

Job creation and training part of Hulshof's agenda

Jim Salter • The Associated Press • July 9, 2008

St. Louis -- Missouri faces stiff competition for jobs and needs to commit to training the work force and creating a climate attractive to business, Republican gubernatorial candidate Kenny Hulshof said Tuesday.

Hulshof was in St. Louis to outline his economic and jobs plans. Currently Missouri's 9th District congressman, Hulshof opposes state Treasurer Sarah Steelman in the Aug. 5 primary election, with the winner expected to face Democratic Attorney General Jay Nixon in November. Republican Gov. Matt Blunt is not seeking re-election.

"We're not just competing with our friends across the river," Hulshof said. "We're not just competing in the Midwest. We're competing globally."

Among the highlights of Hulshof's proposals:

- More restrictions on lawsuits. Blunt signed legislation in 2005 that capped lawsuit awards in personal injury and product liability cases. Hulshof would extend that, for example, by eliminating liability for companies just because crimes happened on their property.
- More restrictions on payments to injured employees through the state workers' compensation and Second Injury Fund. Hulshof said he would seek "common sense" changes such as allowing only one permanent total disability claim per person and ending permanent total disability payments if the injured person gets a new job.
- Adding and retaining quality jobs and improving job training. Hulshof wants to increase state funding for community and technical colleges and strengthen training in math and science. He wants to reward companies that provide jobs with above-average salaries and expand the state's Small Business Incubator program to encourage more startup businesses.

Missouri ranks near the bottom in funding for higher education, Hulshof said. He suggested a funding formula for higher education similar to the one for grades K-12.

- Aiding advanced technology companies, including those in the life sciences. Hulshof said he supports the "Grow Me State Initiative" which proposes seed capital investment and tax credit programs for tech firms. He'd make it a priority if elected.

Some life sciences advocates consider Hulshof an opponent because he does not support embryonic stem cell research. But he said there are many other areas of the life sciences unrelated to embryonic stem cell research.

- Make Missouri a leading distribution hub by capitalizing on access to rivers, roads, railways and airports.

Hulshof spoke at an incubator building not far from the headquarters of Anheuser-Busch, the subject of a hostile takeover bid by Belgian brewer InBev. Hulshof noted that the St. Louis region is dealing with uncertainty over the brewery's future and the recent news that a Chrysler plant in Fenton will close.

"I continue to believe, even given that difficult situation with the Chrysler folks, that our best days are ahead of us in the state," Hulshof said.

Steelman spokesman Spence Jackson reiterated her call last week for repeal of a state law requiring gasoline stations to sell a 10-percent ethanol blend whenever it is not more expensive than traditional gasoline. Some critics blame higher food costs on corn being directed to ethanol production instead of the food supply.

"More and more economists are saying the only way to reverse our decline is to repeal the ethanol mandate, and until Congressman Hulshof will support that, he's just pandering for votes," Jackson said.

Missouri Democratic Party spokesman Jack Cardetti noted that Missouri has lost more than 15,000 jobs since October and has its highest jobless rate in more than a decade.

"Missourians can't afford more of the same when it comes to our economy, which is exactly what would happen if Kenny Hulshof succeeds Matt Blunt," Cardetti said.