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## Focus On Putting Missourians To Work

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Focus On Putting Missourians To Work

*By Rob Mayer*

During the Senate General Laws Committee last week, panel members heard testimony on a bill designed to give Missouri workers the freedom to choose whether or not to join a union as a condition of getting or keeping a job. More specifically, Senate Bill 1, also known as “Right-to-Work” legislation, would bar employers from requiring their employees to become or refrain from becoming a member of a labor organization or pay dues or other charges required of labor organization members as a condition of employment. According to the bill, employers who would do so would be charged with a Class C misdemeanor. In addition, prosecuting attorneys and the Missouri Attorney General would be charged with investigating these complaints.

Currently, Missouri is missing out on new jobs because companies are drawn to other states with better worker-protection laws. Testimony presented before lawmakers in the General Laws Committee revealed that 50 percent of manufacturers refuse to consider our state as a place to locate new jobs because we don’t have adequate laws on the books to protect against workers who are forced into unions.

Recent census data shows that businesses with jobs and the workers who take them are fleeing to states with worker-protection laws. The outcome of the 2010 decennial census resulted in our state losing a congressional seat. There is a direct correlation between states that lost a congressional seat and those that are “Right-to-Work” states: those states

without worker-protection laws lost a total of nine congressional seats, while those with “Right-to-Work” laws gained 11 congressional seats. This session we have the opportunity to correct this wrong, and not only bring beneficial jobs to Missouri, but keep hard-working citizens in our state.

In addition, data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that unemployment is lower in the 22 states that have adopted “Right-to-Work” laws. In the last 10 years, those same states have added 1.5 million private-sector jobs, while other states without worker-protection laws have lost 1.8 million jobs. With more than 100,000 jobs lost in our state since June 2008, we cannot afford to stand by and not take action.

If the previous statistics weren’t alarming enough, per household income is also higher in “Right-to-Work” states. A study published in 2000 by Dr. James T. Bennett from George Mason University cited that the mean two-income household in a “Right-to-Work” state has nearly \$2,000 more in after-tax purchasing power than those same households in forced-union states. Another study conducted in 2005 by Dr. Barry Poulson from the University of Colorado found that real disposable income in metropolitan areas in “Right-to-Work” states is \$4,300 higher in after-tax purchasing power than those same metropolitan households in non-“Right-to-Work” states.

In no way would this bill stop workers from joining a union or prevent employers from entering into collective bargaining agreements and hire union labor. This legislation simply removes a barrier that’s stopping our state from competing with six of our eight neighboring states that have “Right-to-Work” laws and the many more in the country that are beating Missouri when it comes to gaining good jobs, especially in manufacturing.

Senate Bill 1 must receive a passing vote by the General Laws Committee before it can reach the Senate floor for debate. Similarly, Senate Bill 197, also considered by the committee, still needs the committee’s approval. This bill would send the “Right-to-Work” measure to the vote of the people.

I will continue to push for legislation designed to help get Missourians back to work, including measures that would ensure an employee’s liberty when it comes to joining or leaving a union. As I said to my colleagues on the first day of session, “it’s time to end the animosity between business and labor, and instead, work together to do what’s best for the employer and the employee.”

Please feel free to contact me throughout the year with any comments, questions, or issues using the information listed below and on my website at [www.senate.mo.gov/mayer](http://www.senate.mo.gov/mayer).

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