

For Immediate Release

January 17, 2008

SHARING A VIEW OF THE STATE

Issues and Comments – 33rd Senatorial District

Senator

Chuck Purgason

With the Governor's State of the State Address behind us, it is now time to sit down and reflect on the direction this budget and this leadership will be setting forth in this session of the General Assembly.

Understanding where we are and how we got there is critical to setting a direction for Missouri's 2008 legislative session. I recently read an insightful article by Amity Shlaes entitled "The Legacy of the 1936 Election." Ms. Shlaes is a senior fellow in economic history at the Council on Foreign Relations, has served on the Board of the Wall Street Journal, won the New York's Deadline Club Prize for Commentary, was a co-winner of the Frederic Bastiat Prize, and is the author of two national bestsellers.

According to Ms. Shlaes, the presidential campaign of 1936 "...marked the end of old-fashioned American federalism and the rise of a new kind of politics. It was 1936 more than any other campaign that created modern interest groups and taught us that Washington should subsidize them." Special interest groups are often seen as the enemy of the common man and are blamed for much of what is flawed in our political process. But where did they come from, how did they develop into such political powerhouses, and what can we do about it?

To reverse a trend it is important to understand its origin. History can identify the thinking that began the trend and help analyze both direction and destination. The 1936 election was won by promising to *help the forgotten man*. The slogan required a redefinition of *forgotten man* and changed the future direction of America. It can even be claimed that "the forgotten man" was the one most harmed by the policies that followed the 1936 election.

According to Ms. Shlaes' essay, the phrase came from a book by Yale Professor William Graham Sumner. Here is what he wrote: "A and B want to help X. This is the charitable impulse. The problem arises when A and B band together and pass a law that coerces C into co-funding their project for X." According to Sumner, C is "*the forgotten man*." "He is the man who works, ... prays, ...pays his own bills, the man who is 'never thought of.'" But he is the one that is taxed the hardest to pay for the spending of A and B. He is forgotten because he belongs to neither a special interest group nor a constituency group (farmers, seniors, veterans, writers/artists, union members, etc.).

Once “the forgotten man” was uncoupled from its origin, it became the vehicle to push public sympathy and government favors to any conceivable constituency group. The “Special Interest Group” was born. Now, instead of debating ideas in the public square, the debate moved to whose ox would be gored and for whom. Government began the task of ingratiating one group after another to the federal government; the natural partner of ingratiation – dependency – soon followed.

My hope for the 2008 legislative session is that the real forgotten man will be remembered by this legislature and that we will work to protect his/her right to work, live a free life with little government interference, and allow them to keep what they have earned. With a parade of lobbyists, state bureaucrats, and politicians running for re-election and others interested in government money and programs, I hope that we remember these forgotten men and women who work hard everyday and prosper without bigger government, more powerful special interest groups, or increased “earmark” governance.