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Gov. Nixon delivers 2012 State of the State address

Legislative leaders, Judges of the Missouri Supreme Court, Lieutenant Governor Kinder, state officials, members of the General Assembly, members of my cabinet, and my fellow Missourians.

It's an honor to be here this evening, joined by Missouri's First Lady, Georganne Nixon, and members of our family.

Over the last year, many Missouri communities have braved unthinkable hardships. And none more so than in Joplin – the toughest town on God's green earth.

Time and again, the people of Missouri have met those challenges with unwavering strength and determination.

A few months ago, on the first day of school in Joplin, I met a remarkable young man named Quinton Anderson. Quinton is a senior at Joplin High School. He's an excellent student ... and a science whiz. He hopes someday to create new vaccines.

Graduation day this year will have special meaning for Quinton, as it will for so many in Joplin.

Because it was on graduation day last year – May 22 at 5:41 p.m. – that Joplin was hit by the deadliest tornado in modern history.

Winds clocked at 200 miles an hour tore a swath a mile wide and six miles long through the heart of the community.

When I stood there surrounded by smashed cars and shattered homes, it was nothing but devastation as far as the eye could see.

In just 19 minutes, the twister left thousands of people homeless. More than 7,000 homes and hundreds of businesses were damaged or destroyed. More than a thousand people were injured.

161 lost their lives.

The tornado leveled Quinton's home.

Both his parents were killed.

Quinton was flung through the air and found blocks away – face-down in a ditch with a fractured skull, a shattered spine, his left leg torn to shreds.

He spent five and a half weeks in the hospital. And after he left the hospital, Quinton had this to say:

“I used to just take each day like it was given to me. But it’s not. It’s a gift. You’ve gotta pray for the next one.

“Don’t give up hope. Always pray to get stronger each day.

“And if you’re in physical therapy... and they tell you to walk ... always take that extra step.”

Always take that extra step ...

... His parents would be so proud.

Quinton, your faith and your fight have shown the world that the spirit of Joplin is unbreakable. People of Missouri, please welcome Quinton Anderson and his sister, Grace.

Mother Nature hit us hard in 2011, starting with tornadoes on New Year’s Eve ...

A blizzard that shut down I-70 from St. Louis to Kansas City...

Record flooding and drought in the Bootheel ... and in northwest Missouri ...

The intentional breach of the Birds Point levee by the Corps of Engineers ...

More tornadoes on Good Friday ...

Another tornado in Sedalia ... and of course, the EF-5 tornado in Joplin and the surrounding area.

And through every natural disaster they endured, the people of Missouri relied on our brave men and women in uniform: our first responders, our law enforcement community, and all who have answered the call to military service.

In the aftermath of Joplin alone, men and women from more than 400 public safety agencies rushed to help.

Certain special people have a spirit that compels them to run toward trouble, not away from it. And Missouri State Trooper Fred Guthrie Jr. was one of them.

In 2007, Trooper Guthrie earned our state’s highest law enforcement honor, the Missouri Medal of Valor, for saving a woman during a violent storm on Smithville Lake.

It was the same selfless spirit that compelled Trooper Guthrie to brave the swift currents of the Missouri River, which claimed his life last August.

Fred Guthrie was a hero, who died as he lived: protecting others. Even as we mourn our loss, we are lifted up by his courage. Missouri is a better place for his service.

Please join me in thanking the family of Trooper Fred Guthrie: his wife, Teresa; and their three children, Amber, Dylan, and Cody; and all our men and women in uniform.

Quinton Anderson. Fred Guthrie. Our men and women in uniform.

They have shown us the face of courage. They have shown us what it means to be strong in the toughest of times. What it means to take that extra step.

And we've seen our share of tough times these past few years.

It began in 2008, when our nation was hit with the most severe economic recession of our lifetime. In the last six months of 2008, we lost more than 55,000 jobs. In December of 2008, Missouri saw more than 100 mass layoffs, the most ever since we began tracking that number.

But we didn't make excuses. We didn't wait around for help.

Missourians stood up ... got to work ... showed our strength.

Yes, times have been tough. But Missourians have always been tougher.

And that's why I'm so optimistic about our future.

The people of the Show-Me State are stubborn and self-reliant.

When times are tough, we buckle down and get to work.

Missourians don't want a handout.

Missourians don't want a bailout.

Missourians just want an opportunity to succeed.

The people of Missouri turned to all of us ... for strong leadership ... for a clear path forward ... and for hope for a brighter future.

And I'm proud to say that because of our strong leadership, Missouri is once again moving forward.

Unlike Washington, we've worked together like adults ... no matter what part of our state we're from, how we make a living, or what party we belong to.

Unlike Washington, we've kept a laser-like focus on job creation.

Unlike Washington, we've maintained our strict fiscal discipline and balanced our budget – and we've done it without raising taxes.

Our commitment to balancing the budget, holding the line on taxes, and our focus on creating jobs, is paying off.

The national recession brought sharp job losses in 2008 and 2009, but we have turned the corner. Today, it was reported that our unemployment rate is now at its lowest level in three years.

Missouri farms and businesses are shipping more goods around the globe, generating billions of dollars of economic activity and thousands of jobs here at home.

And together, we're bringing the American auto industry back to life right here in the Show-Me State.

But there is more work to do.

Tonight, I'll lay out a specific strategy to create more jobs and grow our economy.

That strategy builds on the granite foundation of fiscal discipline we have laid here in Missouri:

- Balancing the budget;
- Holding the line on taxes;
- Making government smaller, smarter and more efficient.

The national recession, and the gridlock in Washington, created tough budget times for all the states.

Some states simply chose to ignore the problem, spent more money than they had, and racked up huge deficits.

But not here in Missouri. Since taking office, I've cut government spending by \$1.6 billion.

And with the balanced budget I present tonight, I'll have reduced the government's payroll by 4,100 positions. The state workforce is the smallest it's been in 15 years.

Those decisions were tough, but necessary.

Other states haven't shown that fiscal discipline. More than 30 states have raised taxes, including Kansas and Illinois.

But we have not.

Because we know that Missouri families can't afford a tax increase. Period.

In fact, to help more small businesses create jobs and grow, we've begun to phase out the outdated franchise tax on thousands of Missouri businesses.

That means more money to their bottom line – and more jobs for Missouri workers.

But we haven't just made your government smaller. We're also making your government smarter.

By 2015, the Department of Transportation will have cut \$512 million in overhead and administrative costs, and put that money where it belongs: building roads and bridges.

We've consolidated offices and cut our energy bills. We've put critical services online, including teacher certification; insurance agent licenses; and GED transcripts. We've eliminated paperwork, and slashed printing and postage costs.

Because of our focus on fiscal responsibility and efficiency, Missouri is one of the few states with a Triple-A credit rating from all three rating agencies. Kansas can't say that. Neither can Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Nebraska or Tennessee.

New Jersey got downgraded by all three credit rating agencies in the last year. Even the federal government got downgraded by Standard and Poor's.

You know what that says about us here in Missouri?

We know how to manage our money – better than our neighboring states, and much better than Washington.

Our Triple-A credit rating saves the taxpayers millions – and it signals that Missouri is a smart place to invest.

While we're talking about government efficiency, let me make a related point. For the past three years, I have called for comprehensive tax credit reform. Some of you in this room stood with me on this issue. Others did not.

The consequences of this inaction are clear. Over the past four years, more than \$2 billion in state tax credits have been redeemed.

Effective tax credits are used to create jobs and grow our economy. But tax credits that aren't delivering for Missourians must be retooled and reformed. We all know that dollars spent on tax credits are dollars we cannot invest in other critical priorities.

Once again, I ask you to pass comprehensive tax credit reform to get this spending under control.

Balancing our budget. Holding the line on taxes. Maintaining a spotless Triple-A credit rating. These are all signs that Missouri is headed in the right direction.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce recently called Missouri a leader and ranked us as one of the Top Ten business-friendly states in the nation because of our low taxes and fiscal discipline.

We also have a safe workforce. That's another reason we're poised for growth. Reducing on-the-job injuries is a point of pride for Missouri workers – and employers.

Since I became your Governor, workers' injury claims have gone down every year, and are now almost 50 percent lower than they were nearly two decades ago.

That means real cost savings for employers. The cost of workers' compensation has come down each year I've been Governor. In fact, businesses are paying less now for workers' comp coverage than they were back in 1994.

Here in Missouri, we're standing firm to protect workers' safety and workers' rights.

Because, as we all know, a strong and safe workforce makes a strong economy.

From our low taxes to our strong workforce, Missouri is well positioned for job creation. To keep our economy growing, we must build on these strengths.

That's what our Missouri Works strategy will do. With your help, we will:

- One, grow more auto supplier jobs in Missouri;
- Two, sell more Missouri-made goods overseas;
- Three, prepare more workers for high-tech careers;
- Four, train and hire more veterans;
- Five, jumpstart innovation in science and technology;
- Six, target high-growth industries; and
- Seven, create jobs in rural communities.

Let's start with the automotive industry.

Missouri has always been an automotive state. It's who we are. It's in our blood.

But for decades, the American auto industry had been in decline.

When I took office in 2009, thousands of jobs at Claycomo and Wentzville were at risk. We couldn't sit by and watch those jobs go to other states, or other countries.

But we didn't give up on the American auto industry. We believed in our hearts that American workers would build automobiles that could compete in a world economy.

But it was up to us to make sure they were built right here in the Show-Me State.

So, I went to Detroit, and met with the heads of Ford and GM.

And after those meetings, we took bold action.

I called the General Assembly into special session. Folks from across our state – urban and rural, business and labor, Democrats and Republicans – came together and worked with us to pass the Missouri Manufacturing Jobs Act.

And it has paid off.

Last October, Ford announced that it will invest \$1.1 billion in Claycomo.

To put that in perspective, that's a bigger capital investment than building Arrowhead and Kauffman stadiums – combined.

Ford is going to produce the Transit van in the United States for the first time. Until now, it's only been produced overseas. But, because of our work, this vehicle will now be built with pride right here in the Show-Me State.

No more outsourcing, folks. We're bringing jobs back to Missouri.

In addition to the Transit, Ford is adding a second shift at Claycomo to produce more F-150 pickups.

This massive investment will bring 1,600 new jobs to the Claycomo plant – on top of the existing 3,800 jobs we saved.

Just two weeks later, GM announced that it would invest \$380 million to build its new Chevrolet Colorado at Wentzville, and add a second shift on its two existing vehicles.

That's another 1,660 new jobs right here in Missouri.

I wish all of you could have been there with me when we made those announcements. After all they've been through, to see the look in those workers' eyes ... to know they can put food on the table ... and clothes on their kids' backs; to know they can pay the mortgage and the electric bill ... to know that they can put money in the collection plate on Sunday.

What we do here really matters.

And we won't stop now.

Last week, I was back again in Detroit, sitting face-to-face with senior executives at Ford, GM, and some of the world's largest auto suppliers.

I was there for one reason: to get more auto parts suppliers to invest in the Show-Me State. Whether they're making seats or steering wheels, axles or airbags, we want suppliers to bring more of those jobs to Missouri.

As part of our Missouri Works strategy, I call on the legislature once again to stand up with me and fight for the automotive industry. We must pass legislation to help auto suppliers create new jobs across Missouri.

Make no mistake: Just like before, competition for these jobs will be stiff.

But to the Missouri taxpayers, let me say this:

We won with Ford. We won with GM. And we will win with the auto suppliers and create even more jobs.

Let's get it done.

The next component of Missouri Works is to sell more Missouri-made goods overseas to create more jobs here at home.

It's clear the world wants what Missouri's got: Cotton and chemicals. Soybeans and semiconductors. F-150s and F-15s.

When I talk about selling Missouri-made goods overseas, I don't mean just the Fortune 500s that have an established global footprint. Competing globally is just as important for small businesses and family farms in every corner of our state.

One company that's ahead of the curve is Forrest Keeling Nursery in Elsberry, founded 63 years ago in the backyard of Dr. Forrest Keeling. Today, the nursery grows more than 250 types of trees, shrubs and grasses and sells those products around the world. And they have patents pending in more than 50 countries.

Last year, I had the pleasure of visiting this small, hometown business that's winning in the global economy.

On behalf of all of our growing Missouri exporters, please welcome Forrest Keeling's CEO, Wayne Lovelace; his wife, Judy; and their daughter, Kim.

Because of companies like this, Missouri exports were up by \$1.2 billion in the first three quarters of 2011. And that was on top of our outstanding 35 percent growth in 2010.

As part of Missouri Works, we're going to keep this momentum building by creating a one-stop shop to help Missouri businesses and farms find more customers in new international markets.

And with the new trade offices we'll be opening soon in China, Southeast Asia and South America, we're taking the "Made in Missouri" brand global.

Last fall, I led a delegation of more than 60 Missouri business and agricultural leaders to China, where we signed agreements to sell \$4.6 billion worth of Missouri products.

Because, I don't know about you ... but I think it's time the guy in Beijing walked into his local store and saw "Made in America" stickers on the products he's buying.

Another part of our Missouri Works strategy is worker training.

In a global economy with constantly evolving technology, training and education can never stop.

We have established new higher-education programs like Caring for Missourians, Training for Tomorrow, MoHealthWINS and our Nurse Training Initiative to prepare thousands more Missourians for rewarding careers that exist today.

Last year, we also increased Missouri's investment in our Customized Training Program by 50 percent. That record investment allowed us to train nearly 37,000 workers who are on the job now at more than 300 Missouri businesses.

As part of our Missouri Works strategy, the budget I present tonight continues our record investment in worker training for a second year, especially in high-tech areas so critical to modern manufacturing.

One of the growing companies we've helped with worker training is Meramec Electrical Products, which employs 130 people at its state-of-the-art facility in Crawford County.

Our Customized Training Program helped Meramec reduce production costs by 30 percent; become more competitive in the global market; and create 25 new jobs last year.

On behalf of all of our innovative small businesses, please welcome Meramec's CEO, Nick Sanazaro, and CFO Carolyn Sanazaro.

Now, let's talk about military veterans.

Honoring – and employing – our military veterans is another key element of our Missouri Works strategy.

During my last visit to Afghanistan, I was talking with a group of soldiers who were about to go out on patrol. As they were suiting up, I asked one of the soldiers what he was most worried about.

His answer surprised me. He didn't say he was most worried about facing the enemy that night. No. He looked me in the eyes and said, "Governor, I'm worried about whether there will be a job for me when I get home."

Folks, our job is to make sure the answer to that question is a resounding YES.

Every veteran who needs a job should be able to get one.

In 2009, we passed legislation to begin phasing out state taxes on military retirement income.

That law is a strong signal that we want military veterans to move to Missouri, to work in Missouri, and to make Missouri their home.

In 2010, we launched Show-Me Heroes, asking Missouri employers to put military veterans at the front of the line when they're hiring for new jobs. More than 1,700 employers have signed up to be part of this effort.

Tonight, I am proud to report that our Show-Me Heroes program has put more than 1,000 veterans back to work here in Missouri.

The Missouri Works strategy will expand the mission of Show-Me Heroes to include on-the-job training for National Guard, Reserve and active-duty veterans who have recently left military service.

We'll continue to work tirelessly to create job opportunities for every veteran in our state.

The next pillar of Missouri Works is to accelerate investment in high-growth industries like science and technology. With more than 1,000 agribusiness, life science and biotech companies, Missouri is already home to some of the brightest minds and innovators in the world.

With the passage last year of the Missouri Science and Innovation Reinvestment Act, we are poised for rapid progress.

As part of Missouri Works, my budget includes \$4 million in seed capital to invest in attracting the very best science talent to Missouri.

By speeding the flow of innovations out of the lab and into the marketplace, we're growing these industries today and creating the high-tech jobs of tomorrow.

Finally, Missouri Works will help create jobs in rural communities.

Anyone who grew up in a small town like I did knows there's something special about them. Folks want their towns to be places where their kids can grow up safe, get a good education, find a job and raise a family.

It wasn't all that long ago, just a generation or two, that folks made a decent living hand-sewing baseball uniforms in Licking ... making shoes in Piedmont ... or assembling typewriters in Springfield.

Those jobs may be gone, but our rural way of life is still strong.

Our Missouri Works plan will custom tailor a job-creation incentive for small-business owners in rural communities. Because we want every part of Missouri to move forward together.

We're also helping rural Missouri compete by dramatically expanding access to high-speed Internet.

Broadband access is a game-changer – for commerce ... for farming ... for education ... for health care ... for law enforcement and public safety.

Our extremely competitive MoBroadbandNow initiative is bringing a total investment of \$311 million through 18 projects to wire communities across Missouri.

Let me give you an example. Over in Otterville, we've hooked up the local school through our partnership with Sho-Me Technologies. This has significantly expanded their ability to provide web-based classes using streaming video.

Just as the railroads and interstates changed the face – and the fate – of Missouri communities in decades past, this project will help shape Missouri's future from Otterville to New London and everywhere in between.

Rural communities are a proud part of Missouri's past. They're also a vital part of Missouri's future – especially when it comes to agriculture.

Missouri farmers feed, fuel and clothe the world.

And with 108,000 farms generating more than \$12 billion annually, agriculture is truly the backbone of Missouri's economy.

We want to keep Missouri agriculture growing, and our rural way of life strong. That's why I am committed to working with our farmers to open new markets, improve energy efficiency, and use the latest science and technology to make Missouri agriculture even more competitive.

Folks like Bob and Kay Vandiver are a major part the success of Missouri agriculture. Bob's parents raised a few cattle – simply trying to make a living off the land. But he and Kay have turned that farm into one of the largest in our state. It's a lasting legacy – one that will be handed down for generations.

On behalf of Missouri agriculture, please welcome one of the Show-Me State's outstanding farm families, the Vandivers: Bob, Kay, Gary, Dale and Jake.

To compete in a changing global economy, Missouri must have world-class public schools.

Our public schools have always been – and will always be – beacons of hope, opportunity and excellence for all.

No one is turned away.

Some children come to school hungry ... homeless.

Some bear the burdens of poverty and neglect.

But when a child of want ... and a child of wealth ... walk through our schoolhouse doors, they enter as equals.

Support for public education should not be used as a wedge to divide us.

Here in Missouri, public education is an enduring value that unites us.

Some states have opted to balance their budgets on the backs of schoolchildren.

Kansas cut its basic funding formula for K-12 schools by \$232 per child. Texas slashed \$4 billion from the education budget, triggering massive layoffs. South Carolina, Arizona and California have each reduced funding per pupil by more than 20 percent.

But I haven't met one parent or one teacher in Missouri who thinks we should balance our budget by taking money from their kids' classrooms.

For the past three years, even in challenging budget times, we maintained level funding for K-12 classrooms.

This year, we'll take that next step.

The budget I present tonight provides record funding for our K-12 classrooms. Because that's the right thing to do.

Several urgent issues facing public education require our action this session.

First, we must find a solution that applies the foundation formula fairly and predictably.

We also know that we have more work to do with our urban school districts on both sides of the state – to make sure that every child in every community has an equal opportunity to succeed.

Just take a look at St. Louis. We've still got a long way to go, but we're seeing how strong leadership, dedicated teachers, and committed parents are making a real difference right now.

Students have shown academic improvement for four years in a row. The district is now operating with a balanced budget. The attendance rate is at 93 percent.

From my frequent discussions with teachers, administrators and others – and through our work with organizations like Teach for America – it's clear that the St. Louis schools are finding their footing and are moving in the right direction.

We need to take steps to improve public education in a number of other areas, including charter schools.

Missouri has some strong charter schools, where inspired teachers with fresh ideas are giving children a top-notch education.

But let's be frank.

We also have charter schools where children are languishing in classrooms that aren't up to par academically, in schools that aren't well managed. And our students pay the price.

I call on the legislature to send to my desk a comprehensive charter school accountability bill that holds all charter schools – and their sponsors – to high standards of academic achievement and financial integrity.

Educating our children is a high calling, and those who answer the call deserve our support and respect. Good teachers get results. Great teachers transform lives.

We need to entice our best college students to become teachers in those urban and rural public schools that have the greatest needs. And once they're on the job, they must be accountable for what kids are learning.

Our economy is changing. And education can't stop at high school. Because by the next decade, nearly two-thirds of all jobs in the United States will require some kind of post-secondary education. That means more Missouri kids will need a college degree.

But too many families simply can't afford the cost of a college education.

So for the past three years, Missouri has tackled college affordability head-on.

While universities in other states were increasing tuition by double digits, we froze tuition in 2009 and 2010 at all our public colleges and universities.

Last year, I challenged our colleges to continue to hold down tuition.

As a result, enrollment at our public colleges has surged. Over the past three years, we've added 31,000 students. That's set a new record each fall.

And that's great news for our students, our schools and the future of our state.

In another challenging budget year, our top priorities in funding for higher education must continue to be high-quality academic programs and student scholarships.

So, in addition to a record investment in K-12 classrooms, my budget will provide stable funding for our state college scholarships, including Bright Flight, Access Missouri, and A+.

Let me talk for a moment about that A+ program.

These scholarships cover tuition and fees at any public two-year college in the state for students who are willing to work hard, play by the rules, and give back to their communities.

Since I became your Governor, we've worked to add 110 new A+ schools. And the number of students in our A+ program has risen 30 percent.

This year, 12,500 Missouri students will take advantage of our A+ scholarships. Next year, we anticipate closer to 14,000 students will be A+ scholars.

We will continue to expand access to A+ scholarships to students all across our state.

Investing in college affordability is critical for continued economic growth. But we have to balance this budget.

And we all know that means we'll have to cut in other areas.

So, to balance our budget in a way that protects our scholarships and academic programs, I am calling on all our colleges and universities to continue to look for more ways to cut overhead and administrative costs and run smarter, more efficient operations.

While leaner, more efficient operations are essential, higher education must continue to adapt for the modern economy. Public colleges and universities must change their business models.

Let me give you an exciting example of what one school is doing.

Earlier this month, the University of Central Missouri unveiled a new model called the Innovation Campus, and it has the potential to transform how we educate students.

Innovation Campus students will enroll in college courses while still in high school, and then participate in high-impact apprenticeships throughout the college curriculum. Corporate partners will underwrite tuition scholarships, and faculty and employers will partner to guide each student.

The expected results?

- Students get a running start on college requirements;
- They learn the practical skills necessary for excellent careers;
- They can earn a degree in three years or less;
- Business partners will recruit and build their workforce for the future;

- And, costs for students are dramatically reduced.

I encourage all our universities to take the lessons of the Innovation Campus to heart, and develop similar programs.

When we come together – and take that extra step – we are proving that there is no limit to what Missourians can accomplish.

Working together, we passed landmark legislation to ensure that children with autism get the therapy they need.

For too long, insurance companies weren't required to cover the most effective autism therapies. But that changed last year. And now, 1.6 million Missourians have plans that cover autism treatments.

This year, I call on the General Assembly to pass legislation to increase access to care by expanding the number of licensed professionals working with children with autism in Missouri.

That's what we can accomplish when we take that extra step.

Working together, our Partnership for Hope is changing the lives of Missourians with developmental disabilities and their families.

Before this compassionate program was in place, some folks waited years for services to help their loved ones live more independently – help with things like getting dressed, cooking meals, taking the bus to work.

But now, our Partnership includes 91 Missouri counties and the City of St. Louis, and serves 1,300 people with developmental disabilities.

This year, we'll keep expanding the Partnership, improving lives and saving money over the long run.

That's what we can accomplish when we take that extra step.

Last year, we reauthorized Missouri Rx, a vital program that cuts the cost of prescription drugs for 215,000 Missouri seniors and people with disabilities.

When that lifeline was in jeopardy last year, folks across our state came together to protect these vulnerable citizens. And my budget continues full funding for this program.

That's what we can accomplish when we take that extra step.

By working together, by taking that extra step, we've achieved a lot for our state.

We've shown that the partisan gridlock in Washington hasn't taken hold here in Missouri.

But we have more work to do.

That includes balancing our budget, and holding the line on taxes.

That includes putting the Missouri Works strategy in place to create jobs and keep our economy growing.

That includes making a record investment in K-12 classrooms, keeping college affordable, and helping all Missouri children achieve their dreams.

And that also includes passing strict campaign contribution limits.

I've called for contribution limits every year – and I'm going to keep on doing it until we change the law.

When one person with an ax to grind can make an unlimited contribution to advance a narrow agenda ... when lobbyists for powerful interests can tip the balance of an election ... the very foundations of our democracy are at risk.

Unlimited contributions are overriding the will of the people ... and undermining the principle of free and fair elections.

Missouri needs strict limits on campaign contributions.

Let's finally get it done.

Growing up in De Soto, I learned a lot about public service at the kitchen table.

My parents were deeply committed to our community and to public service. Dad was the Mayor. Mom served on the school board.

In our town, when folks needed help they'd call the house. Usually at suppertime.

We didn't have No-Call Lists back then.

Whatever the complaint or request, I don't ever recall hearing my parents ask: Are you a Democrat or a Republican? Or did you vote for me?

Because that's not what public service is about.

When you hold public office ... you represent everyone.

We saw the best of public service in action in every corner of Missouri last year. But one man stands out as a shining example. His name is C. J. Huff.

Dr. Huff is the superintendent of Joplin schools. The tornado damaged or destroyed 10 of their buildings. Joplin High was left in ruins. C. J. feared that if the schools didn't open on time, families would start to leave town. He was not about to let that happen.

So C. J. rallied his forces: parents and teachers; students and civic leaders; carpenters and plumbers ... and an army of volunteers.

In just 54 days, they turned an empty department store at a shopping mall into a high-tech high school.

Not only did all of Joplin's schools open on time, nearly 95 percent of the students showed up on that first day.

Folks, that was amazing to see.

Please welcome an outstanding leader: Superintendent C.J. Huff.

Public service matters.

What we do here matters.

But in a world of term limits, skeptics say we can't get much accomplished.

In a world of hyper-partisanship, cynics say we can't find common ground.

To them I say: Just watch us.

Whether you're from the big city, or a small town.

Whether you make your living on the farm, or in a lab.

Whether you're a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent – or none of the above.

We're all Missourians first.

And here in Missouri, we're not defined by our differences.

We're defined by our shared values.

Values that give us the strength to face whatever tomorrow brings ... with faith and optimism.

There's a lot of uncertainty in this life.

We can't control the weather.

We can't always see what tomorrow will bring ... but one thing is clear.

Through storms and floods and hard times, the good people of Missouri never give up or give in. Even in our darkest hours, the spirit will prevail.

And when people of good faith and good will work together ... nothing can stop us.

Together, we will continue balance this budget without raising taxes.

Together, we will continue to create more jobs, better schools and more compassionate communities.

And, Quinton, I pledge to you that we will continue to work together to take that extra step ... and keep Missouri moving forward.

It is an honor to serve as your Governor.

I am grateful for the opportunity you have given me, and for the trust you have placed in me.

With your help – and God's grace – we'll continue to show strong leadership to move Missouri toward brighter days ahead.

Thank you and God Bless.

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