

Opening Address
Senator Rob Mayer, President Pro Tem
First Regular Session, 96th General Assembly
January 5, 2011

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

Today as I stand before you and humbly accept the honor of serving as the Senate's Leader, I am hopeful. I am hopeful that we can come together and find the best solutions to the state's budget. I am hopeful that we can help put Missourians back to work. And I am hopeful that we will continue our commitment to the education of our children – along the entire education spectrum.

I thank you, my Senate colleagues, for electing me to this role and am grateful for the trust you have placed in me.

The landscape of the Senate has certainly changed over the past few years. We have watched the era of "Senate Lions" pass, and have welcomed more and more new faces to this august body.

Over the past two years, we have welcomed 7 new members and, today, we welcome 12 more members into this body of leaders. All in all, that means 19 or more than half of us have served less than two years in the Senate. But you are all now part of a strong tradition of leadership. A great deal will be expected of you over a short amount of time. But I am confident you will rise and meet the challenge of finding common-sense solutions to address the problems our state is facing today.

Our state is facing serious challenges: it is the third budget year in a row where we will begin with a budget shortfall, we need to get Missourians back to work in lasting and growing industries that pay well and offer benefits, and we

must make sure that our decisions today do not harm tomorrow's vision for an educated workforce.

Our toughest challenge this year again will be the budget.

The good news is that over the last two years we have made tough decisions. As many other states have fallen off the cliff, compared to most, Missouri is in good financial standing.

To date, our state's revenue is showing signs of growth, but not much. It is forecast that we will end the fiscal year that began in July with a 3.6 percent growth in revenue. So far, we are on track to meet this projection. Unfortunately, even with this small growth over last year, it still means we are facing a \$300 to \$500 Million revenue shortfall for the 2012 Fiscal Year.

That shortfall comes on top of the total decline of a little more than \$1.2 Billion – putting us barely above what the state collected back in Fiscal Year 2005.

When it comes to our budget, very few of the state's general revenue dollars are discretionary dollars. That means in tough budget years, like this one, it becomes even more difficult to reduce spending when certain dollars are earmarked - leaving us with little flexibility in where to cut back.

I look forward to hearing Governor Nixon's budget plan later this month. It is important that he presents a budget that only spends what the government takes in and does not rely on special legislation to pass in order to be balanced.

In the Senate, we will protect taxpayers by continuing to make tough decisions to fund our priorities without a tax increase.

There are three solutions to improving Missouri's budget outlook.

The first solution is to put people back to work in good-paying jobs with benefits. Our state's revenue is reliant on people working and participating in our economy.

I learned from an early age that a job is something to value. A job gives you a sense of worth, accomplishment and the pride of making an honest dollar for an honest day's work. Many times, a job is an opportunity that leads to

another job. And in many ways, our jobs help define who we are and who we want to be.

I understand the challenges and difficulties of losing your job. After 12 years on the job for an automotive manufacturing supply company, an economic downturn and restructuring led to me losing my job. My children were young and it was incredibly stressful to not know right away how I was going to provide for my family. But that life- changing moment led me to go back to college and finish my undergraduate degree, and later a law degree. It was tough, but today I own my own law firm. Things could have gone much differently for me. But because there were other opportunities available when my first career ended abruptly, I was able to bounce back. My experience is why making sure other Missourians have job opportunities available to them is so important to me.

Unfortunately, for too many Missourians, there is a void in their lives when it comes to work. Rather than feeling a sense of accomplishment, they face rejections or silence. It's not because of them or anything they have done, it's because there simply are not the opportunities available to them that should be. And that is unacceptable.

It's unacceptable that of the more than 3 Million Missourians that make up our state's work force, more than 280,000 have been out of work for the past year and a half.¹ It is also unacceptable that underemployment has more than doubled to 5 percent from 2007 to 2009.²

Missourians want results and we're going to give them results.

This year, we will pass reforms to help put Missourians back to work in good paying jobs with benefits. We will put Missourians back to work by enabling all employers to invest in working families rather than government growth, improving employers' ability to hire and retain quality workers, making sure employees can't be personally sued for honest accidents at work, and ensuring an employee's liberty when it comes to joining or leaving a union.

We will pass a bill capping the Corporate Franchise Tax. We will pass a bill restoring balance to the Missouri Human Rights Act and Whistleblower provisions. We will pass a bill reversing judicial activism in the Workers' Compensation System. And we will pass a bill making Missouri a Right to Work state.

Legislation filed in the Senate this year would cap the maximum amount of franchise tax liability at \$2 Million allowing employers to invest in hiring new employees instead of growing government through higher taxes. This move would encourage investment by large corporations in Missouri while preserving revenue neutrality.

Other legislation filed this year would improve employers' ability to hire and retain quality workers by ending lawsuit abuses. The bill would bring state law in line with federal human rights laws, allowing employers to invest more in jobs rather than spending money on lawsuit abuses and their increased attorneys' fees.

Another piece of legislation filed in the Senate would restore protections for individual employees from personal lawsuits when companies should be held responsible. Missouri employees and employers face higher risks due to a decision last fall that says co-workers can be sued for their role in workplace injuries, even when it was shown to be an honest accident. By reversing this bad decision, Missouri employees will no longer be at risk of personal lawsuits stemming from workplace injuries and will no longer have to seek insurance to protect against lawsuits if an accident were to occur.

And Senate Bill 1 would secure certainty in take-home pay of every working family in Missouri by making sure employees only join unions and pay dues if they want to - rather than as a condition of their job. By becoming a Right to Work state, we will help reduce our unemployment rate. Unemployment is lower in the 22 states - six of them our neighbors - that have adopted Right to Work laws. Numbers from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that from 1999 to

2009, Right to Work states have added 1.5 Million private sector jobs for a 3.7 percent increase while non Right to Work states lost 1.8 Million jobs over the same decade, for a decline of 2.3 percent.³ It's time to end the age-old animosity between business and labor and, instead, work together to do what is best for the employer and the employee. That means allowing for personal liberty and the free market to prevail in Missouri's marketplace - so that Missourians can go back to work.

The failure to solve these issues is not an option, as Missourians deserve to have job opportunities rather than unfulfilling visits to a local Career Center.

Our second solution is that we must recognize that the best economic development tool is an educated workforce.

We will continue our commitment to provide world-class educational opportunities to our citizens - along the entire education spectrum.

Since the new school funding formula took place, we have injected an additional \$552 Million in K through 12 education and more than \$1.2 Billion total including our additional investments in higher education, scholarships and early childhood learning.

This year, we will continue our commitment to education by working hard to maintain K through 12 school funding at the same level as last year. Every student should have access to an accredited school - so that no matter where they live they have an opportunity for a world-class education.

We will also work to make college and other post-high school educational opportunities more affordable and available to students. We hope the Governor will join us in this effort, rather than again slashing funding for ACCESS Missouri scholarships and virtual school programs.

The third solution to our budget is to continue to reduce the size and scope of state government so taxpayers can afford to sustain it.

We must consider every possible way to make government smaller and more efficient - whether that is through more control, alterations or deletions.

Rebooting Government is not a short-term program. We have an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to truly examine and reshape every aspect of state government that could set Missouri on a sustainable, long-term path.

Last year, we began the Rebooting Government initiative and had several early successes saving taxpayers millions of dollars - but we can and will do more.

That is why I am asking every Missourian to share their ideas on how to reboot Missouri state government through a feature on the Missouri Senate website. I especially hope to hear from those on the front lines of state government because their insight can be the most helpful.

Submissions may be anonymous and every idea submitted will be considered. Starting next week, senators will meet in working groups to consider your ideas and will report final recommendations to the entire Senate on January 19th. Now is the time to be heard - please submit your idea today.

Missourians can also expect us to be accountable when it comes to how their tax dollars are spent. This year, the work of a new committee will begin. The members of that committee will be tasked with examining every state department and division, the way they operate, and how they spend taxpayer dollars. The panel will be the Senate Committee on Governmental Accountability.

As we work on these solutions to our budget, many other issues will also come before us this year. Our work will be difficult. The days will be long and our families and friends will have made substantial sacrifices in order for us to be able to serve. We thank you for this and would like to recognize all of you now. Would our families and friends please stand now to be recognized [applause].

As we enjoy our time with family and friends today and this evening with the pomp and circumstance the occasion brings, it is important for us to remember the work that lies ahead of us. Prepare yourself for tough budget decisions. Remember your neighbor who is unable to find work. Think of our

children's educational futures and remind your constituents that their voice will be heard and the spending of their taxpayer dollars held accountable.

With preparation, cooperation and hard work I believe we can secure a promising future for the people of Missouri. A future Missouri that is full of opportunity. A future Missouri where the American Dream is again alive and well. And a future Missouri where families can thrive.

As President Reagan said in 1984, "In this springtime of hope, some lights seem eternal; America's is."⁴

I believe the same is true for Missouri today.

Knowing that all 33 of us share these goals, I again find myself hopeful.

Thank you.

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1 Bureau of Labor Statistics, Data extracted Jan. 3, 2011.

(http://data.bls.gov/PDQ/servlet/SurveyOutputServlet?data_tool=latest_numbers&series_id=LASST29000003)

2 The Council of State Governments, Midwestern Office: *Missouri's Economic Dashboard*

(http://www.csgmidwest.org/MemberServices/Publications/RMIG/InSearchofGrowth_Dashboard_MO.pdf)

3 *Right to Work=economic growth* by Dr. Greg Schneider, Senior Fellow at the Kansas Policy Institute. (<http://dailycaller.com/2010/10/13/right-to-work-economic-growth/>)

4 President Ronald Reagan's Speech to the Republican National Convention; August 23, 1984. (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reagan/sfeature/quotes.html>)