

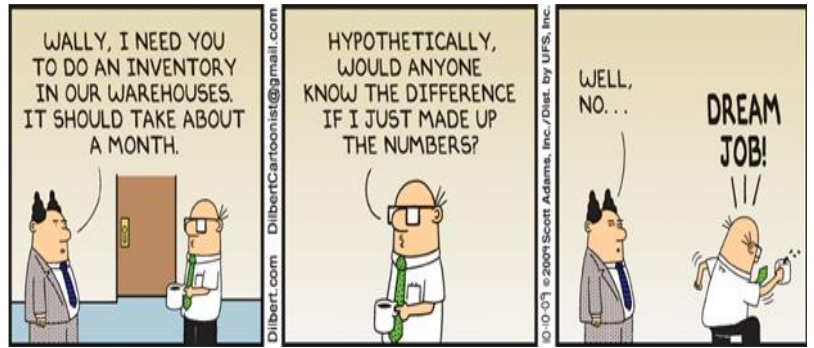
THE WATCHDAWG REPORT

Rep. Thomas Answers our Questions on Pending Legislation

A review of legislation proposed during recent Missouri Legislative sessions left me with questions about how most people define “Conservative”. I sent a note to Representative Lisa Thomas and asked her to respond to questions about bills she’s co-sponsoring. I thank Dr. Lisa for her honesty, and willingness to share. Our exchange shows “Conservatism” is not viewed by all as the same thing.

Question - HB 181 - Changes the law regarding local taxes by authorizing all political subdivisions in the state to levy a transient guest tax instead of only those political subdivisions previously authorized. (Note: I was confused with the language on this one, so asked for clarification. After seeing her answer, I agree this is a good bill. I’m always in favor of less state government involvement.)

Rep. Thomas: “As for the transient guest tax (TGT) bill, it will NOT enact these taxes, so we are not voting FOR new taxes in violation of our conservative beliefs, but merely allowing Missouri communities to place TGT proposals on their local ballot for approval or defeat. This takes the legislature out of the loop and makes it purely a local issue. In addition, it makes state govt more efficient because currently a bill must be proposed to amend the existing statute to cover whichever community wants to potentially float the new tax. This creates unnecessary legislative work to ultimately extend the existing law to permit a specific city/town/area to put the TGT issue on their ballot. It seems to me to be a waste of state legislative time and resources, having been on the committee (tourism) which heard these bills during our last session.”
See Page 2.



ERIC Update – Good News

We’ve learned that groups of patriots across Missouri expressed their concerns about the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) as we presented in last month’s Watchdawg Report. Many leaders from Republican Central Committee’s across Missouri contacted Jay Ashcroft...as I hope some of you did also. The announcement on SOS Ashcroft’s website March 6 says “Ashcroft Leads Missouri, Florida and West Virginia Out of ERIC”. Good news! Actually, others led the way on leaving ERIC, before Ashcroft was convinced to remove Missouri, but we’re glad he did.

Just so you know the damage already done, here’s this:
On February 15, 2023, Alabama Secretary of State Wes Allen made an unannounced visit to the published address of the headquarters of the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) at 1201 Connecticut Ave NW Ste 600 in Washington, DC. Upon arriving at the address, Allen found that the location was actually the home of a virtual shared workspace and that no ERIC headquarters existed at the location.
“I was in DC for a meeting of the National Association of Secretaries of States and, since I was in town, I went to see the ERIC Headquarters,” Allen explained. “What I found was that there was no ERIC headquarters at that address. There were no employees. There were no servers. There was no ERIC presence of any kind. Instead, I found a virtual office that is rentable by the day. What it was missing was people, servers and any sign of the ERIC team.”
Despite publishing the Connecticut Avenue address as its official address on its website, the location is actually operated by Expansive, a company that offers virtual workspaces across the country and rents space by the day.
See Page 3.

Question - HB169 - Establishes the Missouri Entertainment Industry Investment Act and the Missouri Entertainment Industry Postproduction Investment Act. My specific question on this one is how you see this compared to the Conservative position that government should not be involved in business. I'm becoming more and more aware that Missouri Republicans that present as Conservative are also in favor of government involvement in business represented by bills like this and last year's agri-business tax credits. I'm hoping you can help me understand how the two become reconciled in your mind.

Rep. Thomas – “Regarding the Missouri Entertainment Industry (and Postproduction) Investment Act, without it, Missouri has effectively eliminated itself from consideration for film/movie projects. We are being passed over for other states because one of the first 2 questions movie/entertainment scouts ask is whether there are any tax incentives available. Upon hearing “no,” they move on to other states. In fact, just a week before this bill was introduced last session, Sylvester Stallone pulled a project from Missouri, moved it, and renamed it for the new location = “Tulsa King.” That project is doing well on TV and would have been successful as the originally planned “Kansas City King.” Missouri lost out because we could not offer any incentive to keep the project. “Ozark” should also have been filmed in Missouri but went to Georgia, which arguably has the best program. The current version of our film tax credit program is modeled after Georgia’s law. We previously had a film tax credit program, but it expired (in 2013 I believe). The current and considerably improved bill is no-lose, as a project must be in production (i.e., people hired, company money spent, etc.) BEFORE any dollars can be applied for and returned to the film company. Same goes for any postproduction incentives—they have to be underway, and money expended before applying for and potentially receiving any refunds. Caps on the amount of incentives available to any particular project ensure Missouri will never even get close to returning the same or heaven forbid more than has been spent by the entertainment company. HB 181 will absolutely bring money, jobs, and recognition to Missouri. While I am anti-tax credits for the most part, there are programs which are successful and deserve to be supported. This investment act is one deserving of a “yes” vote.”

Question - HB154 (Sponsored by Rep. Thomas) is the only bill you're sponsoring that I'm not clear on. Could you please respond with some information about why this tax exemption is important, and how this came to you to be developed as legislation?

Rep. Thomas – “I can and will defend the brain cancer treatment device sales tax exemption (who doesn't want to reduce the cost burden on terminal brain cancer patients?). In addition, these devices were merely added to other medical equipment already deemed “durable medical equipment” (DME) in order to benefit patients dealing with diabetes, chronic pain, and other serious conditions. The Department of Revenue is supportive of HB 154. I got involved with this bill 2 years ago when I (being in the medical field) was asked to propose it as an amendment to a larger bill. It was accepted and along with the underlying bill ultimately passed out of the House and Senate. The Governor vetoed the bill but specifically commented that he liked my amendment, so I was asked to make it a stand-alone bill last session. It passed unanimously through the required committees but got stalled on the floor when there were limited options to amend it onto any bill that might have a chance of succeeding in the Senate. As you well know, it was a very unusual legislative session!”

Thank you to Dr. Lisa for providing thoughtful and complete answers. It's always good when we share ideas and enjoy beneficial conversation.

Dear Readers – please provide your input to continue the conversation.

What do you think defines Conservatism?

Are there times when government should give tax breaks to help a business? Can that still be considered Conservative? Do we want to help the movie industry come to Missouri? What about our local TIFs?

I do not know who pays the sales tax on medical equipment, patient, or insurance company? Does anyone have insight on that? Should our legislators choose specific beneficiaries of tax breaks?

ERIC - Cont'd from Page 1...from the announcement by Secretary of State of Alabama:

“Before I took office, Alabama transmitted the personal information of millions of our citizens to this private organization for the past several years. That information is stored on a server somewhere but we do not know where. There is no ERIC operation at the location they claim is their office,” Allen said. “A lot of personal data and taxpayer money has been transferred to ERIC. Where is that data? Where are the employees? Where are the offices? Where are the computers?”

Use this link to see the full announcement shared with Alabama citizens -

<https://www.sos.alabama.gov/index.php/newsroom/wes-allen-finds-vacant-virtual-office-eric-address>

What’s done is done, but it appears SOS Ashcroft has prevented further transfer of information.

Call 573-751-2301 or contact Secretary Ashcroft at <https://www.sos.mo.gov/> to encourage diligence on such issues going forward. We should never have been on ERIC.

Tuesday, April 4th Election in Camden County – Please Go Vote!!

You can view the extensive 4 page ballot via camdenmo.org, County Clerk Page, “Sample Ballot”.

There are important choices to be made here. Please review the ballot now, and educate yourself on the races that interest you. Everyone is adding marijuana tax, and other tax increases are proposed by cities and a fire district. The City of Laurie has a big sewer bond proposed. Do your research on all choices before you go to vote. You’ll want to look some of these up and read the whole proposal, more than just what’s on the ballot.

We can’t research all districts, but we have it on good authority that for Camdenton School District the conservative candidates are Troy Risner, Callie Henze and Shelley Creed.

Climax Springs is full of good conservative candidates. Shannon Hodges brings experience as the incumbent. Ryan Williams is recommended as a three-year candidate, and we are happy to know that Irene Mauss will fill the one-year term.

Latest on Veregy Group Projects

I’m not sure if county offices will be back in the courthouse by the end of March or not. Rumor has it that change order pain has re-emerged from Veregy...we’ll see how the Commission does in this round.

Veregy Group is also doing a project for Climax Springs Schools. The superintendent and school board president were very forthcoming with information, and that’s much appreciated. TIPS, the process through which the bid was awarded, appears to be a vendor who enters an agreement with school districts to pre-qualify Energy Savings Performance Contract (ESPC) vendors. It appears that Veregy’s business model is to slip into projects as an ESPC contractor, and then expand scope to include general contract work that probably should be bid separately to general contractors. They make the work easy for the public entity because all they have to do is hire Veregy as ESPC approved, and then add to their scope of work instead of having to put out separate bids. Veregy should stick to lights and HVAC and strictly ESPC work...but they don’t. They apparently have a great sales team, and a terrible delivery team. Climax Springs School is saying that working with Veregy has not been easy, and that currently the project is overdue. They say the work done to date has been acceptable but are struggling to reach completion. (Sound familiar?) Citizens have raised questions about the cost of change orders for additions, and non-ESPC work. All meetings with the contractor are at public school board meetings. Congratulations to the Climax Springs School Board for their transparency.

Note to Readers! To receive The Watchdawg Report free via email, contact me (Jennie) at Contact@watchdawgreport.com, or call 660-238-6514 and leave a message. If you enjoy the print version and would like to see it continued, please donate to help cover costs. Any amount is appreciated. Drop by cash or make your check to Design & Print with note “Watchdawg”. Mail to Design & Print, c/o Jessica Thompson, PO Box 1915., Camdenton, MO 65020.

Support SB85 – Sen. Jill Carter’s bill provides for the designation of local control school districts that are exempt from certain performance reporting requirements of the Dept of Elementary and Secondary education (DESE). We found out that Senator Carter is not a friend of DESE...we thank her for that!

Support SB49 – Sen. Mike Moon’s “Missouri Save Adolescents from Experimentation Act”. Out of committee and on an informal calendar. Provides protection from transgender medical manipulations.

Support SB134- Sen. Mike Moon’s “Vulnerable Child Compassion and Protection Act”. Which prohibits any school official at a public or charter school from encouraging a student under the age of eighteen years old to adopt a gender identity or sexual orientation. This prohibition shall not apply to certain course components of a school's curriculum. This passed out of committee on February 14, and should be but is not moving forward on the calendar – call Senator Bernskoetter and ask if he is supporting this bill.

Oppose SB4 – Sen. Andrew Koenig’s support of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is hidden in this bill that is advertised as parental rights. Anything DESE, is the opposite of educations that’s good for your kids. They are the source of governmental indoctrination and control. This bill has been read the second time in the House.

Oppose SB5 – Sen. Andrew Koenig’s bill proposes state funded transportation of students to schools outside their district...remember “busing”, and how horrible it was for all involved? We need better public schools without government bureaucracy interference, not taxpayer funded busing. The bill is on an informal calendar as of March 8. Please voice your opposition.

Oppose SB81 – Sen. Mary Elizabeth Coleman – this is an attempt at allowing the money to follow the child but does nothing to remove the influence of DESE over all schools. It would cause incredible confusion and not address the real issue of government indoctrination via DESE and Teacher’s Unions. This one is on an informal calendar – so moving forward in the process – terrible.

Oppose SB136 - Sen. Karla Eslinger – Majority Caucus Whip – proposed that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) shall establish a process by which each student prior to 9th grade shall develop an individual career and academic plan, with help from the student's parent or guardian and the school's counselors. Before a student finishes 12th grade, the student shall declare the student's postsecondary plans as part of the student's individual career and academic plan. Such declaration shall include items set forth in the act. Beginning July 1, 2024, each school district shall establish a process in which a student completes and submits the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. ARGHH! Here I see the fulfillment of the communist regime in controlling the people beginning with 9th graders. Who is this woman and how does she stay in office? This is on the informal calendar to move forward. **Please contact Senator Bernskoetter and strongly oppose** this horrible interference in the freedom of parents and children to work together through changes and growth through the teenage years. This one makes my stomach hurt. Perfect example of a fake Republican.

Oppose SB 25 - Hough – this is a very complex and confusing bill that changes tax law to do with income tax deductions. It’s beyond my ability to understand. **Calling all tax professionals who can understand this one...please email contact@watchdawgreport.com and give your opinion...**we’ll follow up with FB posts on the usual groups to share your input. In the meantime, anything that adds to or complicates income taxes is probably bad. We need simplification, not added complication.

Oppose SB 111 - Bernskoetter - Modifies provisions relating to the administration of state employees. This act eliminates the Personnel Advisory Board and gives all duties and responsibilities previously held by the board to the Director of the Personnel Division and the Commissioner of Administration. The act additionally makes the position of Director of the Personnel Division appointed by the Commissioner of Administration. The Director may be removed by the Commissioner for no reason, or any reason not prohibited by law. This is obviously consolidation of power to suit someone, and it certainly does not relate to anything voters in the district are focusing on...like parental rights, lowering taxes, protections against federal overreach. Tone deaf to say the least.

Oppose SB 117 – Luetkemeyer - This act provides that actions for damages against hospitals and other entities for malpractice, negligence, error, or mistake related to the provision of gender transition services to minors are to be brought within two years, reduced from ten. For personal injury, the time to file is reduced from five to two years. There is an error in the bill summary at senate.mo.gov...beware. Call Sen. Mike Bernskoetter at 573-751-2076 and/or send an email to mike.bernskoetter@senate.mo.gov Call Rep. Lisa Thomas at 573-751-1119 and/or send an email to lisa.thomas@house.mo.gov