To the leaders of RespectAbility:

I am honored to be able to share my thoughts on how Missouri can continue to improve and accommodate its citizens living with disabilities. I believe Missouri is at its strongest when it is inclusive and accessible to everyone.

As Attorney General, I have always fought against discrimination of any kind, including against citizens with disabilities. In 2010, I created the Attorney General’s Disability Advocacy Roundtable to listen to stakeholders in the disability rights community and learn firsthand about the challenges these individuals face on a daily basis. I served on the Missouri Housing Development Commission (MHDC), where I supported the adoption of a rule requiring new rental construction built through MHDC funding be designed to accommodate people with disabilities. My office recently rebuilt its public website with additional accessibility features. For example, the new website includes alternative text throughout to assist users who employ screen readers in understanding the content and function of images on the site.

I intend to continue my work of supporting those with disabilities as Governor, starting with healthcare. Expanding Medicaid is the fastest way to improve the quality of care we provide to citizens with disabilities. Right now, Missouri is exhibiting some dangerous trends in its healthcare system. A different rural hospital closes every eight months. There is a growing shortage of healthcare professionals across the state. Yet, hospitals are still forced to make further staffing cuts. We cannot expect healthcare outcomes to improve in a system that overworks its staff and underfunds its facilities. Under such an unsustainable model, it is no surprise that the turnover rate for nurses in Missouri grows higher every year. People in our state are driving further from their homes, waiting longer at the doctor’s office, and receiving care from exhausted and less experienced healthcare workers. Access to quality care should not be such an imposition on the lives of Missourians. As Governor, I will work to reverse this trend.

The federal dollars that would come with Medicaid expansion would immediately provide relief to this strained system. And yet, the Missouri legislature refuses to accept the money for purely partisan reasons. They are willing to let Missourians suffer while they try to score political points. They stand idly by as life becomes harder and harder for all Missourians, but particularly for those with disabilities. As Governor, I will make it a top priority to bring that money to our state.

My career, since the time I served prosecuting attorney in Cass County through my tenure as Attorney General, has always been about fighting for those who are too often overlooked. Though we now have legal protections in place for citizens living with disabilities, there is always more that can be done to make our state inclusive accessible. These changes can be as small as improving the readability of a website, or as ambitious as revitalizing our healthcare system. As Governor, I will continue to work to make a difference, no matter how small. Any improvement we can make in the lives of Missourians is worthy of our efforts.

Sincerely,

Chris Koster