



*Senator  
Bill Stouffer*

**DISTRICT 21**

Senator Bill Stouffer – Cultivating Rural Missouri.

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## **The Stouffer Report: Senate to Focus on Pocketbook Issues**

The economy has everybody talking. It also has most folks asking questions, such as “How long will this recession last?” Unfortunately, there are not many answers yet.

In the Senate, we are looking at every proposal and asking whether it creates jobs and what effect it would have on your take home pay. If the state lives within its means, we will come out of this recession in healthier shape.

The beginning balance for the last fiscal year was nearly \$600 million dollars. Our current budget expectation shows revenues are short by over \$300 million. Unfortunately, even the pro-jobs changes made in state government over the last four years — the same ones that put us in such solid fiscal shape — did not completely shelter us from the downturn in the entire global economy. Relative to other states, like neighboring Illinois — which is over \$4 billion in the hole — this situation is manageable.

This session’s first priority is jobs. The General Assembly must work to ensure Missouri employers can maintain jobs and also create new, high-paying jobs with benefits. This means we will have to have business policies that attract companies to our state and not drive them away. There are so many obstacles to employing people, caused by government, that still need to be changed. Bringing in small businesses and other new, vibrant companies, as well as maintaining our working industries like agriculture and tourism will help grow the economy at every level.

Secondly, to remain fiscally responsible, our priority should be to make health care affordable and available to all Missourians. Putting together

a piecemeal plan is not enough. We have to focus on everybody, whether they have health insurance or not. A healthy Missouri means fewer sick people and fewer costs for all. However, our state should not be in the business of providing free health care for generations, which is simply not sustainable nor does it effectively meet our health needs. In 2009, watch for lawmakers to try to move forward with ideas that help improve health records systems, competition and quality in the marketplace, not wreck it.

Finally, we have to keep focusing on giving students a world-class education. Our kids only get one education, so we should take it seriously. This also means that the centuries-old education system used in this country might need to be adjusted to ensure U.S. students can compete with their global counterparts. It is my hope that my colleagues and I will find opportunities to move toward this goal. Too often we think the only thing that leads to better education is more money. Recent history should show us that's not always the case.

Combine these efforts with further studies to see if the state's tax credits are being used effectively, to create energy policies that power our state, and to reform ethics laws to ensure integrity in government, and you will see we have a lot to accomplish in the next five months.

*Senator Stouffer serves the counties of Carroll, Chariton, Cooper, Howard, Lafayette, Macon, Ray, Saline, and a part of Clay.*

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by e-mail at [bstouffer@senate.mo.gov](mailto:bstouffer@senate.mo.gov).

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