



**Column For Week of: January 28, 2008**

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## Work in Senate Committees

In the Missouri Senate, I serve on five Senate standing committees. During our regular hearings, we discuss legislation and hear public testimony on pending legislation. This week, my work on the Ways and Means Committee led to some interesting discussion on Senate Bill 711, a bill that would make property tax rollbacks mandatory. Recently the Appropriations Committee, which I also serve on, met and approved three supplemental budget bills that made it to the Senate floor this week.

One of the priorities my colleagues and I want to address this session is the issue of property taxation. More and more Missourians have been noticing higher property tax bills — a problem created when the assessed value of a property rises. Taxing entities (libraries, schools, cities, counties, etc.) are constitutionally required to lower (roll back) their maximum tax levy if an area's assessed value increases more than the rate of inflation. However, if the entity did not levy their maximum tax levy in the year before reassessment, they may not have to roll back their tax rate in the reassessment year.

One piece of legislation that is trying to address this problem is Senate Bill 711, the bill we discussed in committee this week. The bill mandates tax rate rollbacks in reassessment years. This means that every taxing entity, in a reassessment year, would have to roll-back its prior year's tax rate regardless of whether the political subdivision was levying the tax at its tax rate ceiling. The bill expands communication with the taxpayer by requiring assessors to notify taxpayers of assessment increases. During committee discussion, I questioned the bill's sponsor on the time frame in which this information is delivered. I

was concerned that assessors might be rushed to get the data complete, and I want to make sure that the most accurate information available is delivered to taxpayers. The committee agreed that some of the details do need to be refined, but that the intent of the bill — making sure Missourians aren't faced with unfair property tax bills — is encouraging.

Being early in the legislative session, we have not seen a lot of floor debate so far this year. This week, we discussed three supplemental bills on the floor. The purpose of supplemental bills is to address budget issues that were not passed or were not funded to the level of being sufficient for the whole year. The three bills provided state funding for programs that make a difference in our state. The provisions in one bill added \$6.3 million in funding to Utilicare, a program that assists those that need help heating their homes during the winter months (House Bill 2015); another bill allowed the Conservation Department to appropriate \$10 million for projects such as nature centers and fishing docs (HB 2021); and the final supplemental bill provided \$1.8 million to the Missouri Sheriff Methamphetamine Relief Team (MoSMART), which supports drug task forces throughout the state that fight the problems of methamphetamine abuse (HB 2022).

While the supplemental budget bills have received approval from both the Senate and House, Senate Bill 711 still has to be approved by committee before moving on to the floor for debate. The Appropriations Committee will continue to discuss the state's spending plan, and the Ways and Means Committee will hear bills throughout the year that affect revenue, assessments, property classifications, and gaming. I will continue to keep you up-to-date on these and the other committees I serve on, and look forward to discussing more legislation with you.

### **Contact Me**

As always, I appreciate hearing your comments, opinions and concerns. Please feel free to call me in Jefferson City at (573) 751-2108. You can also write to at the address listed below.

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