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## **College Savings Tax Break, Credit Freezes Scoring Well With Senate Legislators**

JEFFERSON CITY — Higher education is a longtime focus of mine. I have spent both my professional and legislative careers working to make college accessible and affordable for all Missourians. As a legislator, I believe the General Assembly can do three things in particular to help accomplish this: expand the availability of state scholarships, place caps on public university tuition costs, and provide tax breaks for Missouri families saving for their children's college expenses.

Building upon last year's successes — when we increased educational opportunities through the Bright Flight scholarship program, created the Access Missouri program to provide scholarships to public and private colleges and universities, and set limits for public universities to increase tuitions — the Senate is one roll call away from expanding tax breaks for Missouri families who are saving money for college.

My Senate Bill 863, which recently cleared the House, would expand tax deductions to all college savings plans (529s), allowing more families increased ability to save for the cost of a college education. The goal of my legislation is to encourage families to take the initiative to save for their children's college expenses and to reward them for doing so.

With the current legislative season coming to an end, I am hopeful that we will be able to enact these tax-break incentives for families who have the foresight and diligence to set aside money for college. A good education is one of the keys to a successful life and it's important that we continue to find ways to make it a reality for as many people as possible so that no one is priced out of an all-too-important education.

I'm also pleased to report that consumer protection legislation I helped to forward this year regarding credit freezes was incorporated as an amendment into a House bill this week and is one vote away from being sent to the governor's desk.

The measure allows consumers at the first sign of identity theft to request a "security freeze" or "lock" on their credit file to prevent anyone from trying to receive credit, loans or services in their name. Consumers would then be able to temporarily lift, or "thaw," freezes when they want to make use of their own credit files, such as when applying for credit or loans.

Credit security freezes work because most businesses will not issue new credit or provide goods and services for later payment without checking an applicant's credit history. If an individual's credit reporting

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file is frozen and an imposter tries to apply for credit in his or her name, the creditor is likely to deny the application.

The Federal Trade Commission reported 8.3 million Americans were victims of identity theft in 2005. A credit freeze can save consumers time, headaches and money and puts them in control of who gets access to personal and financial information contained in their credit files.

Protecting consumer credit, enabling higher education — just two of the many things I'm working to secure as your state senator.

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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