

Column from Sen. Matt Bartle for
Week of Sep. 26, 2005

Sen. Bartle Asks for Citizen Input to Improve State

It is wonderful to finally feel some cool air. Fall is here. The approach of autumn reminds me that the Missouri Senate will soon assemble again in Jefferson City for our annual 2006 legislative session that begins in January.

For a legislator, fall is the time to get ready for the upcoming session by researching and preparing bills to be prefiled as early as December 1st. I believe that government functions best when it has the active involvement of its citizens so I welcome any suggestions you might have on how to make our state better.

For example, as I've mentioned in the past, one of the bills I've committed to file will dramatically increase penalties on child sexual offenders. This week I received a list of suggestions from people in Jackson County with ideas on how our laws protecting Missouri's kids can be improved. We will look through this list and see if we can incorporate some of these ideas into the bill that I will be filing. This is only one example of how citizens can help shape our state's public policy.

Another example came earlier this year when a father and mother of a 7 year old little girl came before the Senate Judiciary Committee and told us their tragic story of how their daughter Jessica, along with her grandpa, was killed by a drunk driver whose car careened out of control into their front yard. This personal involvement helped lead to a new law passed by the legislature strengthening our drunken driving law.

Not all suggestions brought to the legislature relate to personal tragedies. Sometimes people just notice a way to streamline our laws in ways that cut unnecessary "red tape" or make government function more smoothly. If you have an idea for a bill that would improve our state in some way, please do not hesitate to contact my office at the number provided below.

On an unrelated note, I wanted to share with you a report that came to my office this week from a law enforcement official in St. Louis. She wrote to update me on the progress being made under a new state law that I sponsored last year and that became effective in January of 2005. This law requires all felons to give a DNA sample that can then be cross-referenced with case files from unsolved crimes. She writes that going in to this year they had three high profile unsolved cases. One, a rape and murder of an elderly victim, was solved earlier this year by the new law. The second was solved last week. It involves a heinous tale of a brutal rape and assault where a woman was bludgeoned nearly to death. The new law is working and predators that have terrorized society with impunity are steadily being brought to justice.

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.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

###