

Column from Sen. Matt Bartle for
week of April 18, 2005

Final Weeks of Legislative Session

The 2005 session of the Missouri Legislature is quickly winding down and with only three weeks left before we adjourn on May 13th there is much left to be done. In the coming days, the Senate must take up and pass the state's proposed \$20 billion budget by the constitutional deadline of just over two weeks from now. Also, a compromise version of the newly drafted school funding formula still needs to be given final passage by the house and senate.

In addition to these high profile bills, one issue that is very important to me still needs to be passed by the Missouri House. This bill, SB 32, would impose common sense regulation on the out of control pornography industry in Missouri. As I discussed before in this column, this bill would protect communities all across our state from the harmful effects of these smut shops by requiring them to close after midnight, by prohibiting nude dancing and requiring performers to be at least 21 years of age. These businesses have been shown to depress local property values and promote crime and it is high time the legislature fights back against the aggressive expansion of this industry in our state.

After easily passing the Senate by an overwhelming margin, this bill has now been sent to the House of Representatives for their consideration. The proliferation of these businesses is an embarrassment to our State and I look forward to working with the House to bring our laws up to date.

Speaking of embarrassments to our State, last year I brought my readers up to speed on an egregious abuse of tax payer dollars in the form of a loophole in Missouri's retirement laws. Here's the problem. Current law allows certain officials, called administrative law judges (ALJs) who review appeals of decisions of state agencies, to become eligible for special retirement benefits the day that they take the job if they have previous state

service. A good example of how this system can be abused came last year when Governor Holden appointed a person who served a mere two weeks on the Labor Commission as an ALJ and will collect a lifetime pension benefit totaling more than \$26,000 per year once he retires. Later in the same month, Governor Holden appointed another political friend to fill this same spot, this time a legislator whose retirement benefits were automatically increased by around \$19,000 per year even though he only served a matter of a few months before being replaced by the new governor.

In response to these appointments, I announced that I would file legislation to close this loophole in state law during the next session of the Missouri General Assembly. In December of last year I prefiled a bill to do just that. This bill was rolled together with similar legislation by other senators and passed by the House and Senate and has been sent to Governor Blunt for his signature.

With abuses like this of taxpayer's dollars it is no wonder that the public is cynical of what goes on in Jefferson City. Giving out 'golden parachutes' to people who are appointed to serve the public is the kind of thing that gives Missouri government a black eye. I am pleased to see that this gaping loophole giving special benefits to a privileged few will now be closed.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.state.mo.us. Thank you again for making it possible for me to serve in the Missouri Senate.

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