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FOR
MISSOURI

info@newmoplan.com | 573-635-0782 | PO Box 1524 Jefferson City Missouri 65102

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For More Information, Contact:
James Harris (573-761-7875)

JUDICIAL SELECTION REFORM GAINS MOMENTUM
SENATE PANEL ENDORSES MEASURE

(Jefferson City, MO) – Today, Senate Joint Resolution 9 (SJR 9) was approved by the Missouri Senate’s Governmental Accountability and Fiscal Oversight Committee. The bill now goes to the full Missouri Senate for debate. SJR 9 provides for more citizen input into the judicial selection process and adds transparency to the process.

“The citizens of Missouri scored a big victory today,” stated Senator Jim Lembke (R, St. Louis), sponsor of SJR 9. “For too long, those who select our highest judges have hidden behind a cloak of secrecy in smoke-filled rooms while choosing those individuals who will interpret our laws. Today, we take the first step in seizing power from special interests and giving it back to the people,” added Lembke.

SJR 9 contains the following provisions:

- The governor could return a panel one time if the Appellate Judicial Commission rigged a panel or did not select the best candidates.
- The governor would have the authority, within sixty days of taking office, to remove members of the commissions who were appointed by the previous governor.
- The list of applicants for judicial appointments would be a public record and posted on the supreme court's website. Nominees submitted to the governor would be subject to a background check, which is not a public record, but must be available to the commission and the governor.
- All information available to the commission would have to be made available to the governor. All hearings, debates and votes would be open to the public, and would require seventy-two hours public notice. Only sessions limited to certain subjects would be closed to the public.
- Gubernatorial appointments to judicial commissions would be subject to senate confirmation.
- No sitting judges would sit on any judicial commission.

House Joint Resolution 10 (HJR 10), a similar measure that was sponsored by Representative Stan Cox (R, Sedalia), was passed by a House panel last month and is awaiting passage by the full House of Representatives.

“The days of a judiciary dominated by special interest are numbered,” stated James Harris, Executive Director of Better Courts for Missouri (BCM). “Missouri’s citizens can look forward

to a day when the Missouri Plan can be restored to its original purpose—getting political heavyweights out of the court room.”

Business people and legal scholars alike testified in favor of SJR 9. They spoke of how the process is currently closed to public scrutiny and lamented the influence that special interest groups, including the Missouri Association of Trial Attorneys, had on the process and that these groups had a strong financial interest in who sits on the judiciary.

To schedule an interview with James Harris, Executive Director, Better Courts for Missouri, please contact James at 573-761-7875 or james@thejharriscompany.com.

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