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Kent Hampton's Capitol Report May 6, 2013

MAY 06TH 2013 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Submitted by

Dee Loflin, SMT Manager/Writer

Jefferson City, Missouri - In the Missouri House we strive to be good stewards of the public interest and the people's money. When times got tough several years ago, we tightened our belts and made difficult and often painful cuts. Today, an opportunity has arisen to invest in Missouri's future through rebuilding the infrastructure of our state facilities.

The House recently perfected House Joint Resolution (HJR) 14, which will create the Fifth State Building Fund. Last October, we made our final payment on the 30-year, \$600 million Third State Building Bond. That bond was approved by the people of Missouri in 1982, when interest rates were between eight and nine percent.

Today, the need for a public works program is great. So is the opportunity for implementing this program at the lowest possible rates. Interest rates are historically low. At 3.3%, they are one-third of what they were in 1982. In fact, these are the best rates this country has seen since the mid-1800s.

Upon voter approval, HJR 14 would allow Missouri to raise up to \$1.2 billion to be used for various construction, renovation, and rebuilding projects at state

facilities. Up to \$600 million would be invested in our higher education facilities. It would allow community colleges and universities to acquire new land on which to build facilities, such as medical training clinics and energy research centers, areas where we anticipate growth in the coming years.

At least \$40 million will go toward preserving and maintaining our 85 state parks. New funds will help the parks system build new public facilities, upgraded campgrounds, and boardwalks, which will in turn bring about new and increased tourism. Up to \$100 million will be reserved for improvements to the Missouri State Capitol. This building is not only the workplace of the Missouri Legislature—it is a state treasure, a museum of magnificent art and architecture, and an inspiration to the thousands of schoolchildren who come here each year.

The building bond will also provide up to \$20 million for renovating the public elementary and secondary schools our children attend every day. Two-hundred million dollars will be set aside for a new mental health facility in Callaway County. The current Fulton State Hospital facility is dilapidated, an unsafe place to work, and an impossible place to heal. HJR 14 would finally provide the funds for not just improvements, but a whole new building at which to treat the criminally mentally ill individuals in our state.

The remaining portion of the \$1.2 billion bond will go toward various building and infrastructure projects, from other state buildings to rural water districts. To give an idea of the many projects that can be aided by a new building fund, we look at the 1982 bond. It provided money for soil and water conservation projects, group homes in Jackson County, storm water control grants, and the construction of the Western Missouri Correction Center, along with the myriad improvements and expansion to higher education facilities.

The Great Seal of the State of Missouri depicts a crescent moon. When the seal was designed in 1822, the crescent moon symbolized the hope that our state – small at the time, but with a wealth of natural resources – would continue to grow. Today we have an opportunity to fulfill our forebears' hopes. The Fifth State Building Fund will create jobs, invest in education and health, and move to preserve and grow Missouri.

With the end of Session approaching, the House is putting the finishing touches on several important pieces of legislation. One of these Senate bills, SB 28, modifies eligibility requirements for unemployment benefits.

Current law states that in order to qualify for benefits, an individual must lose their job through no fault of their own, or they must quit for a good cause related to their work or their employer. If a person is fired because of misconduct, they do not receive unemployment. The trouble is that the current definition doesn't specify what offenses constitute misconduct. This results in abuse of the system. Senate Bill 28 simply puts into statute what is already common sense: there are certain behaviors that reasonably result in termination, and the state should not pick up the tab for these individuals.

Under the revised law, misconduct occurs when an employee knowingly violates the standards of behavior expected by the employer. The clarified definition of misconduct also includes chronic absenteeism or tardiness. This is an essential provision of the bill, because chronic absenteeism hurts a company's productivity, and makes the worker a liability, not an asset, to the workplace environment. We should not be rewarding such behavior with unemployment benefits.

If an individual is working for a state-licensed entity, misconduct also includes knowingly violating state laws or regulations. These kinds of violations not only harm the employer's interests, but could result in the workplace having its license or certification revoked. Again, these actions should not be rewarded.

Reform of our unemployment benefits system is a necessity in the present economy. Missouri's unemployment insurance system is currently more than \$500 million in debt. By reasonably tightening the eligibility requirements for unemployment insurance, Senate Bill 28 will allow this program to become financially sound more quickly.

Unemployment insurance, like other state benefits, was created as a safety net. This particular safety net is for those employees who are terminated because of company-wide cuts, for unjust cause, and for other reasons that aren't the fault of the employee. By preventing just anyone from falling into the net, we are strengthening the system for those who need it.

Throughout this session, the House of Representatives has stood firm against reckless proposals to drastically expand Medicaid - a system already fraught with waste, fraud, and abuse. While I am committed to providing the truly needy with access to medical care, blindly throwing money into a broken system will not solve the underlying problems that plague our healthcare system. Simply enlarging Medicaid will not lower climbing prices, improve the quality of care, or

stop people from taking advantage of a program meant only for the most vulnerable in our society. Transforming Medicaid is the only way to make the system more efficient and effective, so this is the task we in the House have dedicated ourselves to.

This week, the House passed HB 986, which creates the Joint Committee on Medicaid Transformation to investigate needed reforms. This bipartisan group of Representatives and Senators will meet with organizations and citizens from around the state to explore ways to limit skyrocketing medical costs, encourage preventative care, comply with federal mandates, and help able-bodied adults transition to private coverage. I have asked to be a part of this committee since our district is so strongly affected.

This past week our district lost one of their public servants with the passing of Mayor Diane Sayre of Caruthersville. For the many years she served though tornadoes and floods, her resolve was always about the betterment of the community.

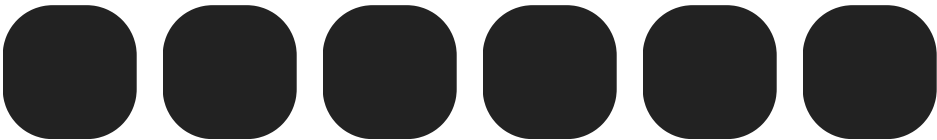
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As always, it is an honor to serve you in the Missouri House. If you would like to discuss any issue, please call 573-751-3629. You can also email me at Kent.Hampton@house.mo.gov. I look forward to hearing from you.

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