



**Column For Week of: February 25, 2008**

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## Missouri's Economy

One of the issues at the forefront of my mind this session is the economy. My Senate colleagues and I are constantly trying to find ways to make sure that Missouri's economy is progressing — that there are quality jobs available for Missourians throughout the state. In order to do this, we need to encourage businesses to come to, and stay in, our state. Last week, the Senate gave approval to a bill that would enhance economic development incentives for businesses in Missouri. The House is now considering Senate Bill 718. The Senate Appropriations Committee, which I serve on, recently discussed economic development as it relates to state spending.

Last fall, the General Assembly held a special session in order to pass a bill that would raise the cap on the Quality Jobs program. The program makes tax credits available to businesses that create jobs with health benefits and higher than average wages. The bill, which fully went into effect on November 28, raised the cap on the program from \$12 million to \$40 million. Senate Bill 718, the bill approved this week, would again raise that cap, this time to \$60 million.

Another program we addressed in the economic development package passed in late August was the Enhanced Enterprise Zone. This program allows businesses in specified geographic areas to receive tax credits due to their potential to create sustainable jobs and impact the local economy. The program is designed to encourage businesses to start in areas that need increased economic activity. The earlier bill doubled these credits, and Senate Bill 718 would raise the cap for businesses in Enhanced Enterprise Zones from \$14

million to \$24 million.

The provisions of SB 718 are meant to help more businesses in Missouri succeed and attract new companies to the state. In a recent meeting of the Senate Appropriations Committee, we further discussed these programs with the Department of Economic Development (DED). Since the committee is responsible for helping craft the state's budget, we take time every year to meet with state agencies and departments to discuss what funding they need. It was in these meetings that we were able to review DED programs. It is our job to make sure these programs are making an impact on local economies and creating family-supporting jobs with benefits.

For DED, early budget recommendations suggest \$327 million in funding for fiscal year 2009, a \$65 million increase. This money would go to the job growth-focused programs I already mentioned as well as programs that revitalize communities and neighborhoods, provide housing opportunities for those in need, and help small businesses get started.

Locally, we have Missouri University of Science and Technology and other excellent universities that are providing ideas and support for employers to advance their ability to encourage a strong atmosphere for employees and communities to build from. Our economy depends on the hard work of individuals. I am working to make sure that the state's economic environment is one that reflects the dedication of its workers. The housing and stock markets have many concerned about economic outlook, which is why we are dedicated to making sure businesses know Missouri is business-friendly. By encouraging attracting and retaining businesses in our state, we are ensuring that Missouri's economy has a strong foundation.

### **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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