



32nd District

Senator Ronald Richard

2013 Capitol Report

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

Every session presents its own unique set of challenges, but there were many to be dealt with this year. From an insolvent Second Injury Fund (SIF) to our ongoing need for job creation, there were many issues that had to be addressed. I'm proud to say we approved numerous measures dealing with some of our state's most pressing needs.

We passed legislation that will return the SIF to solvency, so employers can have the certainty they need and legitimately hurt workers can receive their compensation. We approved a handful of measures to spur job growth, including a bill I've advocated on behalf of for years that creates an incentive to bring more amateur sporting events to Missouri, which increases tourism spending and supports local businesses.

Locally, I fought to see a bill pass that improves the method for calculating the prevailing wage in Newton and other third and fourth class counties. The current method for figuring the wage was unrepresentative of rural areas and inflated capital projects. This change will let us invest more into rebuilding Joplin.

There were many other issues throughout the session, more of which you can learn about in this newsletter.

Please, always feel free to contact me with your questions and concerns regarding state government. My contact information is listed below.

I'm here to serve you, the citizens of the 32nd District, and the best way I can do that is to know what issues are affecting our area. My door is always open.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ronald Richard".



**Contact
Sen. Ron Richard**

**201 W. Capitol Ave., Rm. 321
Jefferson City, MO 65101
www.senate.mo.gov/richard
(573) 751-2173**

Second Injury Fund Fix



One of the most pressing issues this session was dealing with the insolvency of the Second Injury Fund (SIF). Missouri's SIF was created to encourage employers to hire disabled workers or those with a previous work injury. By funneling subsequent claims from these workers into the SIF, businesses would be protected from the increased liability of hiring a disabled employee. The SIF is funded through a surcharge on workers' compensation insurance premiums.

Then 2008 hit, and as unemployment rose, workers' compensation insurance premiums fell, bringing in less and less money for the fund. Eventually, the fiscal obligations of the SIF outgrew the revenue it raised each year. It is now near insolvency, with more than \$28 million in outstanding liabilities and thousands of cases that haven't even been considered yet.

This year, we passed **Senate Bill 1**, which allows the surcharge rate that funds the SIF to be raised in instances of a shortfall. By removing the previous cap on the surcharge, the rate can be adjusted to meet the fund's needs, ensuring its solvency in the future. The bill also addresses occupational disease within the workers' compensation system. There was a great deal of urgency with this issue, and I was proud we moved quickly to address it this year.

Defending Our Rights

During the 2013 session, one of the biggest issues that faced the Legislature involved the government overreach of one of our own state departments. Early in February, it came to light, following a lawsuit filed by a man in Stoddard County, that the Department of Revenue (DOR) was scanning and collecting citizens' private information in order to renew or obtain a driver's license or Conceal Carry Weapons (CCW) permit. These new rules were quietly implemented, without the knowledge of either the public or the Legislature. Furthermore, the new policy was never properly promulgated through the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules.

If left unchecked, government agencies can amass a great deal of power. One of the most important protections against this is oversight through the Legislature. This law being ignored is reprehensible. Even worse, though, is citizens' trust in their state government was betrayed.

We worked hard to address the issue, conducting a series of investigations into why the new rules were implemented, where the information went, and how it was used. This process is still ongoing.

To prevent it from happening in the future, we passed two bills this session. **Senate Bill 252** prohibits the department from retaining copies of source documents used to obtain a driver's or nondriver's license. This measure prevents DOR from continuing its illegal practice of saving Missourians' most sensitive documents.

Additionally, we passed legislation that removes the duty of issuing CCW permits from DOR and instead authorizes local sheriffs departments to grant concealed carry endorsements. Both of these measures address some of the most heinous actions by the department.

We have to be vigilant in the fight against government overreach. Our rights may be inalienable, but they're not guaranteed. We have to be proactive in pushing back against big government programs that slowly chip away at our rights.

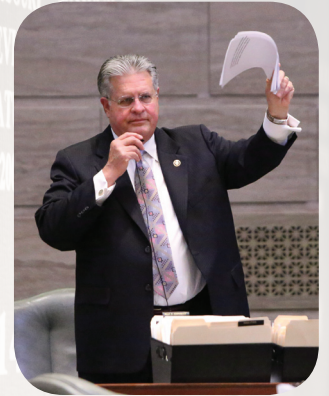
HONORING OUR CAPITOL

On Feb. 5, 1911, the Capitol dome was struck by a bolt of lightning. The dried pine that made up the roof acted as kindling, and the ensuing fire burned so bright, citizens 20 miles away saw the glow of the flames. Despite the best efforts of firefighters and volunteers, the building was a complete loss.

From the ashes, we built our current Capitol, a building that covers three acres and has 500,000 square feet of floor space. It is regularly touted as one of the most beautiful capitol buildings in the nation. Citizens from all over the state visit it every day to walk through the marble halls and consider the history found within these walls.

On May 6 this year, I joined dozens of citizens and officials in celebrating the 100-year anniversary of our current Capitol's groundbreaking. The ceremony was held in the rotunda, where I and others spoke about the awe we have for this hallowed building.

The Capitol is a symbol of Missouri, of our state, our home. On a related note, I was proud to handle **House Concurrent Resolution 7**, which directs the State Historical Society of Missouri to develop plans to commemorate and celebrate the State of Missouri's bicentennial. Missouri has a rich, beautiful history, and we should make every effort to both embrace and remember it.



Historic Veto Session

Of the 29 measures vetoed by the governor this year, the Legislature ultimately overrode 10 bills, a historic number for the modern General Assembly, including legislation that secures the future of the lead mining industry in Missouri and a measure that allows public officials to cast roll call votes via videoconference.

In addition, the Legislature voted to override the governor's vetoes on:

- **Senate Bill 9**, which increases the penalties for cattle theft and regulates foreign ownership of land;
- **Senate Bill 129**, which grants protections to doctors who volunteer their time to provide medical services at no cost to patients;
- A bill that establishes custody and visitation rights for deployed military personnel;
- A measure that prohibits uninsured drivers from receiving noneconomic damages against insured drivers in lawsuits relating to motor vehicle accidents;
- **House Bill 278**, which bars governments, both local and state, from restricting the celebration of federal holidays; and
- Legislation that modifies the law relating to funeral trusts, financial institutions, and exemptions under bankruptcy proceedings, among other provisions.

These bills, along with the four others, have since been enacted into law. It is important to keep in mind that just because some bills were not able to become law doesn't mean we haven't made a lot of progress on some very large, complicated issues. We will continue working on these critical priorities for Missouri during the 2014 legislative session.

Amateur Sports in Missouri

Amateur sports events are a multi-million dollar industry. Beyond simple bragging rights, states that host these events bring in millions of tourism dollars. Fans attending the games stay at local hotels, eat at local restaurants and shop in local stores. Not only does this benefit those existing businesses, it generates a lot of state revenue which can be used to ward off future budget shortfalls.

This year, we passed **Senate Bill 10**, which I co-sponsored, that creates a tax incentive to attract

amateur sporting events to the state. Under the bill, \$5 from every ticket sold to a qualifying event would go towards an incentive to offset the costs local organizations incur while attracting amateur sporting events, such as the NCAA basketball tournament and Olympic trials, to their area.

These events are an important part of bringing new revenue to our state. This fiscally responsible measure will help Missouri become a major player in hosting these types of events in the future.

Increasing International Trade

I was honored this year to accompany the governor and a number of other state officials on a trade trip to France. During my time in the Capitol, I've been on a number of these missions, and I've seen firsthand how they can benefit Missouri businesses.

Missouri continues to grow a strong international trade relationship all across the world. An important part of Missouri's economic development is foreign trade. Last year, Missouri exported more than \$2.5 billion to Europe alone. Exports to France jumped up 21 percent between 2011 and 2012, making the country one of our fastest-growing trade destinations. Growing our Missouri exports is critical in growing our economy.

A key stop in our schedule was the 50th International Paris Air Show. Designing, building and supplying aviation components creates jobs in our area and throughout the state. Strengthening our role in the aerospace industry will bring a number of new jobs to Missouri.

PREVAILING WAGE REFORM



This session, we approved legislation making important changes to Missouri's prevailing wage system, a beneficial program that protects employees from having wages slashed to help contractors win bids. But, the current system has some serious flaws in the way it figures prevailing wage salaries.

Under the current law, counties are forced to pay metro area wage rates that are often much, much higher than what the average contractor in the county makes. This causes labor costs to rise. There are countless counties and cities across the state that can only complete half of the projects for the year, and then finish the project the next year because the cost of labor would simply be too high. Joplin is facing this problem right now rebuilding after the tornado.

Under **House Bill 34**, the wage in Newton County, as well as third and fourth class counties, would be based on surveys from both union and non-union workers. The wage would be set based on whichever group reported more hours of work. In the instance there is no data available for a particular year, the wage would be figured using an average of reports from the last six years. If there are no reports, then the wage would be figured using the most recent wage reported by an adjacent county.

This change is a solid step toward making the prevailing wage more representative of what contractors are actually paid. It will also help reduce the labor costs for reconstruction projects in Joplin and the surrounding area.

State Senator Ron Richard

201 W Capitol Ave Rm 321

Jefferson City MO 65101

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For Our Veterans

The Missouri Senate approved this year **Senate Bill 116**, which makes it easier for members of our Armed Forces to vote by absentee ballot. The current process for absentee voters living abroad, particularly those serving in the military, is lengthy. It can take weeks just for the request form to be received, and then additional weeks for the voter to get the ballot. Then it has to be sent back.

The whole process can take more than two months to complete, and that's if everything goes right. It's not uncommon for an overseas voter, especially those in the military, to have their ballot invalidated because it wasn't received in time.

Senate Bill 116 makes it easier for overseas Missouri citizens to vote by allowing eligible voters to request an absentee ballot online, among other provisions. This change alone will cut the wait time for a ballot by a third.

Our troops sacrifice much to defend our freedoms. It's unacceptable some of those soldiers are robbed of one of our most important rights because of a slow, outdated system.

In addition, we approved **House Bill 374**, which allows for the creation of treatment courts for our veterans that handle cases involving substance abuse or mental illness of current or former military personnel; **House Bill 702**, which designates the Missouri Korean War Veterans Memorial located in Washington as the official Korean War Memorial in our state; and **Senate Bill 186**, which allows funeral establishments and coroners that have unclaimed remains of Armed Services members to release them to a veteran's organization for burial at a state or national veterans' cemetery.

Helping Those Who Help

Last year, a number of benevolent tax credits were set to expire. Many lawmakers supported extending the sunset on these programs, but the gridlock on tax credit reform blocked any measure from moving forward.

Senate Bill 20, which includes a provision based on legislation I filed this year, renews and extends the sunset on a number of important benevolent tax credits, including the Champion for Children tax credit, the Food Pantry tax credit and the Pregnancy Resource Center tax credit. These programs help support organizations that provide critical aid to Missouri families. I was happy to see this bill pass so quickly out of the Legislature.

PRESERVING MISSOURI TRADITIONS

The General Assembly passed this year a measure to preserve a long-standing tradition in our state regarding agriculture. For generations, children and young adults have worked on their family's farms. For many people, it's a rite of passage. It's also a way to teach our youth about the importance of agriculture and instill in them a strong work ethic.

Unfortunately, the federal government passed regulations in recent years prohibiting children from working on farms, even those of their own family.

Senate Bill 16 allows children under the age of 16 to work on their own family farms or, with the consent of their parents, the family farms of others.

Our state and country were built on the backs of hard-working farmers and ranchers. We must protect Missouri's No. 1 industry.