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THE CAUTHORN REPORT

New Priorities for a New Legislative Year

A New Year is a great time to look ahead and make goals. We do this for our own lives, our families and our jobs. Setting goals for my farm helps charter a path toward a productive year. As a new legislative session begins, it is time to look ahead to the important issues that will face the Missouri General Assembly this year.

Five key priorities will dominate the session. They include: creating a 21st century health care system, fully funding the educational foundation formula, eminent domain reforms, cracking down on sexual predators and ensuring Missouri's energy independence.

21st Century Healthcare

Last year we had tough decision to make regarding Medicaid. The social welfare program was growing beyond the state's means. We pledged to create a new healthcare system for Missouri's seniors, disabled and economically disadvantaged citizens.

We want ALL Missourians to have available, affordable healthcare. Our seniors, the disabled, and low-income Missourians deserve personalized healthcare using 21st Century technology. Personal responsibility and preventive measures are key to keep costs reasonable.

Jiffy Lube, which performs lube jobs and other auto maintenance nationwide, can access your car's history at any location. Unfortunately, our hospitals cannot do the same with patient information. Medical records are mainly paper. According to the Institute of Medicine Reports, between 44,000 and 98,000 people die each year from errors in paper medical records. Twenty-first century technology can be our friend in saving lives, and Missouri will lead the way.

Fully Funding Our Schools

For the first time in five years we will fully fund Missouri's foundation formula for our schools. In the next budget year, K-12 funding level will be the highest in state history. This will be done with \$137 million increase from the new formula.

Rural school districts will receive \$15 million in grants to recruit and keep outstanding teachers. Rural schools are gaining a lot under the new formula. No school district should be forced to consolidate or shut their doors. Rural districts provide quality education and keep our senses of community.

Eminent Domain

We must end the abuse of eminent domain. The Supreme Court ruling last summer sent shockwaves throughout the country. They said developers could take private property for their own use. The silver lining in their ruling said this was only because Connecticut had weak laws protecting landowners. States like Missouri are proactively passing laws protecting landowners from eminent domain abuse. .

Eminent domain can serve many useful purposes, such as building highways and schools. However, developers are using the policy to take family homes and land away for personal profit. A person's property is far more important than the local tax base. The special value a family farm has should be considered when land is acquired.

We will work hard to strike a proper balance between economic development and landowner rights. We must protect our communities. Too many times I travel through big cities and see strip mall after strip mall. Northeast Missouri still has great downtowns and communities, and they should never be threatened.

Protecting Our Children

Sexual predators are plaguing our communities. Parents are afraid to let their children play freely like they once did as kids. The Internet makes it harder for parents to protect their children and easier for molesters to stalk and prey young victims.

Legislators, myself included, have sponsored legislation cracking down on sex predators. My legislation includes elements of Jessica's Law, the "25 to Life" measures that keep sex offenders behind bars a minimum of 25 years.

We will enable our law enforcement to better track, find and prosecute sex offenders luring children over the Internet. Background checks for employees working with children is also critical

Missouri's Energy Independence

Energy issues are at the forefront of people's attention. From escalating gas prices to high home heating costs, consumers are being hit hard. We must look beyond traditional sources for our energy needs.

One of my pieces of legislation requires all motor fuel sold in the state contain at least 10 percent ethanol. This source of energy helps our farmers, our economy and our economy. We must rely on the Midwest, not the Middle East, for our energy needs.

Daily we are aware of the growing demands on our energy supply and the increased need for innovation. Missouri can lead the way in being a state that encourages energy independence.

As each of the above issues grow and evolve in the upcoming months I will write about them in depth.

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