



# State Senator Brad Lager

District 12

## 2007 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Dear Friends,

It is official. The First Regular Session of the 94<sup>th</sup> General Assembly has come to a close. When we began the year, we laid out an aggressive agenda. We focused on beginning the transformation of our broken healthcare system, increasing funding for educating our children, ensuring Missouri's law-abiding citizens are protected, and providing tax relief for Missouri's senior citizens. Before the gavel fell for the final time, we accomplished all of these goals.

First, we passed one of the most comprehensive healthcare packages in the country. We have crafted a healthcare delivery system that is focused on wellness, prevention, and personal responsibility. I am committed to ensuring that Missourians have a healthcare system that is available and affordable for everyone. This new model will reduce the number of uninsured in our state, it will ensure that our most vulnerable are protected, it will allow disabled employees to work without fear of losing their Medicaid benefits, it will allow employees to pay insurance premiums with pre-tax dollars, and most importantly it will ensure that all Missourians have healthcare choices.

Next, we increased funding for Missouri's elementary and secondary schools by increasing the foundation formula by \$132 million. We passed the Castle Doctrine, which will allow Missouri's law-abiding citizens to defend themselves and their families from unwanted intruders without fearing legal repercussion. Finally, we enacted tax relief for Missouri's senior citizens by phasing out the tax on Social Security benefits over the next six years.

It has been a tough year, and I am glad to be home in northwest Missouri. I ran for public office because I wanted to make our state and our communities an even better place to work, live and raise a family. Although I did not agree with everything that happened in Jefferson City this year, I do believe we are moving Missouri forward in a positive direction and, overall, I would consider it a successful session. I look forward to continuing to fight for our region of the state and doing what is right for Missouri's taxpayers as we strive to make government more efficient and return common sense to the public policy process. Early this year, we made a pact with the people of Missouri, and I am proud to inform you that the promises we made have been kept.

Sincerely,



# EDUCATION MATTERS

This past legislative session, hundreds of bills were filed dealing with Missouri's educational system. These initiatives encompassed a large range of ideas including forced placement by residential care facilities without school input, numerous attempts to create school choice programs, and a possible reduction in required educational services. Many of these initiatives faced stiff opposition and were soundly defeated in the Senate.

As a result, only a handful of the introduced education bills reached the governor's desk.

The education bills that passed this session included many helpful provisions. Senate Bill



**SEN. LAGER READS TO A FIRST GRADE CLASS DURING VISITS THROUGH THE 12<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT.**

the Small Schools Grant, an increase in school transportation funding, and an increase in funding for Parents as Teachers, Advanced Placement Tests, and Special Education programs.

Although we have some challenges before us here in northwest Missouri, I believe our public schools have and will continue to provide an outstanding education to our students.

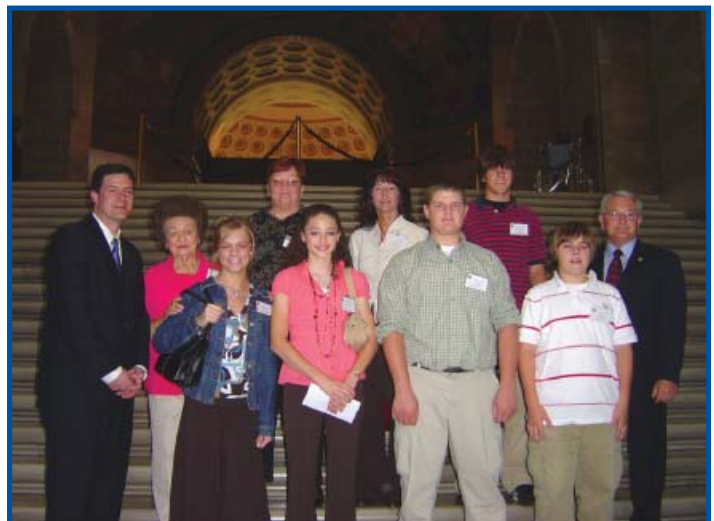
I will continue to fight for continued funding increases to our public schools system and work with our schools to champion efforts that improve education in northwest Missouri.



**SEN. LAGER MET WITH STUDENTS FROM MARYVILLE TO DISCUSS LIFE AS A LEGISLATOR AND THE ISSUES AFFECTING EDUCATION.**

64 addressed the loss of school days due to inclement weather, set a timeframe to begin the school year, and included a new teacher mentoring program. Senate Bill 112 removed the sunset provisions for early childhood education and the First Steps program. Senate Bill 389 included a provision to increase the number of students eligible for Bright Flight scholarships.

The 2008 budget will again provide an increase in funding for Missouri's classrooms. The General Assembly approved \$5.2 billion for elementary and secondary education which fully funds the foundation formula and is a 4 percent increase over last year. The 2008 budget also includes \$15 million for continued funding of



**THESE STUDENTS FROM HOLT COUNTY VISITED SEN. LAGER AS A PART OF THE AMERICAN LEGION YOUTH GOVERNMENT DAY THIS PAST SESSION.**



# ENDING UNFAIR TAXATION

## ENDING TAXES ON RETIREMENT BENEFITS

Until this year, Missouri was one of only 15 states that still taxed Social Security benefits. Seniors have been taxed the entire time they have worked to fill Social Security coffers, and I believe the state should not ask them to pay a second time as they collect those benefits. As a result of this year's actions, Missouri seniors can now keep more of their hard-earned money.

House Bill 444, which I supported in the Senate, implements an end to taxation on Social Security benefits, Social Security disability, and certain non-private retirement benefits. Qualifying non-private retirement benefits include plans for firefighters and police officers, railroad workers, teachers, as well as veterans and certain federal employees. The exemption applies to Missouri residents age 62 and older and disabled residents of any age. Income thresholds are \$85,000 for an individual and

HB 444 will be phased-in over a 6-year period:

- 20% in 2007
- 35% in 2008
- 50% in 2009
- 65% in 2010
- 80% in 2011
- 100% in 2012



\$100,000 for married couples. In order to maintain a fiscally responsible approach, the exemption will be phased in over a six-year period, beginning this year with a 20 percent exemption.

Social Security benefits will be completely tax exempt by 2012.

## TEACHER RETIREMENT BENEFITS

Senate Bill 406 makes several changes to public retirement benefits. Among these provisions is a measure affecting public school teachers' retirement. The measure continues the "25 and out" provision to July 1, 2013, and extends the 2.55 percent formula factor for teachers who retire with 31 or more years of experience.

The act allows the board of trustees for the public school retirement system to increase retirement benefits for the system. The board also is permitted to adopt additional retirement benefits for persons who have retired, including cost-of-living adjustments, as long as the board of trustees finds that the additional benefit will not require an increase in

the contribution rate required by members of the board of education and is financially sound. If the board authorizes such an increase in benefits, it must certify in writing to the board of education the reasons why a contribution increase will not be needed.



**TEACHERS FROM THROUGHOUT NORTHWEST MISSOURI VISITED SEN. LAGER TO DISCUSS THIS YEAR'S MANY EDUCATION BILLS AND THE NEED TO END THE EXCESS TAXATION THEY RECEIVE UPON RETIREMENT.**

## STATE TAXES ON PENSIONS

House Bill 444 will gradually phase out state income taxes on retirement benefits including public school teachers' pensions by 2012. They will be eligible for exemptions up to the maximum Social Security benefit (currently \$32,500).

# ISSUES THAT AFFECT YOU

## ENGLISH As The Official Language



In some states, communities that have large populations of non-English speaking people have begun conducting official meetings in languages other than English. In order to prevent that from becoming a problem in Missouri, the Legislature passed a resolution that, upon voter approval, would make English Missouri's official language.

Currently, Missouri law recognizes that English is the common language of the state and that fluency in English is integral to the American culture. This constitutional amendment would ensure this position would not be overturned by activist judges.

If approved by voters, all official meetings, including state proceedings and public meetings such as city council or school board meetings, will be required to be conducted in English.

The law does not prohibit translators in applicable situations such as court proceedings, but the resolution would

require local and state governments to communicate in English and to use English as the language of record so that all Missourians will be able to understand the official proceedings in our state.

## SECOND AMENDMENT RIGHTS

*Senate Bill 257 ensures that Missourians cannot be denied their constitutional right to bear arms – “the state, any political subdivision, or any person shall not prohibit or restrict the lawful possession, transfer, sale, transportation, storage, display, or use of firearms or ammunition during an emergency.”*

When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, the region became chaotic and was declared a state of emergency. The police then used that status to confiscate legal firearms. Law enforcement officials were overwhelmed and many people were left without any way to protect their families and property as looting and other crimes took place.

This session legislators passed Senate Bill 257, ensuring that Missourians cannot be denied their constitutional right to bear arms during times of emergency. The bill was signed into law at the national NRA convention in St. Louis earlier this year.

“There has been a movement recently to confiscate guns during a disaster,” said Sen. Lager, “but I believe that citizens should always maintain the right to defend themselves and their property, especially when they are the most vulnerable.”

## THE CASTLE DOCTRINE: THE RIGHT TO PROTECT YOUR HOME

Under previous state law, if someone unlawfully entered your home or tried to steal your car, you were required to first retreat instead of fighting back. Home and property owners had to establish that an intruder meant to do them bodily harm before they could use appropriate force against them.

Senate Bill 62 overturns a number of court decisions requiring Missourians to retreat or await physical aggression before using force against intruders who have gained entry unlawfully. The legislation, also called the “Castle Doctrine,” prevents frivolous lawsuits against those that use deadly force in defense of their homes.

Senate Bill 62 also repeals the requirement that Missouri residents must obtain permits from their local sheriff before buying a handgun.

Your home is your castle, and all Missourians have a right to be safe inside their walls.

# A GROWING BUDGET

Since I was first elected, I have fought hard to make our state government a responsible steward of the taxpayers' money. This legislative session proved to be full of challenges as I fought against pay raises for elected officials, reckless tax credits that benefited no one other than big money special interests, and irresponsible fiscal policies that are anything but good government.

One of the first legislative acts this past session surrounded pay raises for judges and members of the General Assembly. Due to an amendment passed last year, pay raises for judges and elected officials have become constitutional mandates for the first time in our state. In response to this poor public policy, I introduced SCR 4 and SJR 19, which would have rejected the proposed raises and would have required the Legislature to approve any future pay increases with a vote on the House and Senate floor. These resolutions were "killed in the legislative process" as too many legislators want generous pay increases without having to vote for them.

The most disappointing legislative initiative in 2007 was House Bill 327, which was sent to the Senate as a

simple economic development bill that bolstered the Quality Jobs Act and Enhanced Enterprise Zone Incentives. After moving through the special interest legislative process, the bill picked up hundreds of millions of dollars in new tax credits. This would have left a targeted few enjoying nice tax breaks come April, while the rest of us picked up the tab.

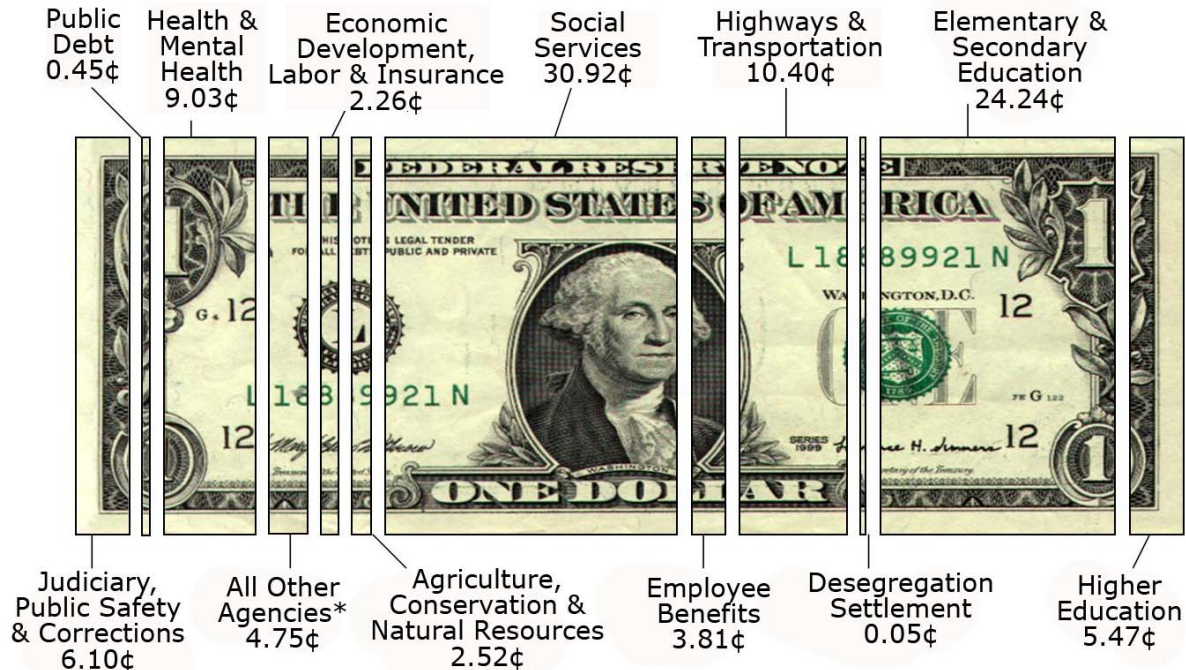
I voted against this bill during the regular session and again during the August special session. Although the big money lobbyists loved this bill, I do not believe this type of spending and fiscal policy is in the best interests of Missouri's taxpayers.

I will continue to advocate for a responsible spending cap that binds the growth of government to the growth of personal income. I will continue to work to shine the light on tax credit programs that are costing the taxpayers of this state hundreds of millions of dollars. Most importantly, I will continue fighting for sound fiscal policy that ensures we don't spend more than we take in, that we prioritize our expenses, and that we live within our means just like you and I do in our personal lives.

## DISTRIBUTION of EACH TAX DOLLAR

### FY 2008 Missouri Operating Budget

All Funds: \$21.488 Billion



\*Revenue, Office of Administration, Elected Officials, General Assembly, Real Estate

Source: Missouri Senate Appropriations Committee



# WORKING TO REPAIR OUR ROADS AND BRIDGES

I have always believed that we need to get decision makers out of Jefferson City and into our part of the state in order for our concerns to be understood. Our families and our economies are forced to depend on roads that are unsafe and unreliable.

It is time for that to change. We need greater attention paid to Missouri's lettered routes. These roads not only carry our school buses, but they are also the artery our agricultural producers depend on to make a living in rural Missouri.

This year, the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission traveled to Northwest Missouri for their July meeting. This marked their third trip to Northwest Missouri in the last three years and over 100 local government officials from throughout Northwest Missouri welcomed them. I am proud to report that there were public officials present from each of the 16 counties in my senate district. They each brought the concerns of their communities, yet together we had one simple message: we are in desperate need of safe and reliable transportation.

This message cannot just be put in front of the Commission once a year. During my five years in the State Capitol, I have consistently pushed MoDOT to repair the thousands of miles of lettered routes in our

state. One of my top priorities has always been to ensure that we have safe and reliable transportation in Northwest Missouri.

The silver lining that came out of the special legislative session held this past August was the 800-bridge program, which has the potential to help many areas of Missouri. Not surprisingly, of the 800 bridges in desperate need of repair in this state, more than 150 of those bridges are in Northwest Missouri. The legislative package we approved in HB 2 will now allow MoDOT to go out for bid on a proposal to repair all of the designated bridges in the next five years. By passing this bill, MoDOT will now be able to get real bids on this idea so that the state can decide if this

proposal is worth advancing. Repairing these bridges is a critical part of ensuring we have safe and reliable infrastructure throughout Missouri.

The Highways and Transportation Commission, MoDOT Director Pete Rahn, and the entire MoDOT staff have been very interested in learning more about our needs and discussing how we can work together to address these challenges. Although they cannot fix everything overnight, I do believe this Commission is committed to moving Missouri forward and bettering our transportation infrastructure in a fair and practical way.



**SEN. LAGER MEETS WITH MoDOT DIRECTOR PETE RAHN AND MEMBERS OF THE HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION IN NORTHWEST MISSOURI.**

## ADVANCING BIO-TECH IN NORTHWEST MISSOURI

One of the biggest developments to come out of the past session was the passage of the Lewis and Clark Discovery Initiative. This unique opportunity permitted the sale of assets from the state's Higher Education Loan Authority to provide nearly \$300 million for capital improvements and building projects without raising taxes or taking revenue from other programs.

The Lewis and Clark Discovery Initiative will provide \$24.4 million for Northwest Missouri State

University to be used towards the completion of the Center for Excellence. North Central Missouri College in Trenton will receive \$2 million to be used towards the construction of their Allied Health Center.

Additional funds from the initiative are also going towards the University of Missouri Research Farms at Hundley-Whaley in Albany, to the Graves-Chapple Farm in Corning, and to the Thompson Farm in Spickard.

# HERE TO HELP YOU

As your State Senator, I believe the cornerstone of good government is open communication. I encourage you to contact my office at any time to voice concerns and offer your thoughts about what is occurring in state government.

Please know that my office stands ready and willing to assist you with any future problems or concerns. If you would like to be kept up to date as events unfold at our State Capitol, please contact me at [brad.lager@senate.mo.gov](mailto:brad.lager@senate.mo.gov) and we will add you to our email distribution list.



Rich Germinder gathered experience over years of working in both state and federal government. He primarily

handles legislative duties for the Senator. He also spends much of his time working with local officials and community leaders to obtain grants, advance local priorities, and develop relationships with government departments.



Katie Reichard developed an extensive background in constituent services during her time working in law firms

over the past few years. She works daily to answer constituent concerns and solve problems that arise when citizens deal with state government agencies. She also handles scheduling duties for the office and manages requests for resolutions and capitol tours.

## Contact Senator Lager:

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# SENATE SNAPSHOTS



**BRAD WRIGHT, THE 2006 NORTHEAST AREA ATHLETE FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS MISSOURI, WAS RECOGNIZED BY SEN. LAGER ON THE FLOOR OF THE MISSOURI SENATE.**



**SEN. LAGER MET WITH ANDREW COUNTY COMMISSIONER GREG WALL AND ANDREW COUNTY CLERK DAN HEGEMAN DURING THE ANNUAL GREAT NORTHWEST DAYS IN JEFFERSON CITY.**



**SEN. LAGER WELCOMED STUDENTS FROM NORTHWEST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY TO THE CAPITOL.**



**MEMBERS OF THE LIVINGSTON COUNTY FFA MET WITH SEN. LAGER DURING THE ANNUAL FARM BUREAU YOUTH DAY AT THE CAPITOL.**

## State Senator Brad Lager

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