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SHARING A VIEW OF THE STATE

Issues and Comments – 33rd Senatorial District

Senator

Chuck Purgason

I have now served in the Missouri Senate for five years. When you add that to my eight years of service in the Missouri House, I have gathered some experience that I think is pretty reliable about the nature of government. If there is anything I have learned through observation and experience, it is that there is a constant drumbeat in the halls of government --- and the drumbeat is for “M-O-R-E.”

“More of what?” you may ask. My reply is simple: More money; more power; more laws and regulations governing our lives. Many lobbyists are hired to award special favors upon certain businesses to attain government support or an advantage over their competition. Every individual or group that receives government money is working to get more and to add more people into their group in order to become a larger and larger lobbying group.

Since 1990 our Missouri budget has grown from around \$7.5 billion to proposals this year exceeding \$23 billion. In other words, Missouri is spending almost three times what we were spending less than 20 years ago. It took us from the time we became a state in 1821 until 1990 (169 years) to grow into a \$7.5 billion budget. But in less than 20 years we have nearly tripled our spending.

The number of laws has grown similarly. From Missouri’s beginning in 1821 until 1959 we had accumulated only about four volumes of statutes, which, if you stacked the books up, would only amount to about nine inches of printed laws. Today we have over 25 volumes of statutes, which, if you stacked the books up, would amount to nearly 50 inches of printed laws.

Here’s the important question: With all the spending and new laws that are passed every year, do we become more free and independent and happy as a population? Or does it just continue to need for more government, more spending and higher and higher cost in the quest to become a more perfect society?

Not all of our government growth has been bad. Highways are better, some state services are better, but are they three times better with three times more spending? However, the fact remains that much of our spending and many laws are nothing more than designer legislation that benefits a select few at the expense of many.

Missouri is losing population, which will likely result in our losing one of our current nine-member delegation to the U. S. Congress. The loss of this seat lessens Missouri's voice in Washington, D. C. Why are people leaving Missouri? Many factors may influence the decision to move such as proximity to family, climate, and quality of life.

One of my colleagues here in the General Assembly recently pointed out: "Of the twelve top states netting new residents, eight of them do not have a state income tax. Those on the left would tell us that people are willing to pay more taxes to get better government services, but the migration patterns strongly suggest otherwise. Interestingly, the people who tend to be the most mobile tend to be the most educated and motivated --- or to put it bluntly --- are taxpayers. Tax them too much and they may not be here in the future to tax at all."

The power to tax is a formidable power. Money is the main engine that feeds government and it is also the main engine that drives individuals in the pursuit of happiness. Good and limited government requires a combination of both.

One attempt to reduce Missouri's dependency on taxpayer dollars is to reduce the state income tax from 6% to 5%. The amendment is to Senate Substitute for House Bill 191 that is currently up for debate in the Missouri Senate. HB 191 passed the House without any broad-based tax decrease proposals. If adopted, the tax decrease plan would be phased in over a ten-year period. When fully implemented, the proposed tax cut would put over one billion dollars back into the hands of Missourians. This is reform that is permanent and predictable.

I'm glad that this issue is being put on the table for discussion. Our sour economy will not be turned around by more government and more spending. Rather, we should grow the opportunity and the economy by lessening the tax burden.

Other proposals include complete removal of Missouri's income tax and replacing it with the Fair Tax. This means that our income tax would be eliminated and replaced with a statewide sales tax of 5.11%. The Fair Tax is in House Joint Resolution 36, which is in the form of a constitutional amendment and would require approval by the voters to become effective. HJR 36 has not yet been debated in the Senate.

A tax cut targeted at removing the tax on all military retirement pay is contained in HB 82. The bill allows a 15% deduction on any military retirement income per year until 2016 when the deduction would be fully phased in. This is especially important for keeping our military retirees from fleeing to other states, including Kansas, which already exempts all military retirement pay from state income taxation.

For the legislature to discuss tax cuts or decrease in fees and regulations puts the body at odds over the special interests that are paid to lobby for more and more of your tax dollars. Since the silent majority of taxpayers do not have paid lobbyists, it is up to you to call and write and let your voices be heard in your state legislature --- especially in the last two weeks of session.

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