

Column from Sen. Matt Bartle for  
Week of Aug. 8, 2005

## **Major Bills in Review**

On August 28th most of the bills the legislature passed during the 2005 legislative session which ended in May will go into effect. As I've mentioned in the past, I'm privileged to serve as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and many significant changes to Missouri's civil and criminal laws were considered and passed by the bipartisan committee's nine members. Here's a look at some of the provisions the committee approved and which were eventually passed by the full legislature:

**Meth Production:** The illegal manufacture of this powerful drug has become far too common in the Show-Me State. In an attempt to curb the production of meth, a new law now requires that pseudoephedrine (a crucial Meth ingredient found in cold medicines like Sudafed) will have to be dispensed by a pharmacy. No prescription will be required.

**Drunk Driving:** In January, the Judiciary Committee heard compelling and heart-wrenching testimony from the parents of a little girl named Jessica who, along with her grandpa, was killed by a drunk driver who drove his car into their yard as they were out checking the mail. A new law was passed that increases the penalty for drunk drivers who kill another person. The law also requires the offender to serve at least 85% of his sentence.

**Sexual Offender Registry:** We expanded the law to allow counties to maintain sexual offender websites, including pictures of offenders (this is similar to the statewide registry created under a bill I sponsored 2 years ago).

**Sexual Offender Loophole:** As discussed before in this column, earlier this year the Missouri Supreme Court threw out part of the law that protected children from sexual misconduct. The court ruled that the law was too vague. In response, I added an amendment to an omnibus crime bill to plug the loophole. Since this provision was

needed quickly we added an emergency clause to it so that it has already gone into effect when the governor signed this bill earlier this summer.

On a related note, there were two provisions that did not come through the Judiciary Committee but which are worthy of mention:

**Elder Abuse:** There are few crimes more despicable than those against our senior citizens. These folks have spent a lifetime raising their kids, paying their taxes and contributing to our communities in a hundred different ways. Many pinch and save just to get by. But how many times have we heard stories of some criminal who by one scheme or another defrauds an older person of their hard-earned savings? This year, the legislature passed a law increasing the penalty for anyone who steals over \$50,000 from a senior citizen to a Class A felony, punishable by a sentence of up to 30 years.

**"Safe Place" for Newborns:** The law that allows mothers of an unwanted baby to leave the child with certain caregivers without facing prosecution was expanded to include babies up to 1 year old. As a society we must value every life and giving a desperate mom a way to give her baby a new life without any penalty is a step in the right direction.

The provisions mentioned above represent only a small number of the bills considered by legislature and the Judiciary Committee. In all, nearly 120 bills were referred to the committee for review. Of course, not all the bills were passed and many were rolled together but it is my hope that the net effect of the committee's work will be to improve Missouri's laws and to offer added protections for those who live under them.

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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