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Jason Smith's Capitol Report - Friday, August 5, 2016

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Making the Fight Personal August 5, 2016

Over the past 11 days, I have travelled nearly 3,000 miles, visited all 30 counties of Missouri's 8th Congressional District and have visited almost 50 different farms and agricultural businesses. There were early mornings and long days in the scorching Missouri heat over the past two weeks, but that is nothing new to many of the incredible folks I had the opportunity to visit with. Getting to better know and understand firsthand the issues these hardworking farmers and small business owners are dealing with on a daily basis has been a great experience.

Each farm I traveled to over the past two weeks was unique and each farm family I visited had their own way of doing things, many of which were incorporating their own innovation into their operations. For many of the families, farming has been a way of life that has been passed down from generation to generation. In Ste. Genevieve, I visited Oberle Meats, a sausage making business that has been a pillar of the Ste. Genevieve community for 146 years. Today, the business is still run by the Oberle family who have maintained the highest quality standards that have made their meat famous and the centerpiece of many Missouri families special occasions. I also visited 4M Vineyards which is a family run business that started out as an FFA project and has turned into one of the largest concord grape vineyards in Missouri. Or, the Marler's who own cattle, but also oversee a large timber operation. I even got to stop by Country Fish Farms in my hometown and visit the Cahill's whom I have known since I was a kid. They help stock

ponds, lakes and resorts across Missouri that allow many of us to enjoy the great outdoors even more and, during the winter, their farm attracts a family of bald eagles which is a sight to see.

Many of the farms and agriculture businesses I visited not only are committed to producing the highest quality products, they are also committed to the innovation and growth of the agriculture industry in Missouri. For instance, the Fisher Delta Research Center in Portageville is conducting fascinating research recognized across the world. The folks at the Delta Research Center study cotton and rice production as well as crop irrigation systems across the farmlands of southeast Missouri in order to develop better cropping and insect and disease-control systems. I visited Heckemeyer's Sweet Sorghum Farm in Sikeston where owner Matt Heckemeyer is working to unlock sweet sorghums potential by trying it as an animal feed, food-grade syrup and potential fuel source. I visited Jayce Mountain Pork in Fredericktown that is using state-of-the-art technology to produce the highest quality pork product while maintaining the safest standards. Seeing how passionate these farmers and researchers are about developing new and innovative ways to keep agriculture strong in Missouri, I am confident that agriculture will remain our state's number one industry and continue to get stronger into the future.

More importantly, this farm tour provided a fresh perspective on the struggles and issues that farmers and small business owners in southeast and south central Missouri are facing and how I can better serve and fight for the people who call our area home. Regulation happy Washington bureaucrats who have never set foot on a farm in Missouri continue to try every way they can to make life more difficult for those farmers who provide for the needs of our nation and the world and who just want Washington out of their way and off their backs. Washington is out of touch with rural America and they don't understand our traditions and values. For instance, of the 435 members in Congress, less than 100 represent rural America. This makes our struggle fighting not only Washington regulations, but also trying to educate other members of Congress about the importance of the parts of the country that help feed, clothe, and provide shelter for their families. I am incredibly proud to call Missouri's 8th District home, and even more proud to be able to represent the amazing folks, and so many others like them, I had the great opportunity to learn about these past two weeks. As I continue to fight for our district, the names, faces, and families I get to meet increase my resolve and make the challenge to change Washington even more personal.

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