

Week of May 3, 2010

State Senator  
**David Pearce**  
District 31

**Capitol Report**



[Website](#) | [Biography](#) | [Newsroom](#)

## **Legislature Advances \$23.3 Billion Budget**

With more than a week remaining before the constitutional deadline to pass a state budget, the Legislature last Thursday approved a \$23.3 billion spending plan for fiscal year 2011, sending it to the governor for his signature. Despite this being the most difficult budget year in recent history, we were able to submit a balanced, responsible plan that maintains our commitment to fiscal responsibility.

One of the most important duties of the Legislature each session is to assign funding for state programs, projects and services for the coming fiscal year. In fact, creating a budget is the only constitutionally required task lawmakers must complete every year by a certain deadline. Unlike Washington, D.C., we must have a balanced budget. We cannot deficit-spend. As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I have experienced firsthand the budget process from start to finish, and the biggest challenge this year was trying to pin budget numbers to a moving revenue target.

With the state's revenue decline being much more significant than expected, we were forced to cut approximately \$450 million from the governor's initial funding recommendations for FY 2011, which he presented in January. We have nearly \$1 billion less to work with than last year, so painful decisions were inevitable. However, we worked diligently to minimize the effect of the budget cuts on Missourians, making reductions across the board so no one area will bear the brunt. We also implemented common-sense spending cuts including trimming state departments, positions, equipment, travel, holidays and much more, which is estimated to save millions now and in the years to come. Perhaps even more importantly, we honored our pledge not to raise job-killing taxes on hard-working Missourians, no matter how dire the financial situation.

Despite the spending cutbacks that were necessary to balance the budget, we were still able to support our top priorities—particularly education. The Legislature voted to maintain foundation formula funding for public K–12 schools at current levels to ensure that they have the core resources they need to educate our children at a level that meets our standards.

Though available funding was in question at various points in the budget process, we also voted to allocate \$37.5 million to the state's Career Ladder program, which pays teachers for taking on extra duties, such as afterschool tutoring. For higher education, we were mindful of keeping college an affordable option for Missouri families by limiting funding cuts in exchange for a continued promise from universities to freeze undergraduate, in-state tuition rates.

Let me reiterate that none of the decisions to cut funding were easy, and they required a large amount of compromise to achieve our goal of making do with less. We know that next year the budget will probably be even tighter, so it was crucial that we lay the groundwork for a government that can run more efficiently with fewer resources.

The legislative session comes to a close at 6 p.m. on Friday, May 14, and several bills are proposed that will help us streamline government. Traditionally, many of the biggest and most controversial bills that are passed are done so in the final day or two of session, so next week will be a very busy and telling time for some of the year's most talked-about bills.

Some of my legislation that is making swift progress through the General Assembly includes:

- [SB 733](#): Changes and equalizes financial assistance amounts for Access Missouri scholarships (the state's largest scholarship program) and protects Bright Flight scholarships for certain military members. This bill was passed by the House this week, and differences between the two chambers' versions will probably be worked out in a conference committee in the next few days.
- [SB 734](#): Requires regional professional development centers to provide assistance to school districts. This bill received a hearing in a House committee this week.
- [SB 940](#): Relaxes state regulations on bingo. This bill was passed by a House committee and now needs to be passed by the full House.

I'll keep you updated on these and the other issues that matter most to you as the session comes to a close.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact my office with your questions or concerns at any time. We look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions and trying to answer any questions you may have. You can reach us by phone at 866-277-0882 (toll-free) or 573-751-2272, or by fax at 573-526-7381.

*Senator David Pearce serves Bates, Cass, Johnson and Vernon counties in the 31<sup>st</sup> State Senatorial District.*

#### Contact Information

**Capitol Office**  
State Capitol Building  
Room 419  
Jefferson City, MO 65101

**Website:**  
<http://www.senate.mo.gov/pearce>

**Phone Number:**  
866.277.0882 (toll-free)  
573.751.2272

**Fax:**  
573.526.7381