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Members of the General Assembly:

Recent days and weeks have seen a bipartisan realization emerge that a comprehensive ethics reform bill is needed to strengthen the credibility of Missouri's elected officials and the confidence of those they serve. The time to act is now; the people already have shown us the way; and a bipartisan commitment to this reform will lay an essential foundation on which we can build the solutions we need. It is in that spirit I write to you today. As you prepare to gather for the 2010 legislative session, know that I am committed to working together to craft an ethics reform package that is worthy of that name.

While a broad array of ideas have been offered that merit discussion, meaningful ethics reform should be built around four core elements. First, I firmly believe we must start with real and effective contribution limits. Second, the current practice whereby funds can be transferred from committee to committee must end. Third, we must prohibit elected officials from receiving payment for political consulting services. And fourth, we must end the practice of legislators serving as lobbyists of the legislative branch immediately after their term in office.

In 1994, an overwhelming majority of Missouri voters spoke loud and clear – they want real and meaningful controls on the influence of money in politics. In that election, 74% of Missourians voted for tough campaign contribution limits. Defying the predictions of nearly all the experts, the United States Supreme Court upheld Missouri's limits and recognized the people's constitutional right to enact such limits. In 2008, those limits were repealed. No effort to reform the ethical culture of public service in this state – or the ethical stature of those of us who live that service day in and day out – can be true to the manifest will of those we serve unless it reinstates the previous limits on campaign contributions and closes the loopholes that would render them meaningless.

To allow any bill to become law that does not keep faith with the voters on this key issue risks deceiving Missourians by promising reform that such a proposal cannot and does not deliver.

Meaningful ethics reform must begin with contribution limits, but it cannot end there. Regardless of where each of us stands on the issue of contribution limits, Missourians are entitled to take us at our word when we say that voters are entitled to know whose money is financing which campaigns. The practice of transferring funds using non-candidate committees is widespread. Such transfers between committees undermine transparency and weaken

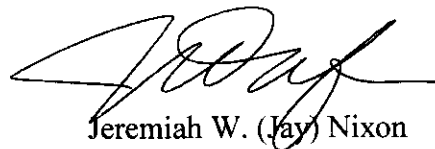
contribution limits. I believe that any meaningful ethics reform must, in addition to reinstating contribution limits, ban all committee-to-committee transfers. If we are serious about disclosure, then closing this loophole should be part of the non-negotiable foundation of any ethics reform legislation.

But we must do more than reform our campaign finance laws if we truly are committed to restoring and improving Missourians' confidence in us as public officials. We also must demonstrate that we have heard the voters' concerns about what behavior should – and should not – be allowed from officeholders once elections are over. Simple common sense demands that the practice of one elected official paying another elected official for “political advice” be outlawed completely and forever. Any effort to enact meaningful ethics reform must prohibit officeholders from taking money – either directly or indirectly – under the guise of “political consulting.” And, to ensure such a prohibition is not circumvented, it should continue for a reasonable period of time after the official leaves office.

Finally, ethics laws around the country, and even in Washington, D.C., have long-recognized the danger of an unregulated “revolving door” between being an elected officeholder in the government one minute and a paid lobbyist of that government the next. In fact, Missouri law already prohibits certain executive branch officers who leave the government from returning to lobby in their former areas of responsibility for a reasonable period. However, Missouri law does not prohibit legislators from becoming paid lobbyists of the legislative branch the minute their successor takes office. Plugging this loophole is the kind of simple and effective reform Missouri voters have the right to expect from us.

In closing, I reiterate that I am committed to working with you to make meaningful improvements, not only to Missouri's ethics laws, but, even more importantly, to the ways in which all of us – we who stand for election and hold these offices – conduct ourselves and the people's business. I have outlined above the four elements that I believe must be part of any such effort. There may be others, but I believe that consensus on these key reforms already has formed, and, therefore, they should be the foundation of our efforts. Each of us owes the Missourians we serve our very best effort toward this important goal, and I believe that the meaningful and bipartisan ethics reforms that we can and must achieve will generate the momentum we need to find bipartisan solutions to the many other issues that the 2010 legislative session holds in store for all of us.

Sincerely,



Jeremiah W. (Jay) Nixon
Governor