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A Challenging Budget Year

Public Hearings Highlight Missouri's Financial Realities

Every year, the Legislature is constitutionally required to craft the state's spending plan. This is a year-round process that begins before the previous session even ends as we look at priorities and legislation that will affect state spending for Fiscal Year 2011 (beginning in July 1, 2010). We also keep a close eye on Missouri's economy, keeping in mind that the state's revenue collections directly effect our planning. This week, we held a series of public hearings in order to hear testimony on the state's finances and the needs of Missourians.

Our meetings this week serve as time set aside for citizens to raise issues or concerns with the way state programs are funded. The hearings allow us to gain insight from the viewpoints of the people who use the very programs the budget funds. Those testifying included parents whose children utilize health or mental health services, veterans who make use of services provided by the Missouri Veterans Commission, and teachers who were able to provide a valuable education for students in the state.

One of the main concerns this year is revenue projections for the upcoming fiscal year. By the end of the current fiscal year, revenue could have declined by as much as 10 percent. Budget staffers have said that between 2008 and 2010, Missouri state government income could be down by as much as \$1 billion. While this is a

concerning reality, it is our job to pass legislation and promote policy that works to strengthen the state's economic outlook.

During past appropriations hearings, I have often heard requests for funding increases, but this year, most of the citizens who presented during the public hearings were realistic about the state's fiscal situation. The hardest part of the appropriations process is making tough decisions, and in a rough economy, this job becomes even more difficult. It is our job to balance the needs presented to us with the fiscal challenges we must address.

The process of crafting the state's spending plan includes appropriating billions of dollars. We approach the work with careful deliberation based on the most recent figures available, even if these figures present a tough situation for our state. I will continue to keep you up-to-date on our efforts as we proceed in our work over the following months.

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.

Contact Information

Capitol Office
State Capitol Building
Room 427
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Website:
<http://www.senate.mo.gov/barnitz>

Phone Number:
573.751.2108
Fax:
573.526.0573

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