



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
of January 28, 2008**

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Home-Heating Relief Funding And Other Measures Move Forward

JEFFERSON CITY — A state budget proposal to provide an additional \$6.4 million in financial assistance to help low-income Missourians pay their winter utility bills is on its way to the Senate floor soon for expected approval by the Legislature, following evaluation last week by the Senate Appropriations Committee, of which I am vice-chair.

House Bill 2015 provides additional dollars for the state's Utilicare Stabilization Fund for the purpose of funding the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The state funds supplement nearly \$57 million in regular and contingency federal heating aid for low-income Missourians. The LIHEAP program ensures more than 22,000 Missouri families aren't without one of their most basic needs: heat.

The Utilicare program provides assistance to Missouri residents with eligible incomes and is distributed through local Community Action Agencies. Assistance is based upon household size, income and type of fuel used for home heating. Some of the funds are reserved for energy crisis assistance, which is offered to families who have been disconnected or have received disconnection notices from their heating providers. Ten percent of the funds are targeted for weatherization purposes.

Some farm-related and nonfarm-related small businesses and small agricultural cooperatives in New Madrid and Pemiscot Counties that suffered financial losses as result of the record low temperatures and freeze last April still have time to apply for federal economic injury disaster loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration. Those local counties are eligible for the loan program because of their proximity to disaster-declared counties in Kentucky and Tennessee.

Loans up to \$1.5 million are available at 4 percent interest rate with loan terms up to 30 years. Interested business owners should contact SBA's Customer Service Center at 1-800-659-2955. Several February deadlines apply.

As promised, I am currently crafting legislation to address the growing copper theft epidemic affecting Missouri consumers, farmers, business owners and utilities. My proposed legislation will require scrap metal

dealers to get driver's license and vehicle information from the people who sell them copper. Drafting meaningful and impactful laws to address this important issue may take some time, and I am committed to doing what it takes to stop the theft of copper, aluminum and other semi-precious metals that is adversely affecting all Missouri communities.

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 (573) 751-3859.

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Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid, Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.