Great Northwest Day at the Capitol
Legislative Priorities
2026

INVESTING IN RURAL AND REGIONAL INNOVATION
Strengthening Northwest Missouri Communities

- ✓ **EXPAND RURAL HEALTHCARE ACCESS**
- ✓ **INCREASE CHILDCARE OPPORTUNITIES**
- ✓ **INVEST IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND REGIONAL INNOVATION**
- ✓ **SUPPORT K–12 EDUCATION IN MISSOURI'S RURAL AND SMALL SCHOOLS**
- ✓ **EXPAND WORKFORCE HOUSING**
- ✓ **ENSURE FAIR AND SUSTAINABLE TAX REFORM**

✓ EXPAND RURAL HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Expanding rural healthcare access is essential to the vitality and resilience of Northwest Missouri. Strong local hospitals and clinics anchor community well-being, reduce costly delays in care, and keep families healthy close to home. Comprehensive rural "desert services"—including obstetrics, renal dialysis, psychiatry, I.V./chemo infusion, state-certified ER Level III Stroke Centers, inpatient rehabilitation, and free patient transportation—demonstrate how a full continuum of care in rural settings supports better health outcomes and long-term regional stability.

What Can Be Done to Help?

- **Attract Dialysis Providers:** Create funding mechanisms or incentive programs to bring dialysis providers to rural areas and establish satellite clinics in rural hospitals or health centers.
- **Expand Mental Health Access:** Increase providers, clinics, and partnerships with local health systems to improve access to counseling, psychiatry, and crisis services in rural communities.
- **Protect Maternal Health:** Safeguard and expand OB-GYN and maternal health services, including support for labor and delivery units in rural hospitals.
- **Sustain Comprehensive Rural Hospital Services:** Invest in critical service lines—stroke-ready emergency care, chemo/infusion, inpatient rehab—and support patient transportation programs so residents can reliably reach care close to home.

✓ INCREASE CHILDCARE OPPORTUNITIES

Supporting rural families through increased childcare availability is vital to strengthening Northwest Missouri's economic foundation. Accessible and affordable childcare empowers parents to participate in the workforce, pursue educational opportunities, and contribute to their communities without compromising their children's well-being. For rural families—where childcare options are often limited—expanding these services reduces stress, improves quality of life, and fosters stronger community connections. By prioritizing childcare, Northwest Missouri can build a supportive environment that nurtures both families and local economies, ensuring long-term stability and growth.

What Can Be Done to Help?

- **Streamline Licensing and Support Tax Credits:** Simplify childcare licensing processes and promote tax credits to reduce barriers for new and existing providers in rural Missouri.

- **Strengthen Childcare Infrastructure:** Encourage investment in childcare facilities—especially in underserved rural areas—to create safe, high-quality environments that support working families.
- **Expand Childcare Capacity to Meet Workforce Needs:** Promote initiatives such as the *Employer-Provided Child Care Assistance Tax Credit* to help businesses support employees and address workforce participation challenges linked to childcare shortages.

✓ INVEST IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND REGIONAL INNOVATION

Investing in rural and regional higher education is vital to driving innovation, economic growth, and community resilience across Northwest Missouri. Strong, well-supported colleges and universities—such as Northwest Missouri State University, Missouri Western State University, and North Central Missouri College—serve as anchors for workforce development, research, and local entrepreneurship. By ensuring these institutions have the resources needed to modernize infrastructure, attract faculty, and provide accessible education, rural communities can strengthen their talent pipelines and expand opportunities for residents. Strategic investment in higher education not only fuels regional innovation but also helps retain young professionals, enhances local economies, and sustains the long-term vitality of Northwest Missouri.

What Can Be Done to Help?

- **Increase Core Appropriations for Higher Education:** Advocate for increased funding to address inflation and expand services for public institutions, including Northwest Missouri State University, Missouri Western State University, and North Central Missouri College.
- **Modernize Campus Infrastructure:** Support sustainability-focused energy, water, and wastewater improvements to reduce costs and enhance operations.
- **Maximize Maintenance Funding:** Prioritize state and federal funding for deferred maintenance on rural campuses to preserve critical facilities and expand academic programs.
- **Maintain A+ Program Funding:** Continue full state support for the A+ Scholarship Program to ensure community college–bound students can access affordable education and career training, strengthening workforce development and economic opportunity across rural Missouri.

✓ SUPPORT K–12 EDUCATION IN MISSOURI'S RURAL AND SMALL SCHOOLS

Supporting K–12 education in Missouri's rural and small schools is essential to sustaining strong communities, vibrant local economies, and a competitive statewide workforce. Rural districts serve as community anchors—providing academic opportunity, employing local residents, and shaping the identity and future of small towns across Northwest Missouri. Ensuring these districts have stable funding, strong local governance, and the resources needed to meet student needs is critical to strengthening families, supporting employers, and preserving the character of Missouri's rural communities. Strategic investment in rural K–12 education not only enhances learning outcomes but also reinforces community vitality and long-term regional resilience.

What Can Be Done to Help?

- **Guarantee a Fully Funded and Stable School Finance System:** Fully fund the current—and any future—school funding formula to ensure rural districts remain financially strong, sustainable, and able to provide high-quality education for every student.
- **Strengthen Local Control and Community Identity:** Preserve the authority of locally elected school boards to make decisions on curriculum, staffing, and resource allocation, and support policies that reinforce rural schools as central pillars of their communities.

✓ EXPAND WORKFORCE HOUSING

Increasing workforce housing in Northwest Missouri is essential to strengthening rural communities and ensuring their long-term vitality. Affordable and accessible housing options attract and retain workers, enabling businesses to thrive and local economies to grow. For rural areas, workforce housing fosters stability, encourages population growth, and supports families seeking to live closer to their jobs and schools. By prioritizing housing development, Northwest Missouri can build stronger, more resilient communities where residents can live, work, and contribute to the region's collective success.

What Can Be Done to Help?

- **Increase Workforce Housing Availability:** Focus on creating affordable housing for essential workers in rural Missouri communities, addressing shortages with homes priced between $180,000 to $240,000.
- **Expand Housing Development Programs:** Implement rural workforce housing programs modeled after successful initiatives in other states, targeting communities under 100,000 in population.
- **Revitalize Existing Housing Stock:** Provide grants for renovating older homes in rural communities to increase livable, affordable housing quickly.
- **Enhance Rural Housing Policies and Incentives:** Establish an Office for Rural Housing to craft tailored housing solutions and expand tax credits for rural communities.

✓ ENSURE SUSTAINABLE TAX REFORM

Tax reform in Missouri must be designed to strengthen—not strain—local and state services that residents rely on every day. As discussions advance to eliminate state income tax and restrict local property tax growth, it is critical to recognize the impact such changes could have on public safety, education, healthcare, and infrastructure across rural Missouri. Local governments already operate on limited budgets, and further reductions in revenue could jeopardize essential services, limit community investment, and hinder economic development efforts.

Balanced tax reform should promote growth while safeguarding the fiscal health of Missouri's cities, counties, and school districts. Maintaining stable and predictable funding ensures that communities can continue to deliver high-quality services, attract businesses, and support families—key ingredients for long-term prosperity in Northwest Missouri and beyond.

What Can Be Done to Help?

- **Protect Local and State Revenue Streams:** Guarantee that any reform effort includes safeguards for local governments, school districts, libraries, ambulance districts, fire districts, road & bridge districts, and other special districts to prevent loss of essential operating funds.
- **Require Fiscal Impact Assessments:** Conduct detailed analyses before implementing changes to income or property tax structures to fully understand their effects on rural services and infrastructure.
- **Preserve Local Flexibility:** Maintain local control over property tax rates and revenue tools so communities can meet their unique needs without state-imposed limitations.
- **Diversify and Modernize Revenue Options:** Explore balanced alternatives—such as targeted use taxes, infrastructure investment fees, and business growth incentives—that help sustain essential services without overburdening families.
- **Prioritize Rural Stability:** Dedicate state-level resources or transition funds to support rural areas most affected by revenue changes, ensuring that tax reform strengthens rather than weakens community vitality.