



Senator Matt Bartle – Serving Jackson County

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## Bill Pre-filing Begins for 2010

With Thanksgiving over and Christmas just weeks away, the start of a new year isn't far behind. For lawmakers, it is now time to focus on the upcoming legislative session and the challenges—particularly on the budget front—that await us. The 2010 legislative session begins at noon on Wednesday, Jan. 6.

In preparation for the beginning of the legislative session in January, Missouri Senate rules allow bills to be pre-filed and numbered beginning Dec. 1. This year I pre-filed several bills, including legislation dealing with the following issues:

- **Toll Roads**: We have known for some time that the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) is facing a looming funding crisis. Funding for MoDOT's construction projects in fiscal year 2009 totaled \$1.5 billion based on Amendment 3 funds and other revenue that runs out in the near future. Funds will sharply decline and drop to a low of \$421 million by fiscal year 2014 according to the department's annual report to the General Assembly. With serious repair needs on major roads, such as I-70, this is troublesome. Toll roads are the most fair and equitable way to build a safer I-70 because only those who use the road pay for it. Toll roads will allow us to capture funds from those who drive through the state, but don't pay a nickel to use our roads. Also, Missouri recently received the green light from the federal government for "truck only" lanes on I-70, which would be much safer as anyone who has driven on the road knows—but we don't have funds to pay for it. Toll roads could help with that endeavor.

- **Tax Credits:** The governor has been forced to cut \$634 million from the fiscal year 2010 budget and eliminate more than 1,700 state positions since the beginning of the year. Yet we're still sinking in a bad economy. One gaping hole in our boat is the approximately \$500 million in tax credits that go out the door annually that are not appropriated by the Legislature. If we want to get our financial house in order, it's simple: We must address tax credits. My bill would make all tax credits come before the General Assembly on a rotating schedule for review. If the tax credit isn't reauthorized, it would expire. As it stands now, many tax credits go on year after year with little scrutiny as special interest groups (who benefit from them) protect the niche they've carved out for themselves in our state's budget.
- **MO Savings Account:** This is a constitutional amendment that, if approved by the voters, would require the state to tuck away 2 percent of the budget in prosperous years to prepare for lean ones. Imagine the financial pain that could have been spared this year if this plan had been passed during recent years of steady economic growth. We all know the economy is cyclical. We will continue to have good and bad years, but if we fail to prepare, it will inevitably lead to continued cycles of financial crisis for the state.

If you have any 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 e-mail at [matt\\_bartle@senate.mo.gov](mailto:matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov) or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.

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