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Committees

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Development
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Hello from the capitol!

We had a busy weekend of working cattle and weaning calves. It is very hard keeping the cows up eating hay. We are going to turn out sometime this week. We have spent a lot of time cutting limbs and trees off the fences. It is the worst I have ever seen. With the high grain prices, high fuel, high fertilizer, and lower calf prices, it sure makes you wonder why a person farms.

On to business at the capitol. As I write this report it is 11:00 p.m. on Wednesday and we are still in session. We have been discussing House Bill 90, the Primary Seat Belt law, since 8:00 p.m. and we are still working on the first amendment to the bill. Someone said there were over 30 amendments to be introduced on this bill.

One point, or a large portion of the discussion, is the threat of racial profiling. Some feel that this law just gives law enforcement officials one more reason to pull citizens over. Another key point brought out during discussion is that this bill is just another freedom or right that is being taken away. On the other side of the debate is the fact that it is already the law that you have to wear a seatbelt and that it will save approximately 90 lives a year. The bill was laid over and will be brought up at a later date and time.

As I mentioned last week, we discussed, debated, clubbed, pulled, pushed, and finally passed a \$21 billion dollar budget. It wasn't easy and took until midnight last Wednesday to get it agreed to. Now it goes on to the Senate and who knows what it will look like when it comes back.

Like I stated before, this year's budget checks in at a little over \$21 billion which represents an increase of approximately \$360 million from last year's budget. It's the largest budget in the history of our state but I am proud to say it is one that allocates your tax money in a fiscally responsible fashion. Rather than repeating the mistakes of the past where programs that simply did not work were funded anyway, we have spent a great deal of time and effort finding the programs that do work and then giving them the funding they both need and deserve.

The largest increase in general revenue funding is in an area I am sure we can all agree is of critical importance – education. Because one of our top priorities is ensuring our young people have exceptional educational opportunities, we approved more than \$5.2 billion in funding for elementary and secondary education. This marks the third year in a row we have increased funding to education and represents an increase of more than \$200 million from the current budget.

Some of the key items contained in that increase include an additional \$132.6 million for our Foundation Equity Formula that allocates funding to our public schools and a nearly \$28 million increase for the School District Trust Fund. Also included is an increase of \$2 million for the Parents as Teachers Program that provides critical early childhood education to the young people of our state and an additional \$3.6 million for the A+ Schools Program that helps to ensure Missouri students are prepared to pursue advanced education and employment.

In addition to our commitment to elementary and secondary education, we made a significant pledge to enhance funding for our institutions of higher learning. The budget we approved contains an increase of more than \$86 million for higher education in Missouri. That represents a 6.3 percent increase over the current budget.

Some of the highlights of our increased higher education funding include a nearly \$32 million increase to Missouri's public four year universities and a \$6 million increase in funding for our community colleges. We also allocated more than \$13 million additional dollars for the Charles Gallagher Scholarship Program and approved an increase of \$6.6 million for the Missouri College Guarantee Program to ensure more Missouri students have the opportunity to attend college. By giving our colleges more funding and helping more students to be able to afford to attend them we believe we have made a significant enhancement to our system of higher education.

While we had a great deal of focus on increasing our investment in education we also made significant increases to funding for the Medicaid services we provide to disabled, low-income, and elderly Missourians. In past years we have spent considerable amounts of time and effort to improve and refine our system of Medicaid so that it is an efficient program that is no longer plagued by instances of fraud and abuse.

We are committed to protecting our most vulnerable citizens. Because of this we've authorized more than \$420 million additional dollars for the program bringing our total funding to our Medicaid program to approximately \$6.4 billion. These are dollars well spent and money that is being utilized to help care for Missourians who otherwise would go without the healthcare they need.

The two priority issues of education and healthcare are just two of the priority budget issues we approved last week. In addition to those important issues we also approved a nearly \$39 million funding increase to the Department of Mental Health so we can continue to provide quality mental health services to Missourians. We also allocated more

than \$400 million in funding made available by passage of Amendment 3 to improve the safety and condition of Missouri's roads and bridges.

As always, it is an honor and pleasure to serve as your state representative.