

# **Senator Luann Ridgeway's Capitol Report**

## **MO Senate Now In Session** January 16, 2007

The 2007 legislative session has just begun in Missouri. Legislators newly elected in November 2006 were sworn in on January 3. I am in the middle of a four year term that began in 2005. Half of the 34 members of the Missouri Senate were up for election this year, along with the entire 163 members of the House of Representatives. From now until May, our typical schedule will be to drive to Jefferson City on Monday morning and return home late Thursday afternoon.

There is a Republican majority in the Missouri Senate as well as in the Missouri House and our Governor is also a Republican. Although our Supreme Court is not elected, the judges are appointed by the Governor. They are supposed to serve in a nonpartisan capacity. There are more judges appointed by Democrat Governors than Republicans. So if you are into statistics, there are more Democrat appointees to the Supreme Court than Republicans. All House and Senate members make the same salary, which is about \$31,000 per year. The judges make close to \$100,000 per year.

Here are my predictions for 2007.

Health care reform, including Medicaid, will be at the forefront of our debate this year. Reforms that lead to more accessibility, transparency and affordability are desperately needed. Legislation of some sort will pass. The big question is whether we will have the collective nerve to pass major reforms or whether we will just tinker around the edges. It is politically risky to debate and pass real reforms. But in my opinion we didn't come to Jefferson City to do the "safe" thing. We need to step up to the plate and become a national leader in health care reform.

Simply put, if we keep doing more of what has always been done, we will wind up with nationalized healthcare similar to England's model. This model has produced rationing, put those in need on long waiting lists and made immediate care available only to the very rich or the very politically connected. We have to find ways to interject free market principles into our system while providing a safety net for those who cannot care for themselves. Interjecting technology is a must as well. This will help us track fraud at any level and also reduce errors and help catch adverse drug interactions.

We must shift from a "sickness management" model to a "health and prevention" model. It won't be easy but we must take bold steps toward reform.

A new “Health and Metal Health Committee” has been established in the Senate. The new Chair is well known for his willingness to carry significant reforms. I remain hopeful that we will tackle this issue in a meaningful way and have already been hard at work to make sure this happens.

Changes in our tax code will also be debated. Simplification is needed as well as tax lids and reductions. I plan to file a tax reduction bill this year. Property tax issues have arisen as an issue of great concern. A constituent has recently contacted me to suggest that real property taxes should not be allowed to go up above the rate of inflation unless the people have approved a tax increase or unless the property owner has made a structural improvement to the home. This may be a good direction to head with state legislation.

Other legislation spanning a broad range has already been filed. To name a few categories of proposals: animal rights legislation, seatbelt law expansion, optional helmets for motorcyclists, telecommunication laws, reducing the level of boating while intoxicated to .08, tax cuts and incentives, education reforms.

On the subject of education reforms, there will be significant effort spent toward providing a quality education for children trapped in failing public school districts. Many legislators are unwilling to let another generation of children lose their chance at a good education simply because we were too weak to challenge the status quo. Most public school districts in Missouri are doing a great job. However there are three or four that have consistently failed. This has to stop.

Please let me know your views and ideas. The best ideas I have received concerning improving Missouri’s laws have come from people who live in Clay County. My staff is comprised of two full time employees plus one full time intern and one part time intern. We serve over 170,000 people and get nearly 100 e-mails per day. We do our best to stay on top of all communication from Clay County. Please do not hesitate to call us as well at our toll free number of 866-875-8348.

Happy New Year! I look forward to serving you this year!

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