



Legislative Session Includes a Number of Successes

JEFFERSON CITY — The year 2009 was undoubtedly a very challenging and unusual one for our state with a downturn in the nation’s economy, state revenues in decline, and many Missourians out of work. Even with significant state savings, lawmakers faced the challenging task of crafting a fiscally conservative budget that would allow us to live within our means, while avoiding the potential harm any mismanagement of the federal government’s “bailout” money could bring to our future generations.

At the same time, lawmakers also focused on three priorities — job creation, education and health care. By the session’s end, we had accomplished the majority of our goals, with a notable exception of not reaching consensus on the Senate’s innovative health care program that would have expanded insurance coverage to 35,000 low-income, working Missourians and eventually up to around 200,000. One of my personal objectives to require insurance companies to provide coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of autism passed in the Senate, but disappointingly, did not make it to the Missouri House floor for a final vote before time ran out. I plan to reintroduce the bill next year and feel confident the measure will eventually pass.

Lawmakers passed the most debated bill of the year — the jobs bill — during the final hours of the session. The jobs issue was revisited many times after the bill initially hit roadblocks in the Senate when a small group of senators did not support the bill without tax credit reforms. In the end, a good compromise was reached that will work to spur job growth and add tax credit reforms. The proposed legislation expands the state’s successful Quality Jobs Act and caps the amount in certain tax credit programs that can be awarded annually, including the Historic Preservation Tax Credit. It also applies the Sunshine Law to awarded tax credits, phases out the corporate franchise tax on three out of every four Missouri businesses, and bans increases in user fees and prevents new regulations on companies with less than 25 employees for four years. The bill also includes my proposal to increase the cap on the New Markets Tax Credit program — an economic development tool that encourages investment in small businesses located in distressed communities throughout the state.

Regarding education, the General Assembly passed a very progressive bill, which includes measures ranging from changing how the school funding deals with Prop A money, to developing teacher standards in public schools, to a teacher merit pay plan for the St. Louis City School District. One of the key proposals of the bill would change the school funding formula so that it allows a more efficient and effective way of distributing education money derived from repeal of the casino loss limits. It would also remove the current 5 percent growth cap on school funding. The bill also includes my proposal to regulate the use of seclusion rooms and to require the state’s education department to create procedures for the proper use of restraint and

time-outs in public schools. My proposal to bring about more financial and educational accountability for charter schools was also successfully incorporated into the bill.

Several of my other legislative proposals also passed this year. They include:

- [Senate Concurrent Resolution 27](#), which creates the Interim Committee on Oversight of Federal Stimulus and Stabilization Funds. The committee will study ways to maximize the amount of federal funds received under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and provide oversight to ensure that the funds are properly spent.

- [Senate Bill 126](#) — a measure that would prevent life insurance companies from denying or refusing an application for life insurance or charging a different rate for the same life insurance coverage based upon the applicant's or insured's past or future lawful travel destinations.

- [Senate Bill 338](#) — which establishes procedures for the compensation of forensic examinations for sexual assault victims. It also allows, upon the victim's request, a photograph to be taken on the incarcerated individual prior to release and given to the crime victim.

- My proposal to ensure Missouri consumers are notified by Missouri businesses when their personal or financial information has been breached, passed in [House Bill 62](#).

- My measure to establish the Joint Committee on Recovery Accountability and Transparency to coordinate and conduct oversight of moneys received by the state and any political subdivision from the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse, passed in [House Bill 544](#).

- My proposal to designate the first week of March as Math, Engineering, Technology and Science Week, passed in [House Bill 506](#).

- An anti-illegal immigration bill I successfully advanced in the Senate ([House Bill 390](#)) that prohibits college students who are unlawfully present in the U.S. from receiving certain types of financial aid, grants or scholarships.

- And, measures I successfully advanced to make information relating to MO HealthNet readily available to the public and to create the crime of knowingly or intentionally producing, manufacturing, selling or distributing a fraudulent insurance identification card (class D felony), passed in [House Bill 577](#).

It was a busy and productive legislative session with many measures achieved to benefit Missouri citizens. Even though the legislative session is over, my work as your state senator continues. I hope to meet with many of you this summer during a series of Town Hall meetings I will continue to host throughout the year to discuss the needs and concerns of our area.

In Lincoln County, the next Town Hall meeting is set for Thursday, June 4, from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., at the Lincoln County Health Department's Wellness Center, located at 101 W. College in Troy (Highway H, one-eighth mile north of Highway 47). I will meet with constituents in St. Charles County on Tuesday, June 9,

from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., at the Lake St. Louis Community Association Building, 100 Cognac Ct. in Lake St. Louis. I will keep you posted on future meetings as well and look forward to meeting with you.

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 (866) 271-2844.

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