



Column For Week of: May 19, 2008

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## The Legislative Session Concludes

The legislative session ended May 16, with the Missouri General Assembly sending 138 bills to the governor for his signature. Though the number of bills passed might seem smaller compared to previous sessions, we focused on passing legislation that will have a positive impact on the state of Missouri. Instead of passing excessive amounts of legislation, we should strive to move our state forward with the laws already on our books.

Several accomplishments from the 2008 legislative session are worth highlighting. Just last week, I discussed several projects in the 16th Senatorial District that will be funded from the fiscal year 2009 budget – prime examples of putting taxpayer dollars back into the community. Some notable legislation that will benefit Missourians:

**House Bill 2058.** A measure I advanced, this bill protects the intellectual property of small businesses and entrepreneurs by creating the Entrepreneurial Development Council, a seven-member panel composed of business people and intellectual property experts, and the Entrepreneurial Development and Intellectual Property Rights Protection Fund. The council would have the authority to allocate money from the fund to help pay the legal fees of entrepreneurs who allege violations of their patents. Money could also be allocated from the fund to entrepreneurs who register with the council for the development, manufacturing and advertisement of new products.

**Senate Bill 830.** Sen. Maida Coleman and I worked on this bill, which limits the tuition a public Missouri college or university can charge to certain combat veterans. I am pleased to show our appreciation to the sacrifices of Missouri servicemen and women by limiting tuition charges to a maximum of \$50 per credit hour at Missouri's public colleges

and universities.

**Senate Bill 1034.** Industrial metal theft in our area is a problem – it costs Missourians and their businesses time and money. This bill strengthens records-keeping requirements for scrap metal dealers, which will help curb the instances of industrial metal theft in Missouri.

**Senate Bill 711.** Under this bill, taxpayers will be protected from property tax increases caused by reassessment. Tax increase loopholes are closed and earlier notice and more information are required to taxpayers. Statewide, families are affected by this issue, and in rural Missouri, the aging population struggles to afford the taxes on their own homes and farms. I am pleased that we passed legislation to combat this problem.

I continue to fight for progress on important issues, including healthcare. Since the healthcare cuts of 2005, the number of uninsured Missourians has skyrocketed to three times the national rate. Most of those who lost healthcare coverage three years ago have been unable to obtain employer-provided health insurance. The state has forfeited one billion dollars in federal funding designated for healthcare because of the Medicaid cuts. That money instead goes to other states to provide healthcare for their citizens.

In addition to healthcare, another disappointment from the current administration is the governor's broken promise on education. Over the past four years, the governor's "highest priority" has dropped to an embarrassing 47th in per-capita funding for higher education and for elementary and secondary education teacher salaries. As state support for Missouri's colleges and universities has steadily fallen, tuition costs have risen dramatically. After an increase of more than 30 percent in the last four years, the average annual tuition at four-year universities is now higher in Missouri than in any other Big 12 state.

The majority party has also failed to provide meaningful tax relief for middle-class Missouri families. Healthcare, education, gas, and food costs continue to climb. To keep these costs in check, the minority party attempted to pass an amendment to the \$240 million Bombardier Aerospace tax credit boondoggle to provide tax relief to hardworking Missouri families.

This legislative session, like the others, was full of challenges and successes, and I

continue to remain focused on ensuring that rural areas like ours are represented and that your thoughts are considered during the policy-making process. Thank you for the opportunity to serve the 16th Senatorial District and to make progress for all Missourians.

## **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 me at Frank Barnitz, Missouri Senate, State Capitol, Jefferson City, MO 65101.

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