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a first class county with a charter form of government with at least nine hundred thousand inhabitants, and adjoins at least four other counties.

Franklin County qualifies under the first quoted exception in that it is a county of the first class with fewer than 900,000 inhabitants that borders three first class counties, Jefferson County, St. Louis County, and St. Charles County. Franklin County also qualifies under the second quoted exception in that it is a first class county without a charter form of government which adjoins a first class county with a charter form of government with at least 900,000 inhabitants (St. Louis County) and adjoins at least four counties, the three previously mentioned, plus Warren, Gasconade, Crawford, and Washington.

The purpose of statutory construction is to ascertain the legislature's intent. *Budding v. SSM Healthcare Sys.*, 19 S.W.3d 678 (Mo. banc 2000). The words should be considered in their plain and ordinary meaning. *State ex rel. Div. of Child Support Enforcement v. Gosney*, 928 S.W.2d 892 (Mo. Ct. App. 1996).

Section 321.015 states a general prohibition that directors of fire protection districts cannot contemporaneously hold offices or employment by the state or its political subdivisions. It then lists a series of exceptions to that general proposition. Exceptions to general propositions are to be narrowly construed. *Butler v. Mitchell-Hugeback, Inc.*, 895 S.W.2d 15 (Mo. banc 1995). However, the exceptions referenced above are clear and remove members of the board of directors of such fire protection districts from the prohibition of holding offices or employment from the state or other political subdivisions. When the language is clear and unambiguous, there is no room for a contrary construction. *Brownstein v. Rhomberg-Haglin & Assoc., Inc.*, 824 S.W.2d 13 (Mo. banc 1992). Accordingly, a director of the Sullivan Fire Protection District is not prohibited from holding a lucrative office or employment with the state or a political subdivision.

CONCLUSION

Because the Sullivan Fire Protection District lies within Franklin County, which is a first class county with fewer than 900,000 inhabitants and borders three first class counties, and because Franklin County is a first class county without a charter form of government, which adjoins a first class county with a charter form of government with at least 900,000 inhabitants and adjoins at least four other counties, directors of that district may contemporaneously hold the position of director and hold a lucrative office or be employed by the state or a political subdivision thereof.

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Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Nixon", written in a cursive style.

JEREMIAH W. (JAY) NIXON
Attorney General