



Gibbons Capitol Report
May 16, 2006

Making Missouri a Better Place to Live, Work and Raise a Family

Friday marked the final day of the 2006 Legislative Session, and I am proud to report that the Senate was able to advance many of our priorities to the governor this year. Last year was an historic session when we wrote a new school funding formula, reformed our civil lawsuit system and significantly improved our state's workers' compensation system. Plus, we passed a balanced budget without a tax increase. This year, I believe the Legislature did a good job of dealing with many issues for the first time. We found common sense solutions to complex problems that should make all our lives better.

Protecting our Homes, Farms and Businesses

The most difficult issue we tackled this session was reform to end the abuse of eminent domain in our state. The measure, House Bill 1944, puts property owners first by preventing the use of eminent domain for projects solely for economic development. Secondly, in the cases where eminent domain could still be used, the bill outlines that property owners should be paid based on what the price of the land would be for development, not its current use.

I represent Sunset Hills which was devastated by a failed eminent domain project for a new shopping mall. The disaster that struck Sunset Hills would not be repeated under this new law because it creates hurdles to prevent local governments from abusing the awesome power of government to take someone's home, farm or business.

Full Disclosure: Campaigns and Ethics

Legislation that significantly reforms Missouri's current campaign fundraising laws as well as limits travel expenses lawmakers can accept from lobbyists passed the General Assembly. I believe this was one of the most important pieces of legislation we passed this year.

We've inherited a system of reporting and ethics laws that needed to be updated. Every person in Missouri has the right to know how much money candidates are raising and where it's coming from. The measure, House Bill 1900, removes the campaign contribution caps to individual candidates. I believe allowing citizens to contribute directly to a candidate improves transparency by diminishing the role legislative and political action committees play in funneling money to candidates.

Focus on Our Children

The Legislature approved a \$20.8 billion state operating budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, with an emphasis on improving education. It included a \$127 million increase for the school foundation formula, as well as an additional \$15 million to fund the Small Schools Grant program. Universities and community colleges received 2 percent increases, marking the first increases for higher education in several years.

Legislation protecting children by increasing penalties for sexual offenders and creating a Child-Safe Internet passed unanimously. It sets a 30 year mandatory minimum sentence for anyone who commits forcible rape or sodomy against a child less than 13 years old. Any sexual predator who might consider harming a child must know, that the punishment will be swift, certain, and severe. Or to put it another way, we are going to lock the door and throw away the key.

The Path to Energy Independence

The Senate also took a first step to putting Missouri on a path to energy independence by advancing legislation that will provide Missouri motorists with a cleaner burning, renewable fuel that lowers prices at the pump and supports Missouri's farmers by requiring gasoline sold in Missouri to contain a 10 percent ethanol blend. This standard uses corn to power our cars and lessens our dependence on foreign sources for fuel. It also protects consumers because the blending is suspended anytime ethanol raises above the price of regular gasoline.

Overall, the Missouri Senate worked hard this session to advance significant legislation including eminent domain reform, healthcare reform, fully funding the school funding formula, new laws to protect children from sexual predators, and setting Missouri on a path to energy independence. Over the coming weeks I will provide you with detailed information on these bills as the governor prepares to sign them into law.

More Missourians are at work, businesses are choosing Missouri as a place to grow and invest over other states, even other countries. Our children have a better chance at a great education, and we are safer. The reforms accomplished during the 2005 legislative session have had a positive proven effect on our economy, and coupled with the priorities we passed this year, they will put the people of Missouri on a strong foundation for decades to come.