



Column For Week of: **January 26, 2009**

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## Facing Missouri's Challenges

This week, the 95<sup>th</sup> General Assembly gathered for a joint session to hear Gov. Jay Nixon give his first State of the State address. I was pleased with the tone of honesty and openness the address took, as well as the focus on working with the Legislature in a bipartisan way. We will have many challenges to face in the coming months, and I know we can meet them successfully if we continue this cooperative and focused approach.

A tough budget year means making tough choices. The governor's budget proposal includes cutting spending by cutting state bureaucracy. This means cutting more than 1,300 positions, which will result in cutting nearly \$200 million in annual overhead. The proposal also includes cutting or eliminating 50 programs. This shows a commitment to well-managed government that meets most of the essential needs of Missourians. While I don't necessarily agree with the areas in which some of the cuts were made, I do applaud the spirit.

Our number-one priority during this session is to promote economic growth in our state. We must focus on creative solutions to create jobs and welcome new businesses. The governor made it clear in his address that it does not matter what party these solutions come from, but that they are implemented quickly to provide relief to the many struggling families in our state. The budget proposals include funding for a new low-interest loan program for Missouri small businesses and a 38 percent increase for job development and training programs. These will support Missouri workers and make sure that we have an economically stable long-term future.

Our state's future depends on our students, and the governor made it clear that we will not sacrifice our students' futures to temporarily relieve financial strains. Fully funding the education foundation formula for K-12 schools will happen in the upcoming

year, and the proposed budget also includes a larger investment for early childhood education. With two state institutions of higher learning and a large number of college students, we in the 16<sup>th</sup> district also know the value of higher education. The governor's proposal included promises not to cut funding for state colleges and universities as well as the expansion of scholarship opportunities. In return, these public colleges and universities won't raise tuition for Missouri students.

Many are hoping we can be saved from a budget deficit this year with the economic stimulus package currently making its way through Washington, but we need to think for the future. I do not believe that we should make budget decisions this year based on speculation on receiving a federal stimulus. I will not commit to using those one-time funds this year to pull us out of a deficit.

We do not know how long the economic struggles that the nation is facing will last, but we do know that we can take actions here in Missouri to face the situation with creative solutions. The governor's budget proposals are a great start, and now we must continue working and making progress for our state.

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### **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 the address listed below.

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