

Column from Sen. Matt Bartle for
Week of Nov. 21, 2005

NEW LEGISLATIVE SESSION LOOMS – SEN. BARTLE TO PREFILE BILLS

We are now officially in the thick of the holiday season. With Thanksgiving behind us and Christmas just around the corner, kids everywhere are counting down the days until December 25th. The arrival of the holiday season is a reminder that the 2006 session of the Missouri General Assembly will be here in just a few short weeks.

Unlike the U.S. Congress, which meets nearly year-round, the Missouri General Assembly is truly a citizen legislature. We convene in early January each year and adjourn in mid-May. We are generally in session from Monday through Thursday although some weeks we may have session on Friday or even on the weekends if legislative business is especially pressing.

In preparation for the beginning of the legislative session in January, Missouri Senate rules allow bills to be prefiled on December 1st. The senate is a very traditional body and the most senior member of the senate is given the first opportunity to file bills. He or she picks their top three priority bills and they are each assigned a number. We begin renumbering during odd years and on even numbered years we simply pick up where we left off. In 2007 we'll begin with Senate Bill 1 but the first bill to be filed for 2006 will be Senate Bill 557. Conventional wisdom holds that bills that are pre-filed and get a low number are more likely to pass but passing bills is more art than science so there is no guarantee.

This year I will be prefiling several bills. I'll have a chance to talk more about many of them in the future but for now I'll simply share a brief summary of a few of them.

As I've been promising since last April, this session I will file a bill dramatically strengthening Missouri's laws on child sexual predators. Last session, I was able to pass the first part of my plan requiring certain repeat offenders to wear a GPS tracking unit - even after they've served their time. However, the second part of this plan will target sexual predators of children and will impose mandatory prison sentences of double or triple those currently in statute. I will be proposing sentences of up to 30 years to life for certain offenses and will propose a sweeping revision of many other laws designed to protect kids.

I will also propose legislation streamlining Missouri's online sexual offender registry in order to more accurately track the addresses of convicted sex offenders.

Other legislation I intend to profile includes a bill to make permanent a law I was able to pass two years ago that required every felon to give a DNA sample for law enforcement to cross-check against a registry of evidence from "cold crimes". This law has been very successful and has solved many crimes in its first year of operation, including unsolved rape cases and a host of other crimes.

These are a few of the bills I'm working on. If you have an idea for legislation or for a way to make Missouri's government function more efficiently, please let me know. My contact information is below.

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.

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