



Senator Luann Ridgeway – Serving Clay County

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Historic Budget Vote

With more than a week left before the constitutional deadline to pass a balanced budget for fiscal year 2011, the Legislature last Thursday passed a fiscally responsible spending plan, sending it to the governor for his signature. This is an historic accomplishment as the state budget has never been formalized more than a full week in advance of the required deadline. Despite the difficult, yet inevitable, decision to significantly reduce spending, we were still able to secure critical funding for our top priorities—including education.

Because of an unprecedented decline in revenue, the \$23.3 billion FY 2011 budget includes nearly \$460 million in spending cuts from the budget proposal the governor originally presented back in January. Millions in savings came from indentifying how state departments and agencies can run more efficiently, including curbing unnecessary spending for travel and putting an end to other extraneous expenses.

In spite of this being one of the worst budget years in history, we were still able to preserve funding for education, which was a big concern for me and many of my colleagues. We voted to maintain funding for the K–12 foundation formula at current levels, as well as provide \$37.5 million for the state's Career Ladder Program, which pays teachers for taking on extra duties such as afterschool tutoring.

We were also mindful of continuing to make higher education an affordable option for Missouri families, so we voted to limit budget cuts to \$50 million for the state's colleges and universities in exchange for a freeze on undergraduate, in-state tuition rates. We know that the quality of education our state offers is directly tied to our economic prosperity, so it's crucial that we continue to support education.

We also maintained core funding for the developmentally disabled. There were some reductions in travel expenses and supplies, but we were able to uphold existing funding for services. It is also one of my priorities to protect those who most need services and cannot provide for themselves. If you have not visited Maple Valley State School or Immacolata Manor (both in Clay County), I would encourage you to do so. These facilities and others like them in Clay County, serve a noble mission making the most of every dollar. They deserve our protection and support.

I'm pleased that lawmakers from both sides of the aisle, as well as members from both the Senate and House, were able to come together and fulfill our duty to pass a balanced budget. Perhaps most importantly, we did not resort to raising job-killing taxes on hard-working Missourians, a pledge many lawmakers committed to uphold early in the session.

Missouri's Health Care Freedom Act

Voters in Missouri would decide whether to pass a law allowing individuals to refuse a federal health insurance mandate under legislation passed Tuesday in the Senate. If approved the Missouri law would bar any law or rule from compelling people to purchase a particular health plan. It's meant to protect citizens from health related legislation passed in Washington. Finally, the voters would have their say on whether they like the "ObamaKare" legislation.

"Fair Tax" Update

Another measure that has yet to make significant headway in the General Assembly is the "Fair Tax", [Senate Joint Resolution 29](#). Upon voter approval, this proposed constitutional amendment would eventually replace state income tax with an expanded sales tax. For each tax year, beginning January 1, 2013, the tax rate for the state individual income tax would be reduced by 20 percent from the previous year's rate until it reaches zero. Beginning July 1, 2013, a new state tax on taxable purchases and services would be imposed at a rate of no more than 7 percent.

The 2010 legislative session comes to a close on Friday, May 14. Though these measures still have several steps to make in the legislative process, traditionally the biggest bills in any given session pass in the last few days. I will let you know what happens with both of these bills and other issues that matter to you as the session winds down.

| Contact Information | | |
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| Capitol Office State Capitol Building Room 221 Jefferson City, MO 65101 | Website: http://www.senate.mo.gov/ridgeway | Phone Number: (toll-free) 866.875.8348 573.751.2547 |

Senator Luann Ridgeway
17th Senatorial District
(573) 751-2547