

State Senator
Shalonn L.
"Ziki" Curls
District 9



2011 Capitol Report

Dear Constituent:

My first year as your representative in the Missouri Senate has been a challenging year for our General Assembly and for our state. Missouri's current fiscal problems stem partly from the national economic downturn that began in late 2008 and continues today. Federal stimulus dollars alleviated some of the pain in Missouri, but that revenue stream has ended. The budget cuts to K-12 education, higher education, social services and other important services and programs that Missourians rely upon likely will continue, unless we see a dramatic improvement in the state and national economies or major changes in state tax policy. However, I was able to secure monies for community development and crime prevention services in Kansas City.

Like many large American cities, Kansas City faces a number of issues, such as urban poverty, blight, and changes in the structure of the city's economy. Manufacturing jobs that once provided a middle-class lifestyle for thousands of Missourians have largely moved overseas. Public education in Kansas City has been beset by one problem after another, with inner-city students suffering the most from the constant turmoil. Fortunately, the citizens of Kansas City are working together to tackle some of the most pressing issues facing our city. It will take innovative leadership and the cooperation of all Kansas City residents to solve these issues, and I am confident we will succeed.

One of these issues is the fact that the Kansas City Missouri Public School District will lose its state accreditation on Jan. 1, 2012. This is the second time in 12 years this has occurred. There are huge decisions that lie ahead of us as we try to determine to best road for success of our students.

I sponsored a public forum along with other state elected officials and various community organizations, that was held on Nov. 15, 2011, to address the loss of accreditation of the district. The commissioner of the Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education provided feedback on the history of the school district, as well as the options that are available as the process moves forward.

It is time that we come together as a community to resolve the persistent problems plaguing our school district for the sake of our children. We can only improve the district if we all work together. I urge you to get involved; attend meetings, write letters, call state officials and tell your friends and neighbors to do the same. The future of the KCMO School District is in our hands. Let's do everything possible to give our kids a chance at a successful education.

My 2011 Capitol Report provides a snapshot of some of the issues we debated that impact the lives of Kansas City residents, and it details a couple of the community projects with which I am intimately involved. Thank you for allowing me to serve you in the Missouri Senate, and please contact my office if you have any questions or comments.

Shalonn "Ziki" Curls

A Part of History

During the 2011 legislative session, I became the first woman *and* the first African-American woman in Missouri legislative history to sponsor a bill as a member of the Missouri House, and then usher that bill to final passage in the Missouri Senate.

House Bill 229 changes the laws regarding the Public School Retirement System of Kansas City, increasing the viability of the retirement system to enhance its ability to pay out benefits. HB 229 ensures that retirees will receive the benefits they have accrued if the retirement system is terminated or discontinued, and it prohibits any retiree from collecting retirement benefits while working as a substitute or working part-time for the system if he or she earns more than 50 percent of his or her annual salary. Finally, HB 229 ensures that if an employee of the public school system leaves to perform military service and dies in the line of duty - his or her survivors will be entitled to death benefits.

It's pretty interesting to sponsor a bill in one chamber of the General Assembly and then handle the same bill in the other chamber. I know there have been a few lawmakers in the past who have accomplished this, and I am grateful to my colleagues in the House and Senate for their support in getting this bill passed.

Improving Access to Dental Care

This bill, **HB 591**, which I handled in the Senate, authorizes the Missouri Dental Board to issue a limited teaching license to a dentist employed as an instructor in an accredited dental school located in Missouri. It is my hope that this legislation will provide greater access to quality dental care for residents, a perennial problem among those in the urban core, as poor dental health can lead to a host of other more serious health problems.

Over the past decade, published studies have linked tooth loss to dementia and associated it with poor pregnancy outcomes. Tooth decay may increase the risk of heart disease; diabetes can increase the risk of gum disease, and conversely, leaving this problem untreated can make blood sugar control next to impossible. Nationwide, an estimated 51 million school hours are missed annually because of health problems affecting the mouth. I am hopeful this measure will increase access to oral care for those who currently go without it and risk their health.

Election Reform Measure Fails on Final Day

House Bill 108, which I handled in the Senate, is a good government bill that clears up some confusion in ethics laws and while leveling the playing field for political donations to candidates.

The bill would have allowed contributions to a political action committee from any corporation, association, or partnership. Furthermore, a candidate would not be prohibited from purchasing tickets, membership dues, meals, advertising, or other similar items from a political action committee if the purchases or expenses were related to education or service in office. Any elected official is allowed to incur expenses from a political action committee if they are related to education or service in office. Unfortunately, this measure died on the last day of the regular session.

TANF Drug Testing Punishes the Poor

I was among five state senators who voted against **House Bill 73**, which requires those receiving assistance from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program to submit to drug testing if there are any suspicions of drug abuse. I fear this new law feeds the public perception that welfare recipients are just using the money they receive to buy drugs.

In reality, more than 108,000 Missouri citizens rely on TANF to feed and clothe their children each day. I believe this misguided law will increase poverty in Missouri and jeopardize families just struggling to make ends meet.

There is no compassion in this legislation because it offers no treatment programs for those who test positive for drug use, and the few state drug treatment programs available are already overwhelmed by those seeking help.

General Assembly Honors a Kansas City Legend

Baseball legend Buck O'Neil is a Kansas City icon and was considered the elder statesman of Negro Leagues Baseball. I was proud to be the sponsor of a resolution this year which designates Nov. 13, 2011, as "Buck O'Neil Day" in Missouri in honor of the first African-American coach in Major League Baseball.

John Jordan "Buck" O'Neil was born in Florida on Nov. 13, 1911, and later became a first baseman and manager in Negro Leagues baseball, most notably in the Negro American League with the Kansas City Monarchs. O'Neil continued playing baseball as late as 1955, and later became the first African-American to coach in the majors with the Chicago Cubs in 1962. As a baseball scout, O'Neil signed Hall of Famers Ernie Brooks, Billy Williams and Lou Brock. However, O'Neil himself failed to make the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown by one vote. To all of his friends and admirers who had gathered at the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City on the day selections to Cooperstown were announced, O'Neil displayed great class and humility.

Buck O'Neil was a role model and a hero to black baseball players and a respected voice in the baseball community, tirelessly promoting the need to recognize and honor Negro League players. Thanks in large part to O'Neil's efforts, the Baseball Hall of Fame held a special election a few years ago to honor outstanding Negro League players and executives. A bronze statue of O'Neil graces the entrance to the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum at 18th & Vine in Kansas City, a museum O'Neil played a major role in establishing.



"Buck" O'Neil

Senator Curls' Annual Public Health & Safety Fair

Family health and safety is an important concern for the residents of Kansas City, which is why I have sponsored a Public Health and Safety Fair each of the past few summers. By teaming up with the Kansas City Missouri Police Department, the Office of Minority Health, Swope Health Services and the Black Healthcare Coalition, we have offered members of the community free health and dental screenings and given away bicycles, helmets, smoke detectors and car seats for those who participated. We also sponsored a 5-K walk-run to encourage people to make exercise a part of their daily routine.



My goal in hosting the Public Health and Safety Fair is twofold: We must find ways to combat the critical problem of childhood obesity while also letting our community know what services are available to enhance their quality of life. Hundreds of children and adults took part in this year's health and safety fair at Swope Health Services in Kansas City this past June, and with your help, we can make next year's health and safety fair an even bigger success.



Left: A display of the items given away at the event. Above: Senator Curls, left, poses with Ronald McDonald and local morning news anchor Kelly Jones.

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Helping Small Businesses & Entrepreneurs

One of the things that make our country great is the spirit of entrepreneurship – from a child's first lemonade stand to a multi-million dollar department store chain started by a young man from Hamilton, Missouri, named James Cash Penney. While many of us have a great idea for a new product or a service, few of us know how to actually start our own business.

In April 2012, we will be hosting sessions designed to teach the basics of starting a business for new entrepreneurs and to educate existing small business owners about the state's procurement process. The workshops will also cover niche marketing in the emerging green energy field, understanding the risks and benefits of partnering and teaming arrangements, and learning how to successfully market MBE/DBE status with the public and private sector.

If you are interested in learning more about the next small business workshop, please contact my office: 201 W. Capitol Ave., Rm. 425, Jefferson City, Missouri 65101 or by phone at (573) 751-3158.

Partnership for Prescription Assistance Program

If you don't have prescription coverage and can't afford your medicines, call 1-888-4PPA-NOW (1-888-477-2669) or go to www.pparx.org.

More than 2,500 brand-name and generic medicines are covered. You may receive your medicine for free or at a low discounted rate.

Bill Tracking

To review bills that are "truly agreed and passed" by the Missouri General Assembly, please visit the Senate website at **www.senate.mo.gov** and click on the "Truly Agreed Bills" link under the "Legislation" tab at the top of the Senate homepage.

During the session, you can follow legislative action each day by clicking on the other links under the Legislation tab.



Senator Curls visited with the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Kansas City on April 6, 2011.