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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 8, 2007

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Hello from the capitol!

It seems like we are in the deep freeze again this week. The sheep have started to lamb and with the cold weather several lambs have spent some warm-up time in my basement furnace room.

In government business this week the Director of the Missouri Department of Transportation, Pete Rahn, gave his State of Transportation Address to the joint session of the House and Senate. Mr. Rahn talked about some of the things that MoDot has done and are planning to do in the upcoming years. In the next five years they are planning on spending 5.7 billion dollars on 5,600 miles of our busiest roads to make them smoother and safer. This will include mandatory four foot shoulders, brighter striping, and rumble strips. Over 800 bridges will be improved, repaired, or rebuilt by 2012.

Since the passage of Amendment 3, MoDot has been under a huge construction project which has increased the percentage of roads that are in good condition from 47% to 74%. With the improvement has come a much safer roadway system.

In 2006, 173 fewer people lost their lives. That was a 14% drop – the third largest in the nation.

Another positive note has been a national survey taken by the Trucker's magazine. The survey ranked Interstates 70 and 44 as the second and third most improved highways in the nation.

On a more somber note, the safety of our MoDot employees is a great concern. In 2006, four employees lost their lives working to improve the transportation network in the state. We must all be aware of our highway workers as we are driving.

On Wednesday afternoon we passed House Bill 453 which allows a maximum of \$2,500 of tax credits to individuals or businesses that contribute food or money to food pantries.

In other news Governor Blunt announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns has approved his request to declare 29 Missouri counties natural disaster areas for agricultural losses due to the recent ice storms.

“The ice storms left a trail of destruction and significant losses across the state for many Missourians including our farm families,” said Blunt. “I am pleased Secretary Johanns responded quickly to my request to ensure Missouri farmers have access to all available resources to help them recover. This declaration will provide welcome support to our agricultural community.”

The declaration includes Barry, Barton, Camden, Christian, Cole, Crawford, Dade, Dallas, Franklin, Gasconade, Greene, Hickory, Jasper, Laclede, Lawrence, Maries, McDonald, Miller, Moniteau, Newton, Osage, Phelps, Polk, Pulaski, St. Charles, Stone, Warren, Webster and Wright Counties. Farm Service Agency (FSA) emergency physical loss loans will be available to farm families in affected communities.

This announcement affects Missouri farm families only. Joint Assessment Teams are completing reviews in the 34 counties under a presidential emergency declaration to determine which might qualify for individual assistance. Reviews are expected to be completed this week. Based on those reviews the governor will request additional assistance for those areas the teams determine might qualify.

As always, it is an honor and pleasure to serve as your state representative.