

March 20, 2017



The graphic features a background image of the Missouri State Capitol interior. In the foreground, a large white text overlay reads "Capitol Report". To the left, a smaller inset photo shows Rep. Donna Pfautsch speaking at a podium. Text on the graphic identifies her as "State Representative Donna Pfautsch, District 33, Serving parts of Cass, Jackson and Lafayette Counties". On the right side, there is a list of committees and contact information for her office.

**COMMITTEES**  
Chair, Commerce and House Procedure  
Insurance Policy  
Health and Mental Health Policy  
Innovation and Technology

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Friends,

The House and Senate have agreed on legislation that is meant to stop the illegal use of herbicides that have caused widespread damage to crops in Southeast Missouri.

According to experts from the University of Missouri, many farmers in that region lost an average of 35 percent of their crops when neighboring farmers used an outdated Dicamba product. Wind and temperature changes caused that product to spread onto nearby fields. Because the product was drifting onto fields not planted with seeds resistant to it, those crops were damaged. At least 150 farmers were impacted by the illegal use of the product.

The legislation approved by the House would allow the Department of Agriculture to issue a fine to any individual who knowingly applies a herbicide to a crop for which the herbicide is not labeled for use. Under current law, the fine is a flat \$1,000, which the sponsor of the bill said is not a strong enough deterrent. Under the bill, the department could issue a fine of up to \$10,000 per violation when a product is spread illegally. The fine would escalate to up to \$25,000 per violation for those who repeatedly break the new law. The money collected from any fines would go to the local school district in which the violation occurred.

The bill would also give the Department of Agriculture additional powers to investigate claims of illegal herbicide use. The department would be able to subpoena witnesses and compel the production of certain records related to the misuse of herbicides. Farmers penalized for illegal use would be liable to the department for its expenses and for personal property affected.

The bill includes an emergency clause, which would make it effective immediately upon being signed by the governor.

### **House Budget Committee Unveils Spending Proposal that Fully Funds Education**

Missouri's public schools would be fully funded for the first time under the budget proposal unveiled by the House Budget Committee Chairman this week. The proposed spending plan would also restore a proposed cut to in-home care and nursing home services for senior and disabled Missourians.

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The Budget Chairman said the 13 appropriations bills that will make up the Fiscal Year 2018 state operating budget represent the legislature's commitment to its young people, as well as to its most vulnerable citizens.

In addition to the additional \$48 million that will fully fund the School Foundation Formula, the House budget proposal restores proposed cuts to K-12 transportation funding. The plan also secures \$6 million in funding to increase broadband internet access for Missouri schools. Additionally, the House budget plan restores \$21.75 million in proposed cuts for the state's institutions of higher learning.

The FY 2018 spending plan proposed by the House Budget Committee also restores approximately \$52 million in proposed cuts that would have impacted 20,000 seniors and disabled Missourians who currently qualify for state-funded in-home care and nursing home services.

Other notable funding decisions in the House plan include \$3.5 million to fulfill the state's commitment to the Biodiesel Producer Incentive Fund, record levels of funding for the state employee pension plan, and \$1.4 million to fund a system of voter identification in Missouri.

The House Budget Committee will work to finalize the budget bills and send them to the floor when the House returns from Spring Break. House Leaders plan discuss the bills on the House floor and have them out of the House by April 6. The Senate and House will then have until May 5 to agree to a spending plan and send it to the governor.

#### **Charter School Expansion Bill Receives House Approval (HB 634)**

This week the House also gave approval to legislation that would expand the use of charter schools statewide, allowing charter schools to be placed in any district where at least one school is performing poorly.

The bill would limit charter school expansion to districts that have a school building with an Annual Performance Report (APR) score of 60 or lower in two of the last three years. If a charter underperforms in comparison to similar schools in their district for two of the past three years, they will be limited to a three-year charter renewal. The bill provides that charter schools will have a three year probationary period, and if a charter performs poorly during two of the three years, that charter school will be ineligible for renewal and will be forced to close.

The bill would also limit the public dollars sent to charter schools to no more than 90 percent of the sending district's tuition. Additionally, the bill is contingent on the public school foundation formula being fully funded. If the legislature does not appropriate enough to fully fund the K-12 formula, then no charter school changes go into effect.

Although this bill was substantially improved from its original form, I voted against it for several reasons. The provision to require the foundation formula to be fully funded only requires the legislature to appropriate the monies, but does not require the governor to approve the funding or refrain from withholding it before the changes take effect. I believe provisions need to be added to the bill that require the funding to be approved by the governor prior to the expansion taking effect.

Further the bill does not require a charter school established in a district with a failing school to serve the same grade levels as the failing school; if a district has a middle school with an APR score of 60 or lower in two of the last three years, then a charter school for high school students could be opened. I do not feel this addresses the issue of the failing school, and may pull students away from a successful high school in the district that has been performing highly.

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One of the amendments, however, will allow public school districts to open a Career and Technical Education-focused charter school (CTE Charter School) in a district not currently served by a “high quality,” traditional Career & Technical Center. Students from other districts may attend these special charter schools on a tuition basis, paid by student’s sending school district. Traditional Career & Technical Centers are not available in all school districts and students in our state. This new type of charter, focused solely on CTE, can provide access to career and technical coursework not currently available for many students in our rural areas.

However, as a retired gifted educator, the syphoning of badly-needed state funds to private entities with such a lack of accountability was not something I could support. I will continue to monitor HB 634 closely as it moves through the Senate and is further amended before being sent back to the House for a final vote.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about these issues.

Warmest regards,

Donna