

For Immediate Release

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# SHARING A VIEW OF THE STATE

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Issues and Comments – 33<sup>rd</sup> Senatorial District

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*Senator*

***Chuck Purgason***

In some ways this has been one of the easier years I have had in the General Assembly and in others it has been one of the hardest. The easy part has been the long days and nights working on this year's state budget. Although the hours are long, at least we are not working from a standpoint of being broke. Some of the policies we have implemented have increased our state revenues and have put our budget in fairly good shape and that will continue if we can restrain our spending in the future. Our budget is poised to be passed by the General Assembly and that issue will be put to rest for another year.

The hardest part has been some of the legislation that I have worked on. One of the major issues is the dealing with the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) that is being initiated by the federal government. This program is designed to have everyone who owns an animal get a premises number from the USDA, register their premises, and then register the type of livestock.

The first step of the program includes funding that the state can draw down from the federal government to begin financing the routine implementation of this program. According to USDA documents routine implementation includes premises identification, animal identification, and tracking of animal movements that will be collected and stored in a national repository. From attending many meetings across the district and because of the hundreds of calls and letters that we have received from people having concerns about this program, several of us in the General Assembly decided to try to take measures to make sure that participation in this program was voluntary.

We operate a voluntary program in the state now that is called the QSA or Quality Systems Assessment program. This is a great program where a producer can meet certain qualifications in raising his cattle and marketing them through QSA and then receive a higher price or premium for meeting the program's criteria. This program works great, is voluntary, and the producer has the option of participating or just selling his cattle on the open market or through livestock auction.

The concern people have with NAIS is that it will become mandatory and all producers will be required to follow the criteria set out by the state or federal government in order to be

able to buy or sell livestock. Because of the concern that this program will be made mandatory, some of us in the legislature decided to try to pass legislation that would assure that the program would remain voluntary here in the state of Missouri.

I feel that any mandatory program would fall hardest on the small mom and pop farming operations that are the majority of the farmers in my district. Looking back in history, Howell County used to be the feeder pig capitol of the world. Thousands of farmers across the district made a living of raising hogs. Today, it is very hard to find any hogs being raised in our area. Dairy farms used to be very plentiful and the dairy industry was very strong. Today, dairy farmers, too, are becoming scarce because of the inability to earn a living.

Not wanting to see history repeat itself in the beef industry, I felt it was important to try to pass the legislation needed to assure our beef industry would remain free and independent and not be over-regulated by a government agency. The frustrating part is that in dealing with this legislation the groups that have testified against it and have worked to have it defeated are some of the groups that I belong to and have worked with the most on issues regarding farming in the past. The groups that opposed this legislation include Missouri Farm Bureau and the Missouri Cattlemen's Association.

This puts me in a position of trying to make a decision based on what I feel is best for the people of my district and the state and opposing the groups that are here representing the agriculture interests in the state. I have spent countless hours working over this subject. I have studied the Federal documents including the 2002 farm bill where this program was initiated and have tried to look at the long term effects this could have on the people I represent and the agricultural interests of the state. I have tried to look at both sides of the issue.

I continue to work with the groups that either support or oppose the legislation, but I have to be the one that makes the final decision. My decision is to continue to try to ensure that this program is voluntary and take the steps that are necessary to ensure that the program remains voluntary. If this means going against these farming groups then that is the decision I must make and stand by it. If you feel I am right or wrong, please tell me. If you think they are right or wrong, please tell them.

I welcome your opinions and suggestions. You may reach me at 573-751-1882, e-mail to [chuck.purgason@senate.mo.gov](mailto:chuck.purgason@senate.mo.gov), or write to me at the Missouri Senate, State Capitol, Room 420, Jefferson City, MO 65101. If you would like to receive these newsletters electronically, please call or e-mail my office.

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