



Missouri Secretary of State
John R. Ashcroft

Media Information

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102nd General Assembly Opening Speech

Delivered by John. R. “Jay” Ashcroft to the Missouri General Assembly

Good afternoon and welcome to the opening of the House of Representatives of the 102nd Regular Session of the Missouri General Assembly. Every two years, Missouri law grants the secretary of state the privilege of opening this venerable chamber and bridging the gap between the speaker from the previous session and the speaker whose leadership now commences. This is the third occasion on which I have been humbled to carry out this duty. I consider it one of the highest honors of my office.

Let me begin by thanking each of you for your service to the people of Missouri. It takes courage to put one's name on the ballot and months of hard work to get elected. And after that, there are weeks of travel, separation from your families, late nights and early mornings. It's clear you don't do it for the pay. Instead, every member of this chamber, regardless of political affiliation, is here with a genuine desire to improve the lives of Missourians. As citizen legislators from various backgrounds, you come together to do the valuable work of drafting our state's laws and shaping an environment of opportunity.

During the past two years, you have enacted landmark, beneficial legislation. From this historic dais, two years ago, I urged you to develop parent-empowering educational reform designed to enhance student achievement. You responded by creating the Missouri Empowerment Scholarship Accounts Program. As a result, these scholarships are enabling parents to direct educational opportunities for over a thousand Missouri students.

Two years ago, I asked for your help in reforming Missouri's election laws. You passed House Bill 1878, strengthening our election processes and instilling voter confidence by requiring government issued photo IDs, banning ballot drop boxes, designating paper ballots as the official ballots of Missouri, and much more. Thanks to your diligence, last November, the Show Me State showed America how safe, secure, and accessible elections are conducted. After almost 20 years we successfully implemented a real photo id requirement in a general election, and it worked.

Other enactments signal your sensitivity to the needs of Missourians. The remote notarization bill you passed proved to be invaluable at the height of the Covid-19 Pandemic. It highlights your commitment to making it easier for Missourians to succeed. When Missourians were in need, your legislation sent the message that “help is on the way.”

We gather today to open a new House, because the work of public service is an ongoing task. We gather as a state to address the unique character and opportunities of Missouri—its capabilities and its challenges. We know that federal government's “one size fits all solutions” are not the best answers. They are frequently both wasteful and costly failing to meet the needs of our communities and families.

Missouri solutions you shape must be based on a proper understanding of the role of government. All Missourians must have equal opportunity to succeed in our culture. No Missourian should be deprived of the opportunity to reap the reward of hard work, creativity, productivity, innovation, and achievement. Missouri must embrace a culture of reward for merit which has made America the envied model for other cultures around the globe. With this in mind I encourage you to build on our successes.

One of our state's most important duties is to provide for the education of Missouri's children. In our most recent budget 7.4 Billion dollars was spent on primary and secondary education, 21 percent of Missouri's budget. The most effective use of taxpayer dollars is to place parents in control of their children's educational choices. Parents know what is best for their children. Missouri's students are not factory widgets: they are unique individuals, endowed by their creator with gifts, abilities, and unlimited potentials if properly nurtured.

My wife Katie and I are raising four children here in Jefferson City. Our eldest attends a local public high school while our three younger children attend a private school at our family's personal expense. It is past time for all parents in this state to have the same opportunity to choose the educational environment best suited to fulfill the needs of their children. Let me encourage you to enact legislation that will capitalize on the caring knowledge and expertise of Missouri's loving parents by expanding their control over their children's education.

We must also address the sobering crime pandemic that plagues our state. Many people do not feel safe in their communities. As legislators, you have the opportunity to improve public safety. We need truth in sentencing legislation.

Members of juries and witnesses at trials should not have to fear encounters with those convicted of serious crimes but prematurely released from custody without having served meaningful sentences. Safe communities rely on citizen participation in the justice system. Public safety requires cooperation with local law enforcement, who cannot be expected to achieve it alone. No one should have to move to live in a safe neighborhood.

You can make Missourians safer by strengthening our criminal justice system. We must ensure that criminals are held properly accountable in every jurisdiction in the state. Justice should never be denied by the inability to appoint a special prosecutor when necessary. Policies that promote rehabilitation combined with truth in sentencing and reforming our special prosecutor appointment statute will profoundly improve the safety of our citizens. I would like to especially thank Webster County Sheriff Roye Cole and Platte County Prosecutor Eric Zahn for their service and their hard work in these areas. They are in the chamber today and I would ask that they stand and be recognized.

Since the authority of our republic is derived from the informed consent of the citizens, everything we do should rest on the foundations of transparency and accountability. The appropriations process is a bulwark of clear transparency and focused accountability. This hard work requires definition of proposed expenditures and a defense of previous spending. Perhaps the informed consent of the governed is most important regarding issues of taxation. I wholeheartedly encourage you to propose to Missourians a constitutional amendment that would ban general tax increases without a vote of the people.

As elected public servants, it is our calling to maximize liberty and opportunity for all Missourians while striving to increase the effectiveness of our governmental operations. Thank you for your dedicated service to our great state. May God bless and guide you and your families and may God bless the great people of the great state of Missouri.

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