



Ensuring Water Park Safety & Protecting Livestock Farmers

JEFFERSON CITY — Growing up in the Midwest, I have always associated the summer months with swimming and farming. I spent my first 10 years in Illinois, and the rest in Missouri, and remember the joys of going swimming to relieve the summer heat. And now my kids do the same. I can also recall waiting for the planted crops to grow “knee high by the 4th of July” and share that same corny expression with my own kids.

During the recent legislative session, the General Assembly passed several important measures, including one that deals with making swimming at water parks safer and another that affects our Missouri farms. I eagerly supported both pieces of legislation and would like to highlight them here.

The first, House Bill 1341 — forwarded and handled by a Senate colleague — created “Ethan’s Law,” which now requires for-profit private swimming facilities to carry sufficient liability insurance. The legislation — now in effect — followed the tragic death of 6-year-old Ethan Cory, who drowned last summer at a private water park in rural Joplin that was not regulated by the state and did not carry liability insurance.

Following this heartbreaking event, Ethan’s parents worked with state lawmakers to draft the legislation, which now requires all privately owned water park owners to carry insurance and to meet and follow regulated safety precautions or face hefty penalties. The bill honors Ethan’s memory and is designed to increase the safety at water parks so that we can prevent this sort of tragedy from happening again.

The farming measure, contained in Senate Bill 931, concerns participation in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Animal Identification System (NAIS) — a government-run program that identifies and tracks specific livestock to monitor animal health. Missouri’s General Assembly passed legislation that prohibits the Missouri Department of Agriculture from mandating that Missouri farming operations register animals with the ID program unless authorized by state law. Missouri farmers may still voluntarily participate in the program.

It was very important to me, my colleagues and the farming community that we keep this animal ID system voluntary and NOT mandatory for Missouri farmers and ranchers for a number of reasons. First, mandating the NAIS program establishes extensive government control of livestock, which is

private property. Plus, it threatens the very existence of our small family farms. Under the program, farmers with small operations would be required to register and pay a fee for every head of livestock and poultry, while large corporate farms would incur lower costs for registering entire herds and earn higher profits. The cost of implementing such a vast program would be monumental, and more importantly, it seems to suggest that our farmers can only be entrusted to protect animal herds with more governmental controls. That is just plain wrong.

As we head into summer, I am pleased Missouri has taken these steps to keep kids safer at private water parks and to protect our farmers from too much governmental interference. As we head into summer, I hope you and your family have a fun and safe one and that our Missouri farmers enjoy a productive season with favorable markets.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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