



WEEKLY REPORT

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AFTER MINORITY PARTY DELAYING TACTICS, SENATE SUCCEEDS IN PASSING TORT REFORM AND FY 2005 BUDGET

It's a pity when lawmakers allow politics to interfere with its responsibility to conduct the business of the people, but that is exactly what happened in the Missouri Senate on Wednesday when the minority party unexpectedly shut down floor debate by adjourning at noon. The move surprised and disappointed majority party members and threatened to set our schedule seriously behind at the most crucial time of year.

While there were numerous Republicans in the Senate side galleries, only a couple of Senators were on the floor. Democrats took advantage of the situation and unexpectedly called for adjournment. The Democratic lieutenant governor was presiding and quickly ruled the motion in order and banged the gavel for adjournment.

It was a slick move.

However, ultimately it could backfire on the minority party and may do permanent damage to the Missouri Senate.

The Senate is a body of tradition and that's something that I have always been proud of.

Democrats shut down debate on Wednesday in an attempt to block passage of tort reform legislation.

The Senate majority would never have chosen to use the raw power of the majority to deny the minority party the benefit of the protection of Senate tradition. The action of the Democrats on Wednesday; however, forfeited that protection. It is a long-standing Senate tradition that the motion for adjournment is made by the Senate Majority Floor Leader. By disregarding Senate traditions so flagrantly and choosing to use a Senate rule, the minority party has now forfeited the protections of Senate tradition. If you live by the rules, you die by the rules.

On Thursday when session convened, the majority party shut down further debate on the tort reform bill by passing what is known as “the previous question,” a rule that immediately shuts down debate on the issue.

It’s a procedure that is routinely used in the Missouri House of Representatives, but has been utilized on five occasions in the Senate in the last 35 years.

The tort reform bill did pass and has been sent to the governor.

Despite the disruptions in the middle of the week, the Senate did succeed in passing its version of the budget.

Totaling \$18.8 billion, the fiscal year 2005 operating budget includes an increase in education.

Elementary and secondary education would receive a total of \$4.7 billion, not counting additional money for such items as busing and special education.

Higher education is scheduled to receive \$1.04 billion in state and federal funds, up almost \$19 million from this year.

Missouri Southern State University would receive over \$20.9 million next year, an increase of \$488,000 over this fiscal year.

Crowder College would receive an additional \$101,200 over last year, with their budget appropriation totaling \$4.3 million. Crowder would receive an additional \$200,000 for its alternative energy program.

Other provisions in the Senate’s version of the FY 2005 budget:

- The Department of Transportation would receive a total of \$1.6 billion.
- The Department of Public Safety, which includes the Missouri Highway Patrol and the Missouri Water Patrol, would receive \$370 million, while the Department of Corrections would receive \$573.4 million.
- The Senate budget would allocate \$971 million for the Department of Mental Health.
- \$723 million was allocated for state employee benefits. This is an increase over last year’s appropriation of \$652 million. The increased funding is intended to pay for salary adjustments, retirement benefits and increases in health care costs for state employees.

Final differences between the House and Senate versions of the budget will be worked out in joint conference committees made up of both senators and representatives. Lawmakers

have until 6 p.m. May 7 to complete work on the budget. Once finalized, the budget will take effect on July 1.

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