



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
Week of May 07, 2007**

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What Is a “Practical” Farmer?

JEFFERSON CITY – The Senate debated the qualifications of the governor’s nominee to head the state Department of Agriculture this week. Let me say upfront that Katie Smith of Platte County is a very bright, very talented young woman with an impressive resume for someone who’s just 29 years of age.

We heard a lot of talk during the debate over her nomination about what is a “practical farmer,” one of the basic qualifications in state statute for the Director of Agriculture.

We look out the windows of the Capitol and see a river that’s about to go over its banks; we’ve seen tornadoes, droughts and other natural disasters like blizzards. My definition of a practical farmer is one who, when they see a river about to flood, they are out there at 2 a.m. sandbagging a levee, then checking their momma cows that are calving, knowing that only Deity and their hard work can overcome Mother Nature. They have a genuine concern that their livelihood is tied so directly to that farm – it’s where their risk is, it’s where their heart is.

A degree in agricultural journalism and extensive experience as a consultant in Washington, D.C. looks great on a resume, but that’s not the issue.

What I’ve loved about coming over to the Senate from the House is that the Senate follows the rules. It seemed in the House we didn’t follow the rules and we stretched things to the nth degree to get things done, but in the Senate we seem to overcome partisanship and cut to the chase and treat each other fairly and honestly. The honest question before us is what is a practical farmer?

I think the problem does not lie with Katie Smith but with the governor for being willing to nominate someone more for their political connections than for their connection to the land.

Like I said, she has a great resume and I'm impressed that anyone who's just 29 has accomplished as much as she has, but is she a practical farmer? You find out what a practical farmer is when you stop in the coffee shop back home and ask folks, have you planted any corn yet? I'm not sure Katie Smith would think to ask that question if she walked into a coffee shop in northeast Missouri.

I wish the governor would have really looked for someone who is qualified under the statute and nominated a practical farmer. Maybe the legislature needs to better define that term so there's no question about who is or is not a farmer the next time a governor nominates someone to lead the Department of Agriculture.

If you are at risk to whatever Mother Nature throws at you, you are a practical farmer in my definition. You're concerned about more than politics, you're concerned about more than being a director; you are mainly concerned about that true agrarian connection to the land.

You have to have faith - faith that the seeds you plant will grow and mature.

At the end of the day Mrs. Smith was confirmed and I look forward to working with her at the Department of Agriculture to be the cheerleader for Missouri agriculture and to ensure our family farmers have expanded opportunities to be successful in Missouri.

We welcomed a number of visitors to our office in the Capitol this week, including Judge Karl DeMarce of Scotland County, a former state representative.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-7852.