

## LEGISLATIVE REPORT 2008

INSIDE: Growing Missouri's Economy — Fighting Illegal Immigration — Improving Our Children's Education — Providing Relief from Sky-Rocketing Property Taxes — Balancing the State Budget — Restoring Tax Reciprocity — Protecting Children — More Inside...



Senator Ridgeway is chair of the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules. She is vice-chair of the Rules, Joint Rules, Resolutions and Ethics Committee and the Small Business, Insurance and Industrial Relations Committee.

Senator Ridgeway also serves on these committees:

- Appropriations
- Commerce, Energy and the Environment
- Joint Committee on Capital Improvements and Leases Oversight

Senator Ridgeway has also been elected to Senate leadership as majority caucus chair.

#### From Senator Luann Ridgeway

Dear Clay County Neighbor,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve as your voice in the Missouri Senate. I enjoy representing the people of Clay County and bringing our common-sense values to the Capitol.

The 2008 legislative session proved successful as we accomplished many of the goals we set for ourselves at the beginning of the year. This newsletter highlights the important legislation from this past session, keeping you informed about how your state government is working for you. I am very pleased to report that the Missouri Legislature has:

- Strengthened our illegal immigration laws, protecting Missourians' jobs and benefits.
- Implemented a plan for property tax reform, offering relief from sky-high tax rates.
- Made a high-quality education a top priority through funding and legislation to expand our base of qualified teachers.
- Achieved a balanced budget that properly funds our priorities without implementing any job-killing tax increases!
- Kept Missouri's children at the forefront by putting in place stronger protections from sex offenders and online predators.

These are just a few of our many accomplishments this year. As always, my job is to represent your interests in Jefferson City. If I may ever be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact me. You may call 573-751-2547, e-mail **luann.ridgeway@senate.mo.gov** or write to me at Room 419, State Capitol, Jefferson City, MO 65101.

Best regards,

Luana Hidgeway



Senator Ridgeway with her 2008 legislative intern, Elizabeth Andrew.

#### Fighting Illegal Immigration

Illegal immigration creates a problem in our state because it threatens the job security and essential services available for Missourians.

This year, we passed HB 1549, which makes Missouri's stance on illegal immigration clear: Zero Tolerance.

Missourians cannot afford to wait for Washington to act on the issue of illegal immigration. I made passing illegal immigration reform one of my top priorities for 2008, and I'm happy to report we accomplished this goal.

Missouri's new law tackles illegal immigration by cracking down on employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants, barring illegal immigrants from obtaining driver's licenses, preventing illegal residents from receiving state or local public benefits and prohibiting cities and towns from giving sanctuary to illegals.

If convicted of employing illegal immigrants, a business subjects their business permits and licenses to suspension. Violators under contract with the state will have their contracts voided and will be barred from contracting with the state for three years with the potential for permanent suspension for repeat offenses. The bill also requires employers on state contracts or using state grants, loans or tax credits to verify the legal status of their employees through a federal database designed to weed out fraudulent residency documents.

A bill I sponsored was amended into the final version of the legislation. My legislation provides that those arrested for a crime will be denied bail if they are unlawfully present in the United States. Without knowing the true identity of a person arrested or their legal status, release pending trial could put the safety of law-abiding citizens at risk.

This is a nation of immigrants. Certainly we welcome those who enter this country legally. However, when people enter the country illegally, they jump in front of those waiting in line legally, and that's not fair.

Without this needed change in Missouri's law, the state would keep providing incentives for illegal immigration. With our new law, Missouri is a far less desirable target for those seeking to enter our nation illegally or for predatory employers who seek to undercut Missouri jobs by taking advantage of illegal labor.





Illegal Immigration in Missouri

Estimates based on the U.S. Census Bureau's March 2005 population survey suggest that there are 35,000–65,000 illegal immigrants living in the state of Missouri.

The Federation for American Immigration Reform estimated in 2006 that Missouri taxpayers were burdened with annual costs of approximately \$116 million relating to illegal immigration.

In 2007, U.S. Immigration and Customs
Enforcement deported
8,900 illegal aliens from a six-state area that included Missouri.

Senator Ridgeway shows a young Missourian how to preside over the Missouri Senate.



Senator Ridgeway talks with Senate Doorkeeper Ken Holman on the floor of the Senate.

#### Halting Tax Increases

Missourians working in Kansas were sure to get a tax increase if action wasn't taken quickly. Thankfully, legislation passed in 2008 stopped this increase.

Until 2007, Missouri allowed workers in the state to deduct property taxes paid to other states when calculating their Missouri taxes. Last year, a St. Louis legislator, trying to attack Illinois, eliminated that deduction. The shot fired at Illinois actually hit Kansas residents who work in Missouri, causing our neighbors' taxes to go up on income from their jobs in Missouri. Kansas decided to fire back at Missouri by eliminating the property tax deduction on Missourians who work in Kansas. Had the situation not been defused, Missourians working in Kansas would most certainly have seen their income taxes rise.

I sponsored Senate Bill 748 that restores tax fairness and prevents a tax increase on Missourians working in other states. The bill applies the Golden Rule in the area of tax policy: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This means that non-Missouri residents get tax breaks from Missouri — providing that the state of the non-resident reciprocates in granting these breaks to Missourians. If Kansas is willing to provide tax breaks for Missouri citizens, Missouri should be willing to do the same.

Conversely, if Illinois isn't willing to allow Missouri workers to deduct their property taxes, Missouri should follow suit. We shouldn't purposefully aggravate our neighbors, but instead focus on working with them for the sake of all our hard-working taxpayers.

# Property Tax Relief for Missourians

Many of us are facing hardships from unexpected tax increases due to reassessments. Missourians will soon receive some relief from these "back door" tax increases. Senate Bill 711 protects taxpayers by mandating tax roll backs, closing loopholes, informing taxpayers and expanding tax relief to seniors and the disabled.

Reassessment was designed to make sure your home was valued accurately — not as a cover to raise taxes beyond the inflation rate. Now all taxing jurisdictions, regardless of whether or not they are operating at or below their tax rate ceiling, are required to roll back their tax rate to counter reassessment increases. Other highlights of the bill include:

- Closing a tax increase loophole that allowed taxing jurisdictions to apply voter-approved levies to future assessments.
- Providing a tax liability statement to homeowners along with their reassessment notice to empower taxpayers to better understand what their assessment notice means concerning the market value of their home, how to protest assessments believed to be inaccurate and how to understand your estimated tax bill based on the new assessments.
- Expanding tax relief to senior and disabled homeowners by increasing the assistance amount allowed under the Circuit Breaker and Homestead Preservation relief programs.
- An amendment I added to the bill clearly states that the county collector must refund penalties and interest on taxes that were improperly collected due to the county's error returning your hard-earned money to your pocket where it rightfully belongs.



Senator Ridgeway presides over the Senate chamber at the dais during the legislative session. The person occupying the dais is responsible for maintaining order in the Senate.

## **Solving Teacher Shortages**

There is a teacher shortage looming on Missouri's horizon, particularly in the areas of math, science and technology. Statistics show that fewer college students are choosing teaching as a career. Experts predict that the U.S. will need more than 2 million new teachers in the next decade. But the traditional certification path is simply falling short of filling this upcoming demand. Therefore, the need to expand the number of qualified teachers in Missouri was clear.

Among the first pieces of legislation to be passed by lawmakers this session was a bill I sponsored, SB 1066, which creates an additional method of teacher certification from the State Board of Education. The bill targets career-changing professionals holding a bachelor's degree or higher. It vastly expands the potential for getting highly qualified teachers in the classroom and helps solve teacher shortages. A prospective teacher may now be certified to teach by obtaining certification from the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence, which is funded through federal grants.

In addition to completing coursework and certification exams, teaching candidates already holding a bachelor's degree or higher must complete a background check and verify the ability to work with children by completing 60 hours of classroom instruction under the supervision of a mentor-teacher.

This certification process applies only to secondary education. A teacher must still receive traditional certification

to teach elementary or special education.

To staff our classrooms with qualified teachers, we need to look to adults who have experience in their chosen fields and who chose to share their knowledge by educating others. This legislation addresses issues I feel very strongly about — education quality and quality teachers. While the Northland is blessed with many talented teachers, we must act now to ensure that quality teachers continue to be available for our children. The new alternative certification process is one step toward meeting that goal.

## Alternative Teacher Certification Highlights:

- \* New certification targets career-changing professionals who already hold a bachelor's degree or higher.
- \* Prospective teachers must complete required coursework and certification exams.
- \* Visit ABCTE online at www.abcte.org for more information on the program.

### **Education Funding Increased**

Education is one of the most important vehicles for our children's success, so ensuring the quality of Missouri schools remains a top priority for me as your state Senator.

I believe every child is entitled to a top quality education. Proper funding

is necessary to accomplish this goal, so once again education was a top budget concern. Since 2005, we have steadily increased the amount of funding for

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elementary and secondary education, and from 2005 to 2009, the Smithville, Liberty, North Kansas City, Kearney and Missouri City school districts

<b>School Districts</b>	2005 Funding	2009 Funding	Funding Increase
Smithville	\$4,945,573	\$6,691,124	35.3%
Liberty	\$28,503,165	\$45,750,939	60.5%
North Kansas City	\$22,505,940	\$32,348,831	43.7%
Kearney	\$8,600,393	\$11,065,043	28.7%
Missouri City	\$202,704	\$244,647	20.7%

have seen more than \$96 million in funding increases from the state. This is a 48 percent increase in state funding to Clay County schools in just 4 years!

Missouri's school funding plan (the "foundation formula") continues to provide funding to schools based on student need and we have gradually increased the amount that schools receive. For fiscal year 2009, which began July 1, the budget contains a \$121.3 million increase in foundation formula funding — a 4.3 percent increase over FY 2008 education funding. Funding for all K-12 schools has increased over \$600 million since 2005. The \$600 million is nearly a 22 percent increase. All additional funding to our schools was accomplished without increasing your state taxes.

#### We're Here to Help

Serving as your voice in the Missouri Senate on pending legislation is certainly an important part of my work. However, this is only a portion of the work I do as your Senator. My staff and I stand ready to help Clay Countians on a wide array of services available by just a call to my office.

We frequently assist in getting any information or services you need from state government. Cutting through big government red tape is our specialty. Here are just a few examples of how we have helped recently:

- In July, we received a list from the state treasurer about people in Clay County who had unclaimed property held by the state. We wrote these people and assisted them in reclaiming their property. We helped a woman successfully claim bonds from her deceased father's estate. To her surprise, she estimates that the formerly unclaimed property is worth thousands! (To check to see if you have unclaimed property visit: www.ShowMeMoney.com).
- My office received many serious and valid complaints regarding the practice of county collectors keeping interest and penalties on taxes wrongfully collected due to county error. At the request of our neighbors in Clay County, I was able to change the law so that it now clearly states that collectors must refund penalties and interest on taxes collected due to county error. You should never have to pay for the government's mistakes!
- Earlier this spring, we were contacted by a family who suffered the unbearable loss of their toddler due to a seemingly safe and small chest falling on the child. While their family had no warning that such small furniture posed grave danger, they don't want others to suffer from this lack of education. They have made available, through a special donation, brackets to anchor furniture



Three-year-old Charlie Horn playing in Penguin Park in Kansas City, right before the tragedy. As his lasting legacy, a safety demonstration house is planned. See www.CharliesSafeHaven.org.

that help prevent tip-overs. As a service to the Horn family and yours, my office in Smithville is serving as a distribution point for these devices. Please call or email my office for more details.

I worked to pass a Senate resolution calling for a change in government reporting so we have better data to base education efforts to help prevent deadly household dangers. The parents are also bravely working to prevent any other parent from suffering the heartache they daily endure. Visit their website at www.CharliesSafeHaven.org for more information.

My office stands ready to serve you, whether you need help on issues impacting the health and safety of our families, help locating a tax refund or payment, cutting through red tape, securing vehicle or driver's licenses, planning your tour of our beautiful Missouri Capitol or information on pending legislation — whether the task is big or small, we are here to help!

Cutting through big government red tape is our specialty.

- Senator Ridgeway

#### Missouri's Budget is Balanced

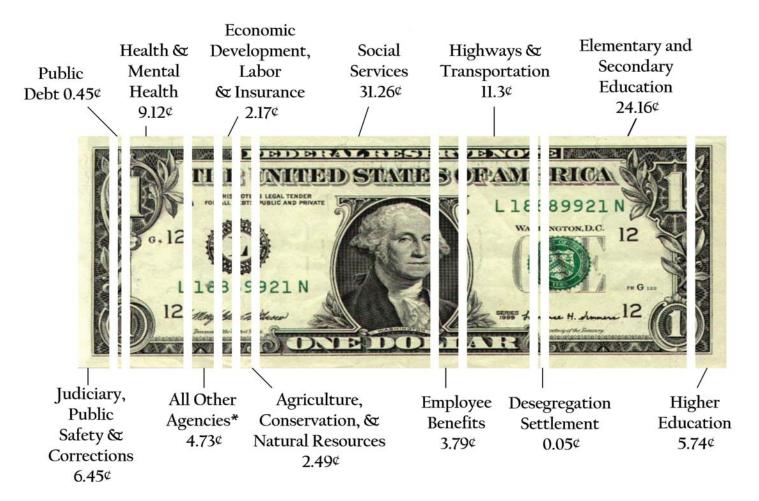
#### A \$22.4 Billion Budget for Missouri

We crafted Missouri's \$22.4 billion budget in a fiscally responsible manner. We were able to expand important programs while staying within our means **without implementing any job-killing tax increases!** In fact, we were able to implement several tax decreases and still balance the budget.

Education was once again a top priority and now K-12 schools have more funding from the state than ever before in Missouri history. Higher education also received a funding boost, with an added \$48.7 million going to the Access Missouri Scholarship Program that supports scholarships for Missouri residents seeking higher education. Health services and veterans' services were also top issues that received more funding. Funding for the developmentally disabled was a protected priority as well. Below is the fiscal year 2009 budget breakdown by department.

#### Distribution of Each Tax Dollar

FY 2009 Missouri Operating Budget All Funds: \$22.4 Billion



<sup>\*</sup>Revenue, Office of Administration, Elected Officials, General Assembly, Real Estate

Source: Senate Appropriation Committee

## SENATOR LUANN RIDGEWAY

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## HERE TO HELP

If you have any concerns or questions about legislative proposals, need assistance interacting with other state agencies, or are looking for information about state services, Sen. Ridgeway's legislative staff, Mike Morris and Amanda Russell, are here to help you.



#### Senator Luann Ridgeway

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