

Opening Address

**Senator Tom Dempsey, President Pro Tem
First Regular Session, 97th General Assembly
January 9, 2013**

Lt. Governor Kinder, members of the Missouri Senate, our families, friends, and fellow Missourians:

It is a privilege for me to address you today, and I am honored by the trust you have placed in me by electing me to be the Pro Tem of the Missouri Senate. I am humbled to be entrusted by you with this position.

Before I begin, I want to recognize a few very important people. First, of course, is my wife Molly. As a wife and mother, you have made so many sacrifices to support our family during the past 15 years of my public service. I love you! Please stand and be recognized.

My oldest daughter Meaghan is currently in South Africa on a service project, but I am pleased to have my children, Abby and Jack, here with me today. Jack was 1, when I was first sworn into the Legislature. Finally, my parents Ernest and Peggy Dempsey, and Molly's parents, Pat and Ned Talbott, are present today. I would ask all of you to please stand and be recognized.

Missouri is a remarkable state, and for so many families throughout our nearly 200 years of history, it has truly been the land of opportunity. In my own family, this has certainly been the case.

I am proud to have come from a line of hard-working family members who immigrated to this country in the hope of starting fresh and building a new and better life. My great-grandparents came to the New World from Italy — bringing little with them except a desire to succeed and dreams of a brighter future.

In 1954, after moving from Illinois to Missouri due to a job transfer, my grandfather, Pio Pedrucci, opened a restaurant, the Continental Café, in half of a first-floor building in St. Charles. It was such a success that grandpa eventually quit his other job. In 1958, he

purchased the entire building, expanded, and renamed the restaurant, Pio's Restaurant and Cocktail Lounge.

Using the knowledge of Italian cooking passed on to him by his mother, my grandmother Mary, and recipes of his own developed through countless hours of practice spent in the kitchen, grandpa made a living for his family.

Pio and Mary had two daughters. The younger, my mother, Peggy, married my father in 1966, and he joined as partner in the business in 1970. And that's how an Irishman gets into the Italian restaurant business.

After semi-retiring in 1975, grandpa still came in almost every day to tinker around and make sure things were prepared to his high standards.

I said earlier that grandpa made a living for his family at the restaurant, but that is only half of the story. The truth is that grandpa made not just a living, but a life for his family there in that restaurant. I guess you could say, "He built that."

This special place we call Missouri provided a setting where personal responsibility, a tireless work ethic, a useful skill, and that precious element called opportunity combined to give our family the dignity of being able to provide for ourselves and to give something back to our community.

I am proud of my family heritage and owe more than you can imagine to the lessons learned working around my grandfather and father in the kitchen, washing dishes, making pizzas, stocking shelves, and performing a thousand other tasks that I can tell you I didn't always appreciate at the time.

I believe other Missouri families are not so different from my own. They desire to succeed, to use their talents to provide for themselves and for their children. They want to do more than eke out a living — they want to make a life.

The Roman poet Virgil once said, "Fortune sides with him who dares." In this 21st Century, Missouri is poised for greatness and good fortune. If we dare to dream, to lead, to act, and to build on our remarkable uniqueness and strengths, we will move our great state forward.

Missouri is blessed with tremendous resources, a strategic location, and a population full of ability and desire to succeed.

During the 2013 legislative session, we must focus on solutions that will promote greater economic vitality, spur employment, and grow personal incomes. Our job, our vision, our challenge, is to create B.I.G. solutions – the acronym (B-I-G) to Build our infrastructure, to Invest in education, and to Grow our economy.

Geographically, Missouri is surrounded by eight neighboring states. We must realize that we are competing with our neighbors to keep, foster, and attract businesses and entrepreneurs right here in the Show-Me State. In order to grow our economy, it will be necessary to enact meaningful reforms in economic development, tax policy, and legal climate.

After four years of hard work and with little to show for it, it's time to pass a far-reaching economic development bill this year. Responsible economic development tools that respond to today's marketplace are needed. Current incentives need to be reviewed and designed to maximize their return for the state in terms of jobs, and to prevent exploitation, like the failure of Mamtek.

We award hundreds of millions of dollars in tax credits to select groups, annually. While other areas of the budget have been pared over the past several years, these numerous programs have remained largely untouched. So, while we need new tools, we need to reduce our allocation of tax credits, as well. Let's demand that government be smaller and that we be smarter in these efforts.

Failure to do so jeopardizes our commitment to K-12 education, a first-rate higher education system, and infrastructure that prepares our state for greater economic growth.

In an age of modern technology and mobility, where companies and individuals can easily cross state boundaries, we must have a tax code that encourages investment right here at home if we are to grow.

We must work to remove barriers in order to give business owners the tools they need to succeed and make Missouri hospitable for those who wish to take the risk and start a business.

That is why one of our top priorities this year is lowering the income tax burden on hard-working Missourians.

Missouri loses around \$400 million each year from sales that take place online. These taxes are collected by our “brick and mortar” businesses, but not by businesses that operate over the Internet.

The time has come for Congress to pass the Marketplace Fairness Act and provide a uniform, national policy that will allow states to collect sales and use taxes on items sold to purchasers within their borders by out-of-state sellers.

The removal of this exemption and others narrow in scope, will allow us to pursue broad-based tax relief.

While cutting income taxes is an important step, our legal climate also needs to be fair and structured to attract, rather than discourage, investment in our state. So, another area that needs our immediate attention is the workers’ compensation system.

Last year, we made important reforms and helped make the system fairer, but more needs to be accomplished. The workers’ compensation system, which was created in cooperation with business and labor interests, should return to being the sole remedy for workplace injuries.

In addition, Missouri’s Second Injury Fund is woefully underfunded. Many employees who were injured on the job, and are dependent on this system to help them meet their daily needs, have found that, even with a valid, legal judgment, the funds do not exist to pay their claims. Missouri workers deserve to know that if they are injured on the job, the resources will be in place to help provide for them. By working together, we can address these problems. I appreciate that the Senator from the 2nd, has filed this legislation as SB 1, so we can move on this quickly.

Over the last decade, we have demonstrated, year after year, in good times and in bad, that education is our No.1 priority. More than ever, to prepare for today’s competitive job market and to meet employer needs for a skilled workforce, we must renew our commitment to invest in K-12 and higher education.

Tax credit reform and continued emphasis on operating more efficiently throughout state government will help us meet this objective. I appreciate the governor's willingness to stand with us in these endeavors. And to ensure that tax dollars are being spent wisely and equitably, we will consider the creation of a performance-based, comprehensive funding formula for our state's higher education institutions.

I support moving forward on new capital investment for research, classrooms, and vocational technology using existing state revenue, but we must first identify the savings that will provide a dedicated revenue stream for this effort, and also, prioritize projects through careful analysis.

When it comes to economic growth, there is no silver bullet. The changes I have outlined thus far are part of a greater effort.

As the Gateway to the West, Missouri enjoyed a global status as a trade and cultural center in the 20th Century. We have seen a decline since then. If we are to reverse this trend, we must build and maintain our vital infrastructure.

Missouri has the seventh largest road system in the nation, larger than any of our neighboring states. A modern, well-maintained highway system is critical to our economic growth.

The worthy, federal goal of greater fuel economy, the continued development of alternative fuel vehicles, and changing driving habits are all driving down consumption and negatively impacting our ability to maintain the backbone of our economy.

Over the past decade the Missouri Department of Transportation has improved to the point that I can finally say, it's time to develop a comprehensive, long-term plan that provides for Missouri's transportation needs and enlist the public's support for a new transportation funding package.

Our geographic location uniquely positions Missouri to be a hub for the movement of goods and services. We need to build and maintain our infrastructure to capitalize on this potential.

As we prepare for new investment in our transportation system and the possibility of greater funding for higher education facility improvements, it is important that we remain good stewards of public money.

This is why we need to change Missouri's prevailing wage law. There are different costs of living, throughout the state, and our policies should reflect those differences. It's important to fix the problems which result in an artificially inflated price for taxpayer-funded, construction projects.

Our task during the next 28 weeks in Jefferson City will be to focus on B.I.G. ideas for Missouri — innovative ideas and solutions that build our infrastructure, invest in our educational system and grow our state's economy — ultimately setting us apart and placing us on a path of large-scale investment and job growth across all sectors of our economy.

Today, most people refer to the restaurant, simply as "Pio's." Though my grandfather has passed way, his great-grandchildren work there. Many things have changed since 1954, but what was true then, is true today.

If we capitalize on our strengths, if we work hard, together, and take this opportunity that we have been given as senators, we can move forward to bring about a brighter, better, more prosperous future for the citizens of Missouri.

Thank you!