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For additional information contact:
Barbara Mustoe
(573) 751-2306

The 2003 Legislative Session

Jefferson City -- Lawmakers convened this week in the state Capitol to begin the First Regular Session of the 92nd Missouri General Assembly. The beginning of each General Assembly is noteworthy, and this session is expected to be especially historic. An exceptionally high number of new lawmakers -- 90 state representatives and 12 senators -- were elected to this General Assembly and administered the oath of office as the session began on Wednesday.

As a result of changes in partisan makeup -- a key factor in deciding leadership positions and the ability to shape legislation through the process -- there has been a turnover in party control of the House of Representatives for the first time since 1955.

In addition to these changes, the full General Assembly will face major issues early this session. At the first of the two annual sessions that make up each Missouri General Assembly, new leadership is elected and new committees are appointed to handle the flow of legislation through the lawmaking process.

This week, the Senate began this process by appointing three key committees, the first of several necessary to get the session fully underway. One of these committees, the Senate Committee on Rules, Joint Rules, Resolutions and Ethics is responsible for reviewing all bills to ensure they are properly perfected and printed. I have been selected to serve as Vice Chairman of this committee which also handles ethics issues in the Senate and reviews resolutions that are introduced to change the rules under which the Senate operates.

The Senate Administration Committee, which handles the business matters related to the Senate, also was appointed, as was the Gubernatorial Appointments Committee.

Under the Constitution of Missouri, appointments by the governor, such as personnel named to head state departments and to fill positions on boards and commissions, must receive the advice and consent of the Senate.

With a number of vacancies being filled during the interim between sessions, this committee will face a large number of appointments that it must review. In doing so, this committee -- and the full Senate -- plays an important role in the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches established by the people in our state's constitution.

The Senate this week also sent its first piece of legislation to committee. -- Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 1, which I have co-sponsored. Under the Constitution, a Citizens Commission on Compensation for Elected Officials makes recommendations on increasing the salaries of statewide elected officials, lawmakers and judges. If the legislature does not pass a resolution rejecting the schedule in the first few weeks of the session, the higher salary schedule will take effect.

While salaries themselves are subject to appropriation later in the session as lawmakers finalize the state budget, Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 1, which has now been sent to the newly appointed Senate Rules Committee, would reject the recommendation of the commission and keep the salary schedule at its present level. Approval by the full Senate and the House of Representatives would be required for approval of the resolution once it advances out of the Rules Committee.

This resolution is the first of an estimated 1,500 bills expected to be introduced this session, including those that make up the state budget -- the most challenging job facing lawmakers each year.

I would like to encourage my constituents to contact me with any questions, comments or concerns regarding any legislative issues. Please feel free at any time to contact my office in Jefferson City at the State Capitol, Room 433, Jefferson City, Missouri 65101, (573) 751-2306, or at gary_nodler@senate.state.mo.us.

It is truly an honor to represent Dade, Jasper and Newton counties and I look forward to hearing from you.

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