

MISSOURI NEWS SCENE



MISSOURI CITIZENS from both rural and urban areas make their feelings on eminent domain abuse known at the Property Rights Day rally Jan. 25 at the state Capitol in Jefferson City.

Property rights focus of rally

GOV. Matt Blunt has called for safeguarding of Missourians' right to own property to protect them from eminent domain abuse. Blunt spoke to a crowd of several hundred people at the Property Rights Day rally Jan. 25 at the state Capitol in Jefferson City.

"We must ensure that eminent domain abuses in Missouri are forever ended. We must strike a balance to protect property owners' rights and to allow the taking of private property only where there is a clear and direct public purpose," Blunt said. "Property ownership is among our most basic rights as a people. It is government's role to protect those rights."

In *Kelo v. City of New London*, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision that could allow governments to take private property for the use and profit of private interests. In response, Blunt formed the Missouri Task Force on Eminent Domain to examine Missouri's laws and identify improvements to balance the needs and rights of property owners with the needs of the public.

The final report includes 18 recom-

Key Points

- Missouri governor leads rally at state Capitol for property rights protection.
- Goal is to pass state legislation that ends eminent domain abuse.
- Balancing needs of property owners with needs of the public is a challenge.

mendations, all of which the governor believes, if enacted, will make a meaningful difference in curbing eminent domain abuse in this state.

The recommendations include defining just compensation, blight, public-use and good-faith negotiations, plus enacting laws to ensure property owners are made aware of their rights and have adequate time to engage in the eminent domain process. Blunt also agrees with the task force that Missouri law should prohibit eminent domain use that takes farmland for economic development purposes.

Blunt and Missouri legislators at the Property Rights Day rally emphasized the importance of improving Missouri's

eminent domain laws. The governor said he is looking forward to working with the General Assembly to pass strong legislation aimed at protecting private property owners' rights. He pledged to keep legislators at the Capitol until the job is done.

At press time, the Missouri General Assembly had several eminent domain reform bills in committee, some of which are based on recommendations from the governor's eminent domain task force. Prohibiting the use of eminent domain by private developers is one of the task force's suggestions.

"We are encouraged by the task force's recommendations calling for more thorough notification of landowners facing the possibility of eminent domain, the creation of a landowner's bill of rights, and the opportunity for third-party mediation and new procedures to ensure landowners receive just compensation," says Charles Kruse, Missouri Farm Bureau president.

An in-depth report on the eminent domain issue will be published in next month's issue of Missouri Ruralist.

Newsmakers

Apply for value-added grants

Approximately \$1.5 million in value-added grants is available for farmers interested in turning crops and livestock into more valuable processed products.

"For farmers, these grants assist with taking some of the risk out of trying new and innovative ways to make the crops and livestock they raise more valuable, and therefore, more profitable," says Fred Ferrell, director of Missouri Department of Agriculture.

Past project examples include meat processing, marketing ethanol and biodiesel production. The MDA's Missouri Agricultural and Small Business Development Authority coordinates the grant program.

"More than 15,000 Missouri farmers are currently involved in projects, and we have seen a substantial number of positive returns from this grant program," says Tony Stafford, MASBDA executive director. "To date, grants have been awarded to over 90 different projects; 41 of those are now operational."

Grant applications are due March 31. For additional information, visit www.mda.mo.gov and click on "Financial," then "Valaddgrant" links, or call (573) 751-2129.

CRP extension possible

USDA will notify agricultural producers with Conservation Reserve Program contracts expiring in 2007 that they may extend or re-enroll their contracts. An estimated 16 million acres under CRP contract will expire in 2007.

Check out www.fsa.usda.gov.

Ag Day week honors America's essential industry

Celebrated each year on the first day of spring, National Ag Day is a time to celebrate U.S. agriculture and honor the people who work to meet our everyday needs. This year's celebration will be carried out through the week of March 19-25.

Associations, corporations, universities and government agencies will gather in our nation's capital to educate Americans about how food, fuel and fiber products are produced and about the essential role of agriculture in maintaining a strong economy. More than 22 million people work in the agriculture industry.

The Agriculture Council of America is coordinating events in Washington, D.C. For more details, go to www.agday.org or call (913) 491-1895.



Show-Me Agri Fact

The Missouri dairy industry employs nearly 5,000 people in producing, processing and distributing dairy products.