

State Senator Robert Mayer The Mayer Memo

Senator Robert Mayer - Serving Butler, Dunklin, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Ripley, Stoddard & Wayne Counties



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Missouri Making Progress in Addressing ‘Town Hall’ Issues

In the news and in national headlines in recent days and weeks, we’ve seen a number of citizens from across the country meeting with U.S. lawmakers at town hall-style meetings to discuss their concerns about proposed legislation, primarily about the federal government’s proposed health care reforms. Some of these meetings were conducted in southeast Missouri, where our citizens are expressing their favor or disfavor with the federal government’s proposals regarding the economy, health care and energy — just as people are doing all over the country.

With the challenges and priorities of these times, many citizens across the country are taking a tremendous interest in what the federal government is doing to create jobs and to help stabilize the economy, improve access to health care, and to protect our nation’s energy future. These are also top concerns for Missouri lawmakers, and I would like to highlight some of the progress we are making in these important areas.

With many states in deep financial crisis, Missouri entered this financial recession in better shape than most. We balanced this year’s state budget, thanks to fiscally responsible budgeting and planned savings over the last several years. We used the federal stabilization money to fill in some of the gaps in this year’s budget, and hopefully this one-time funding will be helpful. We accomplished this without cutting essential programs and services or raising taxes.

With the passage of [House Bill 191](#) this year, we are working to provide Missouri businesses and corporations with a larger set of tools for creating jobs and putting Missourians back to work — including the expansion of the successful Quality Jobs Act. The Quality Jobs Act has helped create thousands of jobs across Missouri. Similar programs that provide incentives for the location or expansion of large business projects *and* for investments in small businesses located in distressed communities were also expanded in the jobs bill and will also help create a climate for business growth in our state.

Missouri’s small business owners were the focus of two measures included in the jobs bill that are aimed at helping small business owners keep a foothold in these challenging economic times. We enacted a tax cut that reduces the number of corporations that must pay the corporate franchise tax by increasing the asset threshold from \$1 million to \$10 million, which will result in a tax cut of \$12 million for small corporations. We also passed the “*Big Government Get Off My Back Act*,” which places a moratorium on some state fee increases and state regulations for small businesses with 25 or fewer employees for a period of four years.

Health care was another major priority of the legislative session, and one we are still working on — and committed to passing — to ensure Missouri’s low-income working families can obtain and afford health care. This year, we created the Missouri HealthNet Data Transparency Program, which will make it possible for anyone to be able to find what a provider charged for a health care service covered by the [MO HealthNet](#) (Medicaid) program with just a click of the mouse. By creating a database that makes the costs transparent, it will allow Missouri to move more quickly in identifying fraudulent providers and help us to ensure state funding goes to those in need. Missouri is the first state in the nation to pass a law that brings transparency to the state- and federally-funded health insurance program.

Protecting Missouri's energy future was another focus of the recent legislative session, as it is in on Capitol Hill, and this will continue to be a hotly debated issue here at home and in Washington, D.C, with conflicting ideas about how we will accomplish our energy conservation goals without emptying the pockets of taxpayers. State lawmakers are closely watching the federal cap-and-trade legislation regarding carbon emissions and the potential negative impact it would have on Missouri, which is one of the nation's top coal users. In Missouri, we deliberated a bill this year that would have allowed eligible power plants to charge customers through their utility rates for the cost of construction of certain types of clean energy plants. I opposed the bill because it did not provide enough consumer protections. The issue, ultimately, was taken out of consideration, but did advance more energy discussion in our state, which will continue.

This year, Missouri also continued its commitment to education by passing a major piece of education legislation that addresses many areas. This progressive, wide-ranging education bill — [Senate Bill 291](#) — that I helped advance as chairman of the [Senate Education Committee](#) will benefit Missouri school districts, students and teachers and supports our state's commitment to keeping education our number one priority.

The economy, health care, energy and education will remain priorities when lawmakers return to Jefferson City next January. Our priorities and goals will remain the same: to protect taxpayers by spending within our means while pursuing our major priorities of creating jobs, protecting taxpayers with NO new taxes, helping Missourians find and afford health coverage, and preparing Missouri's workforce for the future.

As always, 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 1-877-291-5584.

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