

House Speaker Tim Jones
Opening Day Address
Jan. 8, 2014

Friends and colleagues, family members and esteemed visitors who have made the trip to be here with us today, welcome to the Missouri State Capitol and the Opening Day of the 2014 legislative session.

Today, as we begin our vitally important work, we stand at a moment in our nation's and state's history that can only be described as challenging.

The federal government continues to spend money at an unsustainable rate, and Washington DC seems intent only on advancing policies that jeopardize the very liberties and the free market principles upon which this country was founded.

While these are challenging times, we must recall and remember that our nation has encountered historic divisions and conflicts, but has always risen to the occasion and always emerged stronger and more resolute from every battle and hardship.

President Ronald Reagan once said: "We speak with pride and admiration of that little band of Americans who overcame insuperable odds to set this nation on course 200 years ago. But our glory didn't end with them. Americans ever since have emulated their deeds."

As I have traveled the state of Missouri over these past years, I have been impressed time and again by the undaunted spirit of the people of this great state. Even in the face of these challenging times, they continue to persevere and overcome.

Today, Missourians are looking for new leadership, new ideas and a new direction. The citizens of our nation and state have firmly declared that failed big government "solutions", full of bureaucracy, spending and waste, are not the answer. The promise of a return to freedom, of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is what people want. Government must stop taking, must stop erecting barriers, must cease its endless confiscation and redistribution of the hard earned fruits of our citizens' labors. With the end of 2013, we saw people everywhere declare: more government is not the answer, it is the problem.

Missourians have carried on in spite of a lack of executive level leadership on both the national and state level. For over five years now, while poverty has been on the rise, while more Americans than ever before have been engulfed by the welfare state, while failed tax and spend policies have literally bankrupted several major urban cities in our country and threatened to bankrupt entire states, we have seen a president continue to blindly engage in efforts to grow the size of a failed government even larger - to make it more intrusive and more present in our day-to-day lives.

As the late, great Margaret Thatcher once observed, "The larger the slice taken by government, the smaller the cake available for everyone." Her words have become reality here in America as we have witnessed disastrous policies like Obamacare, failed federal bailout plans, and a

skyrocketing national debt that now exceeds 17 trillion dollars. As our federal government has grown hungry for a larger and larger slice, it has caused many of us to wonder what type of country we are leaving for our children and grandchildren.

In Missouri, our governor has stood in the way of significant legislation that would provide growth and opportunity for all Missourians. Our governor has said no to lower taxes and policies that would create a vibrant business environment. That is in large part why our state has lost 30,000 jobs during his tenure and ranks near the bottom of the entire country for job growth.

We stand at a crossroads. We stand at the epicenter of a great nation that has before it a generational choice. Here in the Heartland, we can look to the north and east, to states that have employed failed tax and spend policies of the past as their once promising urban areas flounder towards bankruptcy. Or, we can look to the south and to the west where bold leaders are enacting even bolder reforms of growth and opportunity that are leading to prosperity for all. Some of our neighbors here in the Midwest have moved boldly, have enacted significant policy changes of tax reductions and worker freedom and they are now seeing, for the first time in generations, positive growth.

There is no reason Missouri should be left behind. There is no reason that our neighbors should be experiencing healthy growth and recovery while our GDP ranks nearly last in the country. That is why this year, if our governor chooses to continue not to lead, the Missouri House is determined to forge ahead with a bold agenda that will bring the opportunity for prosperity to all Missourians.

Our agenda this year will focus on four major policy areas: Growth and opportunity for all Missourians, Guaranteeing access to a great education, Generating affordable and abundant energy and Guarding and protecting Missouri values.

Providing growth and opportunity for all Missourians means we will continue to consider any policy that gives our citizens, our workers, our employers, the opportunity for new jobs. This means creating a business-friendly and job-creating environment with a lower tax burden, reduced regulatory burdens and ending costly, frivolous litigation.

First and foremost, Missourians want us to pass the first significant tax reform our state has seen in nearly 100 years. Missourians need and want lower taxes. Missourians also want us to engage in significant reforms of our tax credit system and end our governor's practice of picking winners and losers via some centralized planning authority. Missourians want tax breaks for all, not just the chosen few.

Missourians also want us to take on the true health care crisis in our state - much needed malpractice reform. Missouri stands at a huge disadvantage with nearly all of our neighboring states by having a punitive litigation culture that seeks to unfairly punish our hard working doctors and nurses, and encourages our health care industry to spend less on research, development and access to care and more and more on legal defense funds. It is time that we had a health care system that welcomed doctors and patients into our state instead of driving them out.

In the 21st century, one of the best policies we can promote is giving people the right to pursue their dreams and their own economic freedom, to be masters of their own destiny. In this day and age, every worker should have this right. As 24 states have now empowered their workers over entrenched union bosses and given their workers the ultimate freedom to make their own choices, we owe it to all Missouri workers to give them the same freedom. For true growth and opportunity Missouri should become the 25th state for worker freedom and choice.

States that have embraced worker freedom have experienced explosive growth as a result. Studies prove that states with worker freedom create more private sector jobs, enjoy lower poverty rates, experience more technology development, realize more personal income growth, and increase the number of people covered by employment-based private health insurance.

Across our country, jobs are created where the environment facilitates and encourages job growth. Companies large and small are relocating to states with lower tax burdens, less regulations and where worker freedom and choice reigns. The states that are creating the most jobs are low tax, low regulation, right-to-work states with equitable and fair legal systems.

As I have traveled our great State, I have heard the yearning for these policies echo in the words of many, many Missourians. Family farmers in northeast Missouri, entrepreneurs in St. Louis and Kansas City, manufacturers in southeast and southwest Missouri, builders in mid-Missouri, health care providers in northwest and south central Missouri...hard working Missourians all across our great state have spoken in unison: reduce the barriers that government throws before us, provide us relief from excessive taxation, reign in wasteful spending and job-destroying bureaucracy, level the playing field so all may compete fairly. Missourians know what will create growth and prosperity. We owe it to them to act.

A strong, effective education system is another key to ensuring prosperity for future generations of Missourians. We must continue to work toward a public education system that provides a truly excellent education to every young person regardless of their zip code or place of birth. We must provide every district in our state the tools to ensure that effective teaching, not bureaucracy, is the number one priority. And as we look at our failing school districts in St. Louis and Kansas City, we must see this crisis, which has lasted over forty years, as an opportunity to stop doing business as usual in our system of education and start embracing innovation that will lead to better educational outcomes. We must appropriately fund our public education institutions at all levels and then hold them accountable for the billions of taxpayer dollars that they receive each and every year. All individuals in our education system should be held accountable to our most important treasure: our children, who are our future.

To those who call the current open enrollment law a “crisis”, many of us say, we are glad you finally noticed that there is a crisis in public education, one that has been going on for decades. Guaranteeing a great education for all children, no matter where they reside in the state, is, and always has been, one of my highest priorities. Removing the opportunity and choice for a great education that some children have now for the first time in generations is the height of cynicism and should not even be considered. Preserving the opportunity for every child to truly have the choice for a great education is what we should demand.

We must also work to ensure Missouri embraces responsible energy policies that will encourage affordable energy prices and technological development. We must ensure our regulatory framework is not impeding Missourians from using existing energy sources or pursuing new developments using sources like coal and natural gas. Only by using an “all of the above” energy framework can we hope to achieve energy independence. We must acknowledge that Missouri is a state that has more than 80 percent of its energy generated by coal, which means we must continue to do all we can to safeguard our natural resources. Our manufacturers, our farmers, our business owners and every family continue to rely on Missouri’s abundant, affordable energy. We owe it to our future growth and prosperity to make sure that we can meet the ever-escalating energy demands of tomorrow.

Missouri is a state built on family values and steeped in common sense, and the legislature will continue to advance policies that support and bolster these ideals. The General Assembly as a whole has worked together to push back against the over-encroachment of the federal government and the continued attempts by our executive branch to violate the privacy rights of Missouri citizens in many aspects of our daily lives. Whether it is protecting our generational right to farm, pushing back against unlawful and egregious actions by our state departments and agencies and holding them accountable, or protecting our devotion to life and the rights guaranteed to us by all the amendments that we cherish in our country’s and state’s constitution, we owe it to all Missourians to protect the values, rights and freedoms that they hold dear.

These initiatives we have discussed today have been placed into effect with tremendous results in many other states in our nation. While states around us have cut taxes and produced positive economic growth as a result, our governor has denied Missourians a reduction in tax burdens and has instead advocated for a massive expansion in government spending and failed entitlement programs. As we have discussed removing barriers to job growth, education reform and placing reasonable medical malpractice limits in place, our governor has largely remained on the sidelines or vetoed bipartisan legislation in these key policy areas.

Missourians deserve better. The people deserve a government that wants to level the playing field and stay out of the way so workers and businesses can do what they do best, create growth and opportunity for all. As our great founding father Thomas Jefferson said, a wise and frugal government is one that leaves citizens “otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor and bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government.”

It is time for us to live up to the words of Jefferson and for the leaders in this Chamber to empower us to be the great state we can and should be. It is time to stop hemorrhaging jobs across our borders and failing to attract new businesses opportunities because our economic policies are flawed and unwelcoming. And it is time to get serious about empowering our young people to become the entrepreneurs, the family farmers, the small business owners, the innovators and leaders of tomorrow by providing them with an educational experience that is second to none.

We must empower Missourians to succeed and to grow, and we must do it now. May God continue to inspire us and to bless us all, across this great nation and here, in the great state of Missouri.