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Time to Talk About “Right to Work”

MARCH 15TH 2011 BY STAFF WRITER

Time to Talk About “Right to Work”

By ROB MAYER

More than 280,000 Missourians are out of work. The alarm is sounding. Missouri can no longer continue to do business as usual and expect things to change. That is why, in the Missouri Senate, we are moving forward with several plans this session that are part of an equation to help employers put Missourians back to work in good-paying jobs with benefits. Making Missouri a “Right to Work” state is part of that equation. And we begin the debate on “Right to Work” on the Senate floor today.

Currently, Missouri is missing out on new jobs because companies are drawn to other states with better worker protection laws. Fifty percent of manufacturers refuse to consider Missouri as a place to locate new jobs because we have no protections against forced unionization of our workers – that’s according to testimony given to the Senate General Laws Committee by Mark Sweeney, a site location consultant who works to find new plant sites for both domestic and foreign manufacturing companies. He says Missouri is off the radar for 50 percent of his clients, while the remaining place a heavy emphasis on a state’s “Right to Work” status when choosing where to locate.

“Right to Work” will, in no way, stop workers from joining a union or prevent employers from entering into collective bargaining agreements. Rather it simply states that joining a union or paying dues cannot be a condition of getting or keeping a job.

Not having “Right to Work” has cost us in many ways.

First, Missouri is losing a congressional seat due to the most recent census data. That data shows businesses with jobs and the workers who take them are fleeing to states with worker protection laws. Non-“Right to Work” states lost a total of nine congressional seats and, due to population shifts, “Right to Work” states gained 11.

Second, we have underperformed compared with the six of our eight neighboring states that are “Right to Work” states. All those states have lower unemployment rates than Missouri. Tennessee, the only one with a comparable rate to ours, gained jobs in 2010 while Missouri lost jobs.

Plus, data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows unemployment is lower in the 22 states that have adopted “Right to Work” laws. In the last decade, those states have added 1.5 million private sector jobs, while non-“Right to Work” states have lost 1.8 million jobs. With more than 160,000 jobs lost in our state since June 2008, we cannot afford to stand by and not take action.

The bottom line is that our unwillingness to change is costing Missouri jobs. I look forward to beginning the debate on this important legislation that will remove 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.

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.

Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, represents the 25th State Senatorial District in the Missouri State Senate and serves the state as the President Pro Tem of the State Senate.

LAST UPDATED ON MARCH 15TH 2011 BY STAFF WRITER

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