



## MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

Wes Shoemyer  
18<sup>th</sup> Senate District

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 434  
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

**A Weekly Column for the  
Week of April 12, 2010**

**Capitol Office:  
(573) 751-7852**

# The State Budget

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JEFFERSON CITY – This week the Missouri Senate approved the 13 bills that comprise the \$23-billion state budget. It has been a very difficult process given the continuing drop in state revenues that has forced lawmakers to cut about \$500-million from the governor's original budget proposal crafted at the start of the legislative session. Nearly all state agencies and programs will have to cope with reduced funding in the fiscal year that begins July 1.

The Senate managed to restore funding for the Career Ladder program that pays teachers a bit more for performing extra duties like mentoring students after class. The state funds half of the program and local school districts fund the other half. Since the teachers have already performed these extra duties during the current school year it is only fair that we pay them the supplemental pay that they were promised. This program helps our rural school districts stay competitive with wealthier, urban districts.

The future of this program has challenges since there is no funding for it in next year's budget, but at least teachers and school districts can plan accordingly. Still, I want to thank all of the citizens who contacted their representatives in the Legislature about the importance of the Career Ladder program because your opinions prompted the Senate to restore cuts the Senate Appropriations Committee made to Career Ladder.

On the other hand, I was very disappointed that the Senate cut half of the funding for Parents-As-Teachers. Additionally, the Senate cut almost \$31-million for school bus transportation, which will have a huge impact in rural areas like the 18<sup>th</sup> Senate District that rely on school buses to get kids to school. I voted no on the education funding bill because of these short-sighted cuts that will fall disproportionately on our rural school districts.

I also voted no on the bill that funds mental health services in Missouri because I did not agree with many of the cuts to the programs and services that so many of our most vulnerable citizens depend upon. The reduction in state aid for alcohol and drug abuse treatment, psychiatric care and crisis services for people with developmental disabilities will negatively impact hundreds of Missourians. I understand tough choices have to be made, but I do not agree that we should try to balance our budget on the backs of those who need our help.

Overall, the Senate version of the state budget cuts \$454-million from the spending plan proposed by the governor in January, but we're holding on to nearly \$300-million to try to cushion the blow in future budget years which many of my colleagues fear will be just as bad if not worse than this year's budget process. The Senate version of the budget also includes a lot of structural reorganization of state government designed to save money in future years, such as combining the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Health & Senior Services and the Department of Social Services into one large agency called the Department of Health and Human Services.

The proposed budgets approved by the House and Senate now move to conference committees which will try to reconcile differences between the two versions. Work on the state budget must be completed by May 7, one week before the end of the session.

We welcomed a lot of visitors to our Capitol office this week, including a number of our county officials representing the Missouri Association of Counties; local teachers advocating for Career Ladder and Parents-As-Teachers; Terry Combs, the Executive Director of the Chariton Valley Association of Kirksville; the Hatfield family from Kirksville; and Raymond Kenison from Hannibal on behalf of the Missouri Baptist Children's Home.

Finally, the Senate lost a dear member of its family this week when longtime doorman B.W. Robinson passed away at the age of 93. Mr. Robinson, a Hannibal native who began his teaching career in a one room schoolhouse in Ralls County, was a familiar figure to anyone who sat in the upper gallery during Senate debates. He called everyone he met "friend," he always had a big smile, and he was simply the nicest person you could ever meet. We will miss B.W. dearly, and our thoughts and prayers are with his family.

If you have any questions or comments about these or any other issues give my Capitol office a call at (573) 751-7852, send me an e-mail at [wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov](mailto:wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov), or drop a line to Room 434, State Capitol, 201 W. Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101.