

# **CAPITOL REPORT**

## **Senator Luann Ridgeway**

### **February 24, 2005**

## **Valentine's Day Show Down**

There wasn't much love shown last week in the Capitol on Valentine's Day. You may have already heard that the Senate stayed up all night on February 14th. This was because a filibuster was going on. It started at 4:00 p.m. on Monday and did not end until around 6:45 a.m. Tuesday morning.

So, for the first time in anyone's memory, the Missouri Senate was in session all night long. On the surface, this "all nighter" was due to a battle over changing the name of "Southwest Missouri State University" to just "Missouri State University". The University of Missouri is really peeved about this name change. Therefore, their Senator (from Columbia, MO) pledged to talk and talk and talk (filibuster) so as to clog up all the work of the Missouri Senate in an effort to get the bill sponsor to call off the name change proposal. The senator representing the SW Missouri State University area, refused to give in. Finally, the opposition couldn't go on anymore and a vote was taken on the bill about 6:30 a.m.

But the real battle wasn't about the name change. Here's what was going on behind the scenes.

For this battle to make sense, a filibuster needs to be understood. A filibuster is traditionally considered to be a "talk 'til you drop" session (remember Jimmy Stuart's famous filibuster in the movie "Mr. Smith goes to Washington"?). It's a tool used by a senator or a groups of senators who do not have the votes to stop a bill, but who intend to make all the other business of the Senate come to a grinding halt while they talk. In effect, they stall with the hope that the other side will give in and not pass the bill or change it so it's less offensive to the minority who filibusters.

The tradition of the Missouri Senate up to this point has been to have breaks during a filibuster session. For example, a filibuster may start at 3:00 p.m. but would halt around midnight. Then all the senators would go home, sleep, shower and come back at it again at 9:00 a.m. or so the next morning.

An aggressive group of filibustering senators could do this for days.

It is highly unlikely that the framers of our constitution intended for us to have wimpy filibusters. It breaks the intended operation of our system to have a minority totally take seize to the senate.

Now the rules have changed. We are no longer having "wimpy" filibusters. Rather, we made a statement that, if you are going to filibuster, then prepare to talk 'til you drop.

This change is significant because:

- 1) The senate has a hard time (real hard time) breaking any tradition. This proves that, with term limits, we have elected a group of senators who are willing to make changes.
- 2) With the new rules for filibusters, it will be difficult for a minority to totally grind the proceedings of the senate to a halt for any extended period of time
- 3) Even with the change, nothing is done to harm the ability to have free and fair debate on the senate floor. Everyone will still have an opportunity to be heard.

Hopefully, we won't be plagued with filibusters this session. But it is likely that at least one or two will occur again. When it does, it is my hope that we will stick to the new rules requiring a filibuster to be continuous. This is a necessary change if we are going to maintain open debate and allow our Constitution to operate properly.

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