



# Lair's Legislative Log...



REPRESENTATIVE MIKE LAIR—DISTRICT 7

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We are in the week between Christmas and New Year's Day and are making ready to embark on 2012. The challenges and rewards of the next year are, for the most part, hidden from us. One of my favorite quotes states: *"If you wish to see God laugh, tell him your plans."* It seems that sometimes we have little control over many aspects of our lives, but there is one thing of which we have total control. Our attitude is our choice. The old adage that the glass is half-full or half-empty may be overused, but it is true. Make the most of your new year.

My new year has begun with a myriad of budgetary ideas as to how to do more with less. Many of the ideas have merit and no doubt will become a part of the solution of our woes, but some are a little bit too creative. Our Governor has advanced a plan to borrow over \$100 million from five Missouri universities. The schools and the amounts mentioned are University of Missouri – \$63M, Missouri State University – \$13M, University of Central Missouri, Southeast Missouri State University, and Truman State University at about \$10M each. The Governor's plan continued with the repayment of the loans by diverting the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority (MOHELA) money for the next seven years. Therefore, bottom line, he is robbing Peter to pay Paul, and Peter represents the future recipients of the state college loan programs. This money would be used to help balance the budget and offset the ex-

pected shortfall for Fiscal Year 2013.

I am afraid this creative bookkeeping does little to address the real budget issues that we are facing. There will be a shortfall of between \$400-750 million in the budget that we have begun to craft for 2013. If anyone tells you that they know the exact amount, they are misleading you, because those numbers do not exist as of yet. Trade and professional organizations have given their members estimates that run the scale from top to bottom, but are mere guesses. We have tried with little success to prepare for the eventual loss of federal stimulus dollars. We were chided last year when we returned federal transportation money that would have doomed Missouri to further state expenditures for years to come and put us further behind in future budgets. We must address entitlements, including tax credits, if we are to get hold of our spending.

An additional problem is the fact that it is an election year for the Governor, a part of the Senate, and all of the House members. Many elected officials look at the politics of a piece of legislation before they cast their vote. I have watched House members who will be running against each other for a Senate seat in the next election change their votes multiple times to try to gain a political advantage. I am afraid this modus operandi will only increase this year because of the redistricting fiasco that places so many House members against each other in

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the November 2012 elections.

Several positive ideas for the Department of Corrections have come forward and I eagerly await watching them come through the committee process. These deal with offender restitution, sentencing, and parole. The Missouri Supreme Court has also been a leader in this arena.

Professor David Valentine of the University of Missouri – Columbia's Truman School of Public Affairs recently issued a report on the negative effects term limits have had on state government. The report said, "...today's legislators are less informed about the intricate details of state government... term limits have negatively affected the ability of lawmakers to tackle tough policy decisions, increased their propensity to view their current office as a steppingstone, and weakened the power of the General Assembly." Valentine's research showed a significant drop in tenure for both the House and Senate as a result of the 1992 voter approved limit that established the eight-year maximum service. He compares today's members of the General Assembly to those who served in the 1920's in length of service and effectiveness. Professor Valentine concludes, "Today our society is more complex, our issues more complex, and our government more complex. You just can't come in off the street and become an effective legislator – and you could do that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century." Much of his research rings true with what I have observed over the past three years.

I was invited by Robert Newman, su-

perintendent of the Polo school district to attend the December board meeting. The board is always welcoming and has great questions about educational reform, successful lobbying, and, of course, school funding.

I hope you enjoy your New Year's celebration. Please be safe.

Thank you for the privilege of representing the citizens of the 7<sup>th</sup> District. As always, Gregg and I are at your service at (573) 751-2917, or [mike.lair@house.mo.gov](mailto:mike.lair@house.mo.gov) or State Capitol, 201 West Capitol Avenue, Room 400, Jefferson City, MO 65101. My website is [www.RepMikeLair.com](http://www.RepMikeLair.com)

*Mike Lair*

