

# State Senator Robert Mayer The Mayer Memo

Senator Robert Mayer - Serving Butler, Dunklin, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Ripley, Stoddard & Wayne Counties



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## Spending Your Tax Dollars Wisely *Senate Budget Adds \$121 Million for K-12 Education*

JEFFERSON CITY — Each year, toward the end of the legislative season, the General Assembly turns its attention to the state budget. With the May 9 budget deadline just around the corner, the Missouri Senate spent this week approving funding to manage the critical functions of the state government, with an emphasis on improving education.

The Senate discussed and advanced a proposed a \$22.6 billion state budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, with increases totaling \$356.4 million. The budget includes a \$121 million increase for the school foundation formula, as well as an additional \$3.5 million increase for the A+ Schools Program that covers full tuition for the first two years of college for students who perform well in a participating high school. Missouri college students will have even more opportunities for needs-based scholarships, with an increase of \$29 million in the Access Missouri Scholarship Program, making \$100 million available for scholarships annually for Missouri students to attend public or private colleges or universities.

As chairman of the Senate's Education Committee, I am extremely pleased that we were able to provide additional money for education without a tax increase and to increase higher education budgets by 6 percent — their third year in a row for growth.

The Senate advanced thirteen budget bills that allocate funds to specific departments and areas, several of which I will highlight here. In the proposed budget, a total of \$340 million is dedicated to help low-income Missourians who are uninsured

purchase health insurance coverage. There is \$2.2 million dedicated to the Serving Our Veterans Program for mental health services to family members of veterans and transitional housing assistance for homeless veterans with an additional \$250,000 for a National Guard tuition assistance program. The budget also increases spending for several health programs including \$7.3 million for autism services, \$250,000 for the Missouri Alternatives to Abortion Program, and \$500,000 for Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs).

Children benefit from the budget with a \$6.1 increase for childcare for families below 127 percent of the poverty level or \$26,924 for a family of four. Another increase of \$4.8 million covers pre-existing conditions for children insured by the State's Health Insurance Program known as CHIPS.

Other highlights include a \$10 million increase in spending for biodiesel subsidies, a \$7.6 million increase for life science research for plant and animal science projects, and increased funding for maintaining our roads and infrastructure. I am pleased to report that the Senate has also approved fully funding the boll weevil eradication program.

The process of developing a budget is not easy and is the only constitutionally mandated task of the General Assembly that it is required to complete each year by a certain date. Now that the Senate has weighed in on the budget bills, they will move to conference committee where members of the Senate and House will iron out differences before the budget moves to the governor's desk.

As vice chair of the appropriations committee, I understand the importance of making sure your tax dollars are spent responsibly. I want you to know that the work I am doing in the Senate will directly benefit the citizens of the 25<sup>th</sup> District whose concerns and needs I work diligently to represent.

### **Waking Up to an Earthquake**

Undoubtedly, many of you felt the rumble of Friday morning's earthquake that was centered in southern Illinois and could be felt across several states, including southeast Missouri. I'm glad we were spared any significant damage, but it sure rattled the nerves of many of our folks who are still reeling from the widespread flooding.

Here's hoping for a temperate, moderate, uneventful 2008 from here on out.

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