

Column from Sen. Matt Bartle for  
Week of July 11, 2005

## **MISSOURI LEGISLATURE RESPONDS TO GROWTH OF PORNOGRAPHY INDUSTRY**

Missourians are a tolerant people with a proud history of individual liberty and a strong streak of self-reliance. It is these traits that prompted many people who settled here as pioneers to originally head west despite the hardships in hope of finding a better, more independent life. Yet despite our sense of laissez-faire we also realize that in a civilized society not all things should be accepted and tolerated. Freedom, like everything else in life, is not absolute. There must be common-sense limitations for the good of the community. We've all heard the saying that even freedom of speech doesn't include the right to yell "fire" in a crowded theater.

This week I had the chance to once again travel along I-70 and saw the string of smut shops in little metal sheds with their gaudy, tasteless advertising that have sprouted up at seemingly every exit ramp. While our state spends thousands of dollars trying to coax tourist from across the nation to vacation here, these businesses give the impression that visitors have entered a tasteless, sordid world more reminiscent of Pinocchio's fictional "Pleasure Island" than family-friendly Missouri.

Many people agree in principle that these shops are an eyesore but believe that they are unconditionally protected by the First Amendment so there is nothing that can be done. I am pleased to report that not only does the First Amendment allow society to impose common-sense regulations on these purveyors of pornography but that the Missouri Legislature has done just that. My trip to Jefferson City along I-70 this week was to attend a ceremony in Governor Matt Blunt's office where he signed into law a bill that contains language I sponsored this past session to rein in the nearly unbridled growth of this industry.

The new law has a number of important provisions. It bans anyone under the age of 21 from entering an adult business; requires a reasonable distance be kept between performers and patrons; prohibits total nudity and prevents “megaplexes” where multiple adult businesses congregate under the same roof.

These businesses care for little other than their own bottom line. They mar our scenic landscape, they prey on our kids, harm property values and act as parasites on the healthy development of our communities. The new law is designed to mitigate their harmful effects on property values, reduce crime and prostitution and protect minors from exposure to this coarse and tawdry industry. During the course of the legislative session, as we were debating the merits of my legislation, I distributed to my colleagues studies showing a link between smut shops and the negative effects such businesses can have.

It is true that Missourians cherish individual liberty and are reluctant to interfere in someone else's business, but when that business negatively impacts our state, our communities and our families it is time to take action. How many of us would want one of these little metal sheds moving in next door or down the street? Would we want our kids to have to walk by one on the way to school or would we want one near a playground? Clearly, the answer is a resounding "no." While some parts of the state have the protection of local zoning laws that require smut shops to keep their distance, many areas do not. This bill will give all of our state a valuable tool to control the spread of this industry.

Missouri may be the land of the pioneers but it is high time we send the message that it is no longer the "wild west."

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](mailto:matt_bartle@senate.state.mo.us) or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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