



MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

Robert Mayer
25th Senate District

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 331
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

A Weekly Column for the
Week of **January 17**, 2005

Contact: Irene Murray
(573) 751-3859

Senate Committees In Full Swing

JEFFERSON CITY – The Missouri Senate stood adjourned on Martin Luther King Day to observe the holiday honoring the civil rights leader and his accomplishments. The Senate had traditionally worked through all recognized state holidays in order to complete the business of the people by the Constitutional deadline of mid-May. This year is the third consecutive year in which the Senate suspended operations on the day marking the (approximate) birth of Dr. King.

Senators began the shortened legislative week introducing a number of bills ranging in intent from revising business tax policy to addressing animal feeding operations. Once bills are introduced, they are referred to the Senate committee whose title most closely matches the bill's purpose. Bills in committee are often given public hearings to enlist the thoughts, comments and suggestions offered by people outside the capitol.

As vice-chairman of the Senate's Judiciary and Civil/Criminal Jurisprudence Committee, I heard testimony on a number of bills including legislation that would create criminal charges for using audiovisual recording devices in movie theaters; allowing courts to order convicted persons to pay costs associated with prostitution-related arrests; allowing county law enforcement agencies to have sexual offender registry websites; and allowing for the termination of parental rights subsequent to the domestic murder of a spouse.

As an Education Committee member, this week I heard testimony on a bill that would rename Southwest Missouri State University to Missouri State University. Name change proponents contend dropping the school's regional distinction will boost collegiate prestige, and in turn enrollment. Opponents feel the renaming would dilute the mission of, and create problems for the University of Missouri, which some consider to be the state's flagship public college system.

I also belong to the Appropriations Committee, which this week took public testimony on the first of the budget bills funding the state's programs and services. Traditionally, the public did not have an opportunity to express their views on state spending before the budget panel. (The budget meetings could be publicly attended, but no public comment period existed.) However, recognizing the merits of listening to ideas from people outside the capitol, panel members this year actively sought public input. The total state budget has come in at around \$19 billion in recent years.

All bills earning committee approval travel to the Senate floor for debate by the full body. Senate passage moves bills to the House of Representatives, where the legislation must earn similar approval. Joint passage moves bills to the governor's desk.

The Missouri Senate convenes again on Monday, January 24. Two days later, I and my lawmaking colleagues in the House and Senate will hear Governor Blunt's State-of-the-State address and budget message.

Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid, Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.