

For Immediate Release
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SHARING A VIEW OF THE STATE

Issues and Comments – 33rd Senatorial District

Senator

Chuck Purgason

The Senate worked late this week on a bill dealing with several education issues. One measure considered was a proposal allowing school districts to implement a four day school week. Rural school districts which have to run a fleet of buses over hundreds of miles of roads every day would see substantial savings in transportation costs. Every district would realize savings on utility bills.

Several senators argued against the amendment, saying it would compromise educational quality. Others pointed out it would cause a hardship on parents who may have to arrange for additional day care for the extra day their children would not be in school. Districts opting for the four-day week would still have to meet the state minimum hour requirement. The measure was ultimately defeated 16-13.

Also offered was an amendment allowing parents to enroll their children in the public school district of their choice. A similar law was passed in Iowa. Officials there say approximately four percent of children transferred to a district other than the one they resided in. For many rural areas of Missouri, it is not unusual for families to own land in more than one school district. Another common situation is for a child to live miles closer to a school other than the district they are forced to attend under the current system.

Most of the opposition came from urban senators who feared their districts would lose enrollment to better performing schools. After over an hour of debate, an alternative proposal was adopted which would require the Joint Committee on Education to study the issue and report back to the legislature by the end of the year.

Also included in the overall bill was a mechanism to allow school districts to use federal stimulus money for construction projects. The money would be distributed throughout the state on a per pupil basis.

The House of Representatives passed its version of the budget last week. Now the thirteen bills which comprise the spending plan have been officially referred to the Senate Appropriations Committee for consideration by its eleven members. The committee has actually

been preparing since the beginning of session so it may be able to immediately begin work on the budget. The House budget totals \$22.8 billion in spending. This is approximately \$250 million less than what was called for by Governor Jay Nixon.

Like most family budgets, our state budget is also under pressure due to the on-going economic recession. Revenues are down and could slide further during the coming year so spending must be adjusted according to the level of money available in the state checkbook.

The goal of our budget proposal reflects the priorities of investing in our school children, senior citizens, and continuing to protect the most vulnerable in our society as well as protecting taxpayers --- the “forgotten men and women” who work hard everyday to pay the bills.

As the economy has taken a sharp downturn over the past year and a half, many states have been raising taxes and cutting programs to balance their budgets. For example, California has slashed education funding and South Carolina has cut millions of dollars from elementary and secondary education. In addition, Kansas is late paying their state employees while Illinois is \$12 billion in the hole and failing to pay healthcare providers for Medicaid services.

Hopefully, Missouri will continue to move forward as a national economic leader and refrain from adopting the failed philosophy of spending our way to prosperity. In fact, taxpayers will be pleased to know that the House budget is not only balanced without a tax increase, but it balances the budget with the money we reasonably think we will have to operate our state in the coming year.

As always, I will listen to you and I welcome any suggestions you may have that will help improve the lives of the people of this district. You are welcome to contact me at 573-751-1882, write to me at Missouri Senate, 201 West Capitol Avenue, Room 420, Jefferson City, MO, or email at Chuck.Purgason@senate.mo.gov. If you would like to receive these reports electronically, please contact my office with your e-mail address.