

State Senator

**Ron**

**Richard**

*District 32*

**Session Report**

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# Tax Relief for ALL Missourians

This year, the Missouri Legislature overrode the governor's veto of a broad-based tax cut bill designed to encourage economic growth in the state. This is the first time in nearly 100 years Missourians have been given significant tax relief. It's truly historic and long overdue.

The legislation reduces the maximum tax rate on personal income by 0.5 percent over a period of years beginning in 2017; allows an individual income tax deduction for employers who claim business income on their personal taxes; grants a \$500 deduction for individuals who earn less than \$20,000 a year; and requires tax brackets for individual income to be adjusted annually for inflation.

Most importantly, none of these reductions go into effect unless triggers within the bill are met. Revenue collections must increase by \$150 million more than the highest amount from the last three years, and the cuts don't go into effect until 2017 to allow time for full funding of the school foundation formula, a goal of both the Legislature and the governor.

The bill will allow Missouri citizens and businesses to keep more of their hard-earned income. That money can then be reinvested in our economy through consumer spending, initiating business expansion and job creation. The legislation goes far in creating an economic environment in our state that is conducive to long-term growth and prosperity. I was proud to see such an important bill finally enacted into law.

## A MODERN CRIMINAL CODE

One of our top priorities this year was finally addressing Missouri's outdated criminal code, which hadn't been revised since 1979. A lot has changed since then, and it's imperative our laws keep up with societal and cultural shifts. Prosecutors, criminal defenders and members of the judicial branch have long called for a revised criminal code.

During the 2014 session, numerous legislators and legal experts worked together to craft legislation to overhaul a criminal code woefully behind the times. Those efforts took years of preparation, ultimately culminating with the passage of Senate Bill 491 this year. It was not easy. The original bill was more than 1,000 pages. But, through compromise, and honest and open debate, we were able to send the governor legislation that will give law enforcement agencies the tools they need to protect the public.

A strong, modern legal system is critical to protecting the safety of the public. I was proud of my colleagues for coming together to tackle what was an overwhelming and exceptionally complicated bill. It's yet another example of how the Legislature can put politics aside to do what's best for the people of our state.



## LETTER TO CONSTITUENTS

*Friends and Neighbors,*

*Every session presents its own challenges, and this year was no different. From the education of our children to the health of all Missourians, there were many issues that needed attention. Through countless hours of debate, and many late nights, we were able to pass a number of bills that will improve the lives of Missourians. You'll find details of those measures in this annual newsletter.*

*It is an honor to serve our great state in the Missouri Senate. Please always feel free to contact me with your questions and concerns regarding state government. I'm here to serve you, the citizens of the 32<sup>nd</sup> District, and the best way I can do that is to know what issues are affecting our area. My door is always open.*

*Sincerely,*

## Creating Missouri Learning Standards

Throughout the 2014 session, legislators spent a significant amount of time debating legislation dealing with Common Core. These standards were created a few years ago to make students equally competitive across the nation. However, many parents were completely left in the dark regarding the implementation of these new standards. Many people still don't know, which reflects just how poorly this process was carried out. Parents should always be involved in changes to their child's education. That generally wasn't the case with Common Core.

This year, we passed House Bill 1490, which, among other measures, creates the Education Standards Working Groups. These groups will be made up of teachers and educational professionals from around the state. Together, these members will collaborate to create educational benchmarks for Missouri students through an open and transparent process. Most importantly, it allows us to create standards that work best for our students, maintaining local control that is critical to a strong educational system. These groups started meeting in October and will work throughout the next year.

# Volunteering on Public Projects

This year, I sponsored Senate Bill 718, which allows volunteers to work on public works projects without being held to prevailing wage requirements. This bill was brought to me by the City of Carl Junction. The Garden Club wanted to build a gazebo for the town.

Unfortunately, the Department of Labor saw this as a public project and it wasn't allowed. I think it's ridiculous people can't volunteer their time to worthy causes. Senate Bill 718 also contains an amendment that protects contractors from being forced to "volunteer" their time without fair pay.



# 48 HOURS CAN SAVE A LIFE

This year, the Senate approved House Bill 1307, which increases Missouri's current 24-hour waiting period for abortions to 72 hours. The bill in no way restricts a woman's right to receive an abortion. It only provides more time for women to consider what is a permanent decision.

Under our current 24-hour waiting period, a woman must receive information about the development of her unborn child and about the methods and risks of abortion. A mother also receives information about adoption and has the opportunity to view an ultrasound and hear the heartbeat of her child. We want women to have informed consent and the time for deliberate and careful consideration. House Bill 1307 simply provides them an additional 48 hours to weigh the decision.

There were more than 9,000 abortions performed in this state in 2012 alone. This is a tragedy. It is also a sign we need to do more to ensure women know they have other options, and they're fully aware of the consequences and possible risks of an abortion. It is my hope this measure gives women more time to consider a decision that affects not only themselves, but also the life of the unborn child.

# Preserving MoRx

The Missouri Rx Prescription Drug Program, or MoRx for short, was created a number of years ago to provide prescription drug benefits to more than 200,000 low income and disabled seniors in Missouri. It's intended to supplement Medicare Part D plans, so that seniors are able to fully afford the medications if the Medicare payment doesn't cover all of it.



Unfortunately, the MoRx program was scheduled to expire in August of this year. If allowed to lapse, hundreds of thousands of seniors who depend on this program would have been forced to either find extra money in already tight budgets, or simply do without the medicine they need.

This year, we passed Senate Bill 754, which extends the MoRx Prescription Drug Program another three years, until 2017.

# FISCAL YEAR 2015 BUDGET BREAKDOWN

Highlights from the Fiscal Year 2015 \$26.4 billion budget:

- Record levels of funding for K-12 education, including a \$102.2 million increase (**governor withheld \$102.2 million in GR**);
- \$43.4 million increase to higher education through performance-based funding (**governor withheld \$43.4 million in GR**);
- \$8.5 million increase in First Steps;
- \$6.7 million for the A+ Schools program (**governor restricted \$2 million in GR**);
- Increased funding for Individuals in Crisis by \$38 million;
- Increased funding for rebasing for providers in the development disability community by \$30 million (**governor vetoed \$10.3 million for provider rates**);
- Increased funding for Missouri's Autism Projects and strengthening the MO HealthNet mental health system (**governor vetoed GR increase and restricted portion of available funds**); and
- \$11.1 million increase to the Children's Division's child welfare program.



## State Senator Ron Richard

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## WELCOMING VISITORS TO THE CAPITOL

Every year, I'm proud to welcome hundreds of visitors from the 32<sup>nd</sup> District to the Capitol. I've long believed a strong democracy depends upon an ongoing conversation between citizens and their representatives. I always welcome seeing people from back home, and am eager to hear your thoughts and ideas on state government. If you plan on visiting the Capitol during session, from mid-January to late May, please contact my office and make arrangements to meet with me.

## CONTACT SEN. RICHARD

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## Improving Missouri's Health

The health of our citizens was another major topic this year. One of the first measures passed out of the Legislatures was Senate Bill 668, which requires insurance companies to establish equal out-of-pocket costs for covered oral and intravenously administered chemotherapy medications.

We also passed House Bill 2238, which allows individuals with intractable epilepsy—a disorder in which a patient's seizures do not respond to current treatments—to take an oil extracted from hemp plants. CBD oil, as it's known, has shown to be incredibly effective in treating the symptoms of this form of epilepsy. This bill will change the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of families in Missouri who currently deal with this debilitating and heartbreaking disorder.

Senate Bill 639 requires doctors to advise women with dense breast tissue about the possible benefits of seeking out additional tests. This simple mandate could help save countless women's lives. My wife Patty tirelessly advocated for the measure. I was grateful for her support and to see this incredibly important bill enacted into law.