

*Nothing is politically right
that is morally wrong.*



*Free and fair discussion
is the firmest friend of truth.*

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

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**Session Scorecard: Missourians to Benefit from Bill to Spur Job
Creation, Increased Education Funding, and Healthcare Efforts**
*Senators - Republican and Democrat - Work Together to
Do the Right Thing for the People of Missouri*

JEFFERSON CITY – The Missouri Senate advanced a number of key priorities including protecting taxpayers with a balanced budget, passing job creation initiatives, increasing funding for K-12 education, and expanding affordable health coverage options for more than 35,000 uninsured Missourians.

Senate Leader Charlie Shields, R-St. Joseph, thanked all senators for their patience and cooperation to find common sense solutions to the problems that face the people of Missouri.

“We set out to make the daily lives of Missourians better when it comes to jobs, education and healthcare this year,” he said. “The Senate worked together to pass a balanced budget on-time that protects taxpayers, a job creation bill coupled with tax credit reforms, increased funding for education without a tax increase, and affordable healthcare for 35,000 uninsured Missourians.”

On the final day, senators advanced a bill expanding tax incentive programs geared to spur job creation coupled with common sense tax credit reforms aimed at protecting taxpayers.

The Senate adopted its version of [House Bill 191](#) by a vote of 27 to 7. Leaders noted senators reached a good compromise on the priority shared by the governor to help put more Missourians back to work.

“We spent many late nights and dozens of hours, and it paid off when we were able to get to a compromise that means more job opportunities for folks in Missouri, plus we protect taxpayers by being more responsible with tax breaks corporations can qualify to receive,” said Majority Floor Leader Kevin Engler, R-Farmington. “Folks expect us to come up and here and get-er-done and the Senate lived up to those expectations this year.”

The bill expands the Quality Jobs Act, a proven program that provides tax incentives to businesses that create jobs that pay above the county average wage and foot the cost for at least half their employees’ healthcare benefits. The program’s annual cap increased by \$20 million, plus senators removed the per company cap to allow for even more job creation.

New gaming money derived from the passage of Proposition A last November by Missouri voters will go to students in Missouri classrooms as intended thanks to a sweeping education bill sent to the governor by a vote of 29-3. [Senate Bill 291](#) fixed an error in the proposition language. Lawmakers voted to have the gaming funds generated from the removal of loss limits deposited into the Classroom Trust Fund and distributed to school districts through the fund. The fix will mean an additional \$60 million for Missouri classrooms in the fiscal year that begins July 1.

“The Classroom Trust Fund is a proven method for making sure gaming funding that is supposed to go to our students in our classrooms gets there,” Shields said. “By running the additional money generated by the removal of loss limits through this proven fund, we are ensuring our students will see those dollars as intended by the people when they voted last November.”

The measure also expands virtual classrooms for use by Missouri school district students and charter school students for any grade, requires teachers have performance standards, creates a new voluntary merit pay program for teachers in St. Louis City's school district, and establishes a "parents' bill of rights" to inform parents of their special needs child's educational rights.

The Missouri General Assembly last week advanced thirteen budget bills totaling \$23.1 billion for the fiscal year beginning July 1. The bills include a \$63 million increase for the school foundation formula, as well as the largest budget reserve totaling \$966 million for spending in future budget years.

Sen. Gary Nodler, R-Joplin, chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee and handled the budget bills in the Senate.

"We have continued our commitment to fully fund a new school funding formula that gives all our children an equal opportunity for a great education," Nodler said. "We added \$63 million without a tax increase, while increasing higher education funding to make sure more Missouri students can afford an educational experience past high school. This is the fourth year of meeting our promise to fund the new formula for K-12 students and our fourth year in a row to increase funding for higher education, and with setting money aside to weather this down economy, we are making sure we will be able to continue to build on those educational promises next year."

The increases for education represent the fourth consecutive year K-12, and universities and community colleges have benefited under Republican leadership. Universities and colleges have promised to hold their tuition rates flat with the level funding lawmakers approved.

Senate leaders did note disappointment when it came to healthcare reforms and improving Missouri's judicial selection process.

The Senate passed and sent the House of Representatives two versions ([Senate Bill 306](#) & [House Bill 156](#)) of a program called Show-Me Health Coverage would provide health coverage at no additional expense to 35,000 Missourians in the first year and, ultimately, provide private health insurance to up to 200,000 of Missouri's 700,000 uninsured citizens. The bill's sponsor, Sen. Tom Dempsey, R-St. Charles, said the measure would pay the premiums for health insurance for individuals who earn up to 50 percent the federal poverty level, or \$9,156 for a parent and two children.

"Everyone deserves to be healthy," Dempsey said. "That's why we want to make health insurance more affordable and portable to low-income families so they can use preventive services and stay healthy, rather than go to the costly emergency room as a last resort after they are sick."

Shields and Engler both shared their disappointment that the Senate was unable to break a filibuster despite having spent many hours debating [House Joint Resolution 10](#) that would have let voters decide whether or not we should change the way appellate judges are chosen.

The 2009 regular session ended today at 6 p.m. The Senate will next convene during the annual veto session held in September.

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