



Week of April 4, 2005

Cruel and Rural Punishment

Small farms and local government face demise of home rule

JEFFERSON CITY— Despite my unyielding opposition, a bill lifting restrictions on building and expanding concentrated animal feeding operations made it out of the Senate last week by a single vote. Its passage sets a terrible precedent for rural Missouri. Proponents of Senate Bill 187 have shown they value regulating large-scale farms from a distance rather than effectively governing them at a local level. The bill causes traditional family farms to suffer and threatens the quality of our air and water.

On the surface, SB 187 is seemingly environmentally friendly. It states that only Missouri's largest farm operators would be subject to the state requirement of notifying nearby property owners and local officials if they wish to build a new or expand an existing operation. The language sounds as if the bill's sole purpose is to prevent air pollution caused by huge corporate animal feeding operations. But by "huge," the bill refers to only farming facilities that house more than 7,000 cows or 17,500 hogs, for example. So an operation can contain 6,999 bovines and be free from any sort of local oversight.

The big, but supposedly not "too big," animal-feeding operations will not have to answer to the people whom their operations effect. Neighbors to the farms will have to put up with offensive smells tainting their breaths of fresh air and hordes of animal waste polluting their waterways. They will have no one in the area to complain to because SB 187 tears authority away from the county government and hands it to federal overseers.

Local officials will have their hands tied when it comes to passing ordinances to protect county residents from the health and environmental evils of industrial-sized farms.

In southwest Missouri, our philosophy has always been that we can take care of ourselves when it comes to regulating farming operations. We don't need "Big Brother" in Jefferson City or Washington, D.C., telling us what pollution and nuisances we should tolerate. You elected your local officials. When you voted for them, you trusted them to handle the issues that affect you daily. No one knows what is best for southwest Missouri like a southwest Missourian does.

It is my job at the Capitol to be an advocate for my constituents' best interest to ensure that the state government does not infringe on the rights of you or your local government. Protecting our family farms and environment is more important than building a burdensome bureaucracy. I hold to the stance that the best government is the government that is closest to the people. SB 187 contradicts that mind-set and will only hinder your rights as a Missouri citizen.

The bill is currently stalled in the House, where I hope it stays—for the sake of our state, our local government, our environment and our families.

*Sen. Larry Gene Taylor represents the people of Ozark, Stone,
Taney, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald counties.*