



State Senator Joan Bray

Missouri Senate 2008

Dear Friend,

Once again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to serve as your state senator. I appreciate each person who has contacted my office to let me know her or his interests or concern or to ask for assistance from my staff or me. We welcome your being in touch.

In the following pages you will find a brief overview of the recently concluded regular session of the 94th Missouri General Assembly. I hope that you will find the information interesting and helpful and that you will know whom to call or where to go if you need additional information or help.

In my report to you last year, I described a rancorous, partisan session. This year I am pleased to tell you that the Senate was a more civil environment with a better spirit of working together.

The Legislature is not due to return to the Capitol until the annual Veto Session takes place in mid-September. In the meantime, many elected officials will be involved in campaigns as this is a major election year at both the state and national level. Party candidates will be chosen at the Primary Election on August 5, and the party candidates will square off against each other at the General Election on November 4. Among the races on the ballot in Missouri are those for U.S. President/Vice President, Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, Treasurer, and members of the U.S. House, Missouri Senate and Missouri House.

I urge you to get to know the candidates, study the issues and, most of all, vote.

Regards,



Sen. Bray and Sen. Gary Nodler

Tax Aid for Seniors and People with Disabilities

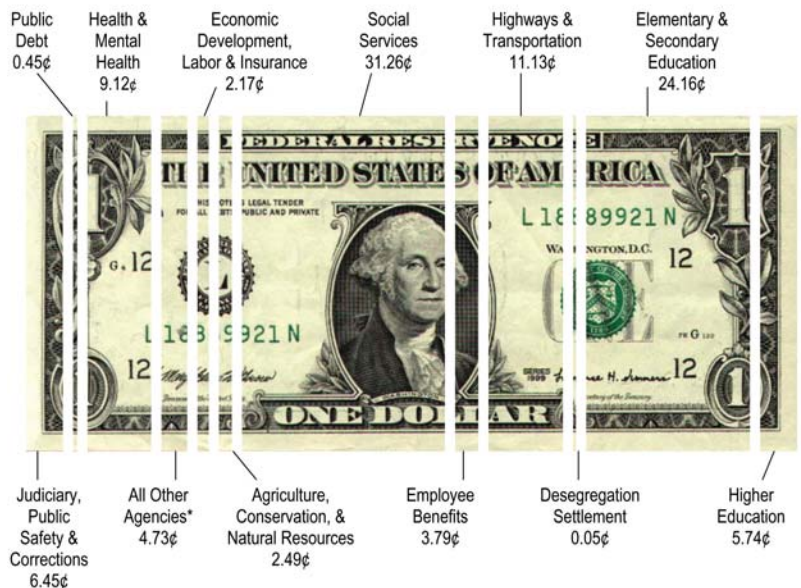
Are you a senior who owns your own home? Is your income less than \$77,323? If so, call the Tax Assistance Center at 314-877-0177 to find out if you are eligible for the Homestead Preservation Tax Credit.

Are you a single senior who owns your own home with a total household income of \$30,000 or less or married with an income of \$34,000 or less? Are you a single senior who pays rent or taxes on the home you occupy with a total household income of \$27,500 or less or married with an income of \$29,500 or less? If so, call the Tax Assistance Center at 314-877-0177 to find out if you are eligible for the 2008 Property Tax Credit (also known as the Circuit Breaker Tax Credit). Claims can be filed beginning Jan. 1, 2009.

More information on either program may also be found at www.dor.mo.gov.

Fiscal Year 2009 Missouri Operating Budget

All Funds: \$22.444 Billion
Distribution of Each Tax Dollar



* Revenue, Office of Administration, Elected Officials, General Assembly, Real Estate

Source: Senate Appropriations Committee

Telecommunications Bill Will Raise Phone Rates in Rural Areas

Telephone rates charged for traditional land line service in rural areas are sure to go up after passage of House Bill 1779.



Sen. Wes Shoemyer and Sen. Bray

The bill is based on the claim by land line companies who say they need to compete more effectively with new means of voice communication that currently are not subject to the same oversight and laws as traditional phone service providers.

In recent years, Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP), which uses the Internet to transmit the voice, has begun to compete — primarily in urban areas. VOIP is most often provided by cable companies. While House Bill 1779 requires that VOIP providers follow the same regulations as telephone service providers, the bill also significantly relaxes these rules and reduces the Missouri Public Service Commission's (PSC) oversight in regulating telecommunications.

Ultimately, these changes will decrease consumer protection traditionally provided by the PSC and will definitely lead to higher prices, especially in rural areas where basic phone service has hovered near \$7 per month for decades and consumers have little choice of alternative providers.

TV Alert

On Feb. 17, 2009, all broadcast television stations will stop broadcasting on analog signals and begin broadcasting only in digital.

You don't need to buy a new TV. If you currently watch a television using a broadcast antenna, you will need only a digital-to-analog converter box to continue receiving your current TV signal. Subscribers to cable or satellite TV, or those who watch over-the-air programming on a DTV (a TV with a built-in digital tuner), will not need a converter box.

Converter boxes are now available and cost between \$40 and \$70. Coupons worth \$40 are available to help reduce the cost of a converter box; households may request up to two \$40 coupons. Call **1-888-388-2009** or visit **www.dtv2009.gov** to obtain a coupon or to get more information.

Consumers are expected to dispose of 120 million TVs by 2010 according to the Consumer Electronics Association, overloading landfills and increasing pollution. Visit **myGreenElectronics.org** to find an electronics recycler where you live.

Missouri Goes Green

A bill that passed in the final hours of the session marks a turning point in Missouri's efforts to improve energy efficiency, and many of the provisions in Senate Bill 1181 were contained in measures that I filed this past session.

The new law establishes stricter energy efficiency standards for all appliances and for public buildings over 5,000 square feet. Some of the programs created through Senate Bill 1181 include: the linked deposit loan program for alternative energy operations, a tax deduction for a home energy audit up to \$1,000 per year at a maximum of \$2,000, the Show-Me Green sales tax holiday for all Energy Star appliances, and the formation of green school cleaning policies.

The bill also includes language I sponsored to create the necessary boards and committees that are needed to obtain millions in federal funds in the coming years, as well as protections for consumers from electric rate increases of more than 1 percent per year due to any mandated use of more renewable energy sources. This and the other programs created in the bill signal that the state is finally ready to make a commitment to energy conservation.



Sen. Bray and the Maplewood-Richmond Heights High School State Championship Basketball Team

Gubernatorial Appointments



Rev. Noella Buchanan
Child Abuse and Neglect
Review Board,
January 16, 2008



Steven Lipstein
Mo HealthNet Oversight
Committee,
January 16, 2008



Rick Sullivan (with wife Susan)
Chief Executive Officer of the
Transitional School District of
St. Louis, January 30, 2008



Arthur Bond, III
Seismic Safety Commission
April 2, 2008

Legislature Passes Property Tax Reform

Property taxes for many homeowners in St. Louis County rose dramatically after last year's reassessment. Property values had increased in the two years since the last reassessment, and St. Louis County's assessment levy rates had been lower than state requirements. In response, the Legislature changed the law to require that every taxing district roll back its prior year's tax rate to offset increasing property values.

Currently, taxing districts only have to roll back tax rates when they reach their tax rate ceiling and can avoid roll backs if their tax rate is less than their tax rate ceiling. Senate Bill 711 requires taxing districts to roll back their tax rate in reassessment years regardless of whether or not they are at their tax rate ceiling.

The bill also includes a range of other changes set out to help taxpayers understand and navigate the property tax system.

Beginning in 2009 for taxpayers in St. Louis



Sens. Dan Clemens and John Griesheimer, front; Sens. Kevin Engler, Bray and Charlie Shields, back

County, the bill requires that taxpayers be notified of their projected tax liability on or before June 15th in reassessment years. The bill also provides for a taxpayer advocate at the State Tax Commission, who will represent and protect taxpayer interests.

Also, the legislation changes the Senior Citizen Circuit Breaker Tax Credit for homeowners by expanding the eligibility requirements of the program as well as increasing the maximum award from \$750 to \$1,100.

For a summary and more information on Senate Bill 711, go to www.senate.mo.gov (click on "Session Information," and then on "Truly Agreed Bills"). Also, you can visit my Senate Web site at www.senate.mo.gov/bray.

From Bill to Law...

Tax Deduction Increases for College Savings Plan

Senate Bill 863 allows married taxpayers who file a joint tax return to deduct up to \$16,000 a year in contributions to MOST, the state's higher education savings program. The previous cap on the deduction was \$8,000. For more details on MOST, visit the Missouri Department of Higher Education at www.dhe.mo.gov.

Program Waters Down Teacher Standards

A program that enables a person to acquire a teaching certificate by watching DVDs and observing two weeks in a classroom was passed during the 2008 legislative session by special interests seeking to set up an alternative teacher certification program despite the state already having several meritorious alternative certificate options. I opposed Senate Bill 1066 vigorously, believing that teaching is a highly skilled profession and Missouri's students are not well-served by undereducated teachers.

Legislature Revises Uniform Anatomical Gift Act

A person's decision to donate an organ is strengthened through the establishment of a first-person consent donor registry. Senate Bill 1139 allows a person authorized to make health care decisions for the donor to facilitate the donor's wishes if he or she cannot, and it allows individuals to designate an organ recipient — either a person or a procurement organization, such as eye or tissue banks.

Look Beneath the Surface

Every day victims of human trafficking are suffering in our community. We need your help to stop this human rights violation. To learn more about this violation of law and how to recognize it, schedule a speaker for your community group, faith-based organization, classroom or other association by calling my district office at **314-340-6582**.



John Comerford
Missouri Veterans Commission,
April 9, 2008



Dr. Bradley Freeman
State Board of Registration
for the Healing Arts,
May 7, 2008

How to Contact Me

My staff and I are available to help you, whether you come to the office, or contact us by mail, telephone or e-mail. We are always ready to answer any questions or concerns you may have about Missouri state government.



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Protect Yourself from Identity Theft

You can find the only source for a completely free credit report by going online and visiting www.annualcreditreport.com or calling 1-877-322-8228.

You are guaranteed by law one report per year from each of the nation's three primary credit bureaus.

If you think you are a victim of identify theft, call the Attorney General's Identity Theft Hotline at 1-800-392-8222 for help recognizing and reporting identity theft.

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