



Sen. Rupp Joins Fellow Lawmakers For State of the State Address

JEFFERSON CITY — On Jan. 15th, the governor delivered the State of the State Address. The reason for this speech is to give the governor a chance to address the General Assembly and talk about the accomplishments of the previous year, his priorities for the upcoming year, and his budget proposal. I agree with the governor that the state of our state is strong. I am also pleased with many of the issues he addressed because they are reflective of my own priorities for this year—measures I believe will help us continue to improve our state

The creation of the fiscal year 2009 budget begins with the governor's budget proposal. These recommendations are then used to craft a responsible budget that wisely invests Missourians' tax dollars. One of these wise investments that the governor highlighted in his speech is an increase for public education. In 2005, the General Assembly passed a bill containing a new funding formula in order to appropriate money to local school districts based on student need, not property value. The governor's budget proposals contained a total of \$121.3 million of foundation formula funding for our public schools.

Another exciting part of the budget proposal expands on work we completed last year. During the 2007 legislative session, we passed legislation that created more need-based scholarship opportunities for Missouri students at community colleges, public universities, and private colleges. The governor is requesting a \$27.9 million increase for the program so that even more Missouri students will be able to pursue higher education.

As a member of the Senate Education Committee, I am working to advance two of my proposed education reforms. My proposed Senate Bill 846 would broaden higher education scholarship opportunities for good students. Senate Bill 770 would create scholarships for Missouri students with developmental disabilities.

Last year, we completed extensive reforms to Missouri's state-sponsored healthcare system — called MO HealthNet — in order to focus on preventative care and phase out fraud. This year, we want to continue that work and make sure that all Missourians have a chance to receive affordable healthcare. The governor reflected this desire in his speech when he stated he was committed to making sure that people in the state can access healthcare. We will be working hard this session to create legislation that gets us further towards our goal. My proposed Senate Bill 768 would provide financial support and resources for families affected by autism.

Illegal immigration is an issue that I am definitely concerned about. I am disappointed that Washington has yet to adequately act to resolve this issue, and I think it is time for Missouri to stand up and say that we will not tolerate illegal activity in our state. The governor addressed this issue in his speech, and I support his call to action. This is certainly a priority for me this year, and I will work with my Senate colleagues to find ways to address the problem of illegal immigration. To that end, I have forwarded Senate Bill 858 that would strengthen laws relating to illegal immigration, including penalties for employers who hire illegal aliens.

The governor's State of the State Address touched on many of the issues we will be dealing with this session. I am pleased that his priorities are aligned with my own, and I look forward to a busy session. I am hopeful that we can pass legislation that will make a positive impact on our state.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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