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Committees

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Development
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 8, 2007

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Hello from the capitol. With the nice weather it is really difficult to be inside everyday.

House chamber activity has sure escalated this past week with the addition of afternoon sessions. We took up the much debated and heavily lobbied House Bill 808 which is better known as the Betty L. Thompson Scholarship Fund. This bill would have permitted a 65% tax credit to corporations and businesses that donated money to offer scholarships to children with less than a 2.5 grade average and with a household income of less than 135% of the poverty level. It would have applied only to students who lived in the St. Louis and Kansas City school districts. These children could then apply to attend neighboring public schools or private schools.

On the surface this sounded like a good idea but when you get to the real meat of the issue it isn't. It does nothing to promote parental involvement or reward the families that make the children do their homework and attend school regularly. If your children have a grade average above 2.5 they are stuck in the existing environment. This bill has been around for three years and I have opposed it since the start. The bill failed with a vote of 62 to 96.

The past week the House also heard legislation that will provide an incentive for younger Missourians, first time workers, our working poor and the self employed to purchase health care insurance coverage. HB 364 will allow all Missourians to deduct the cost of qualified health care premiums from their Missouri State Income Taxes in pre-tax dollars. While people will still have to pay for the insurance premiums each month it will make it easier for workers and young Missourians if they know they will get to deduct 100 percent of those premiums on their taxes and save more by counting it against pre-tax dollars. This most likely will allow them to recoup some or all of those payments at the end of the tax year.

The House passed HB 620 to create an alternative certification process so that successful professionals seeking a career change could share their knowledge with Missouri students. Those wanting to enter the teaching profession could begin the process by obtaining certification from the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE). Teachers certified through the ABCTE would then be allowed to acquire a provisional

teacher's certificate pending completion of professional development, mentoring, contact-hour requirements, and a performance-based evaluation within a two-year period.

Our goal isn't to displace the standard model of teacher certification but rather to augment it so we can tap into a pool of potential teachers who will help gap the shortage we are currently experiencing. The men and women who would qualify under this plan are the same men and women who could walk into any university in our state and be able to share their wisdom. It only makes sense to allow them to share that knowledge with our K-12 students as well.

By creating a more skilled and diverse workforce we become a more attractive destination for the high quality businesses and jobs of the 21st century. This initiative will provide invaluable assistance in doing that and in helping to position Missouri as a leader in the global economy.

Also passed by the House this week was HB 488 that authorizes an income tax credit for up to 50% of the cost to purchase and install idle reduction technology on a class 8 truck. A "class 8 truck" is defined as a heavy duty vehicle with a gross vehicle weight in excess of 33,000 pounds. The maximum amount of the tax credit is \$3,500 per truck. No more than \$15 million in tax credits can be issued during any one fiscal year and no more than \$30 million can be issued during the life of the program. If the amount of credits claimed in any one fiscal year exceeds \$15 million, the Department of Revenue must apportion the tax credits equally among all eligible taxpayers. The tax credit can only be claimed by Missouri residents and may be taken against individual and corporate income tax, corporate franchise tax, and express company tax liability. The tax credit is not transferable or refundable, but can be carried forward and claimed for up to three taxable years. The provisions of the bill will expire two years from the effective date.

Currently, any neglected or abused animal may be impounded. HB 46, passed this week, prohibits a farm animal weighing more than 50 pounds from being impounded until the district state veterinarian of the Department of Agriculture or his or her designee has examined the animal and determined the animal to be in imminent danger of loss of life or has determined that the condition or conditions deemed to be in violation cannot reasonable be rectified before the disposition hearing. If before the disposition hearing reasonable attempts to correct the condition have not been made and approved by the veterinarian or his or her designee during a required follow-up visit, the animal may be impounded or destroyed.

If an abused or neglected farm animal in the possession of a caregiver is impounded the authority having custody of the animal is required to make a diligent effort to notify the owner in writing that the animal has been impounded.

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