



Spending Your Tax Dollars Wisely

JEFFERSON CITY — It's that time of year when the General Assembly turns its attention to the state budget. With the May 9 budget deadline approaching, the Missouri Senate has approved funding for the critical functions of state government, with an emphasis on improving education.

The Senate last week discussed and advanced a proposed \$22.6 billion state budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, with increases totaling \$356.4 million. The budget includes a \$121 million increase for the school foundation formula (which is a total of \$607,055,032, or a 22.05 percent increase, since 2005 WITHOUT A TAX INCREASE!) Missouri college students will have even more opportunities for needs-based scholarships, with an increase of \$29 million in the Access Missouri Scholarship Program, making \$100 million available for scholarships annually for Missouri students to attend public or private colleges or universities.

As a member of the Senate's Education Committee, I am extremely pleased that we were able to provide additional money for education and to increase the higher education budget by 6 percent — the third year in a row for growth, again without raising your taxes.

In the proposed budget, a total of \$340 million is dedicated to help low-income Missourians who are uninsured purchase health insurance coverage. As vice-chair of the Senate's veterans' panel, I am pleased to announce that \$2.2 million is dedicated to the Serving Our Veterans Program for mental health services to family members of veterans and transitional housing assistance for homeless veterans. The budget also increases spending for several health programs including \$7.3 million for autism services (one of my top priorities), \$250,000 for the Missouri Alternatives to Abortion Program, and \$500,000 for Area Agencies on Aging.

Children benefit from the budget with a \$6.1 million increase for childcare for families below 127 percent of the poverty level or \$26,924 for a family of four. Another increase of \$4.8 million covers pre-existing conditions for children insured by the State's Health Insurance Program known as CHIPS.

Now that the Senate has weighed in on the budget bills, they will move to conference committee where members of the Senate and House will iron out differences before the budget moves to the governor's desk.

I want you to know that I understand the importance of making sure your tax dollars are spent responsibly and understand that the work I am doing in the Senate will directly benefit the citizens of the 2nd District whose concerns and needs I work diligently to represent.

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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