

# Missouri IMPACT

People of Faith, Advocates of Justice  
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## **Religious Leaders Call for Statewide Discussion Of Moral Issues in Missouri's Budget**

**JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.** -- Religious leaders gathered in the State Capitol today to speak out on the moral issues they see contained in the General Assembly's budget-making process in this year of economic crisis. "We must find an equitable and common sense way to avoid cuts to programs that serve our most vulnerable neighbors," said Rev. John Bennett, spokesperson for Missouri IMPACT. Missouri IMPACT is a grassroots network of people of faith who work for public policy which reflects justice, peace, and the common good.

Bennett and several ministers from St. Louis and mid-Missouri announced the initiation of "The Long Spoons Coalition," an effort during this Legislative Session to talk with elected officials and to promote widespread public discussion of the state's budget. The name of the coalition was taken from the benediction offered by Rabbi Susan Talve of St. Louis at the Jan. 12 swearing in ceremony of Gov. Jay Nixon. In that benediction, Rabbi Talve shared a folk tale that used feeding each other with long spoons as an analogy for our willingness to share with our neighbors.

Rep. James Morris (D-St. Louis City and also pastor of Lane Tabernacle CME congregation), read a statement from Rabbi Susan Talve of Central Reform Congregation in St. Louis. Talve's statement said, "We must deliver adequate health care, housing, jobs and quality education to the rural towns and villages, to the suburban and the urban areas, and to the ranchers and the farmers who fill the table for us. We must not rest until we find a way to provide enough for all."

In addition to kicking off "The Long Spoons Campaign," Missouri IMPACT and Missourians for Tax Justice (MTJ) announced their support for legislation to be filed today by Rep. Jeanette Mott Oxford, D-St. Louis City, and twenty co-sponsors. Sen. Joan Bray, D-St. Louis County, will also file the bill in the Missouri Senate on Feb. 3.

Bob Quinn, member of the executive committee of MTJ, and executive director of the Missouri Association for Social Welfare, said "Our state income tax system is completely outdated. The top income bracket is only \$9,000, a level set in 1931 — 78 years ago. \$9,000 was a lot of money in 1931. But in 2008, that \$9,000 in 1931 is worth \$667,797 or more. Our current income tax brackets and rates were set in 1971 — 38 years ago."

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RELIGIOUS LEADERS CALL FOR BUDGET DISCUSSION  
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Quinn continued, "To top it off, everyone with taxable income over \$9,000 pays at the same six percent rate. That means CEO's with millions of dollars in income pay at the same rate as the minimum wage worker with earnings below the poverty line. These facts show why under our present tax system the lowest income taxpayers have a tax burden that is nearly twice that of the wealthiest taxpayers. This is unconscionable. We desperately need to create an income tax system that is more equitable and fair, and more adequate to produce the dollars to meet Missourians' needs."

The legislation, the Tax Justice for a Healthy Missouri income tax revision plan, would:

- Adjust the top tax bracket upward from \$9,000 annually to \$50,000
- Reduce taxes paid on average by the bottom 60 percent of Missouri taxpayers (low and middle income taxpayers), in part by creating a \$150 refundable credit that phases out between \$30,000-50,000 for singles and \$60,000-80,000 for married couples filing jointly)
- Eliminate the deduction for federal income taxes paid which mainly benefits wealthier taxpayers
- Produce approximately one billion in new revenue if approved by a vote of the people
- Take advantage of the federal income tax off-set; that is, Missouri's wealthiest tax payers who itemize deductions would pay less federal taxes because of paying higher state taxes so that, in effect, the federal government would pay for about 20% of the billion raised for Missouri by the plan

(see accompanying graphs from the Institute on Tax and Economic Policy)

"The evidence is all around us of the cost to our quality of life together when we chronically underfund health care, education, mental health, and other essential services," Rep. Oxford said. "We cannot afford to simply freeze some budget line items and slash others. We can find a better way while creating a tax system that is more equitable and adequate. Now is the time."

Rev. Bennett said that Missouri IMPACT is committed to statewide outreach for The Long Spoons Coalition. The IMPACT board will meet at First Baptist Church in Jefferson City on Feb. 4 to continue their planning in this regard.

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*Note - Co-sponsors for the House version of the bill included as of Feb. 2: Reps. Beth Low, Gina Walsh, Bert Atkins, Jamilah Nasheed, Sharon Pace, Rochelle Walton Gray, Ted Hoskins, James Morris, Shalonn "Kiki" Curls, Jonas Hughes, Steve Webb, Michael Vogt, TD El-Amin, Mike Talboy, Tishaura Jones, Chris Carter, Don Calloway, Jake Hummel, Roman LeBlanc, and Michael Brown.*