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Isn't it Funny...

Op-Ed Piece Submitted to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch by: Sen. John Griesheimer, R-Washington
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As this year's legislative session draws to a close it has become glaringly obvious to me that I have been "penned" as the 2005 Whipping Boy for the Post-Dispatch. However, being known in the capitol as the senator from the "Fighting 26th" I would like to give your readers and my constituents an alternative perspective of Senate Bill 179, dealing with the practices of regulating utility rates in Missouri. However, unlike the perspective you offer, mine is that of someone who has actually stepped foot in the capitol this year and was present for all hearings and debates you so poorly portray without witnessing firsthand.

It is important to note that Senate Bill 179 allows electric utilities to more quickly adjust consumer rates based on increases **and decreases** of fuel costs. This creates a greater stability in the market which in turn can mean lower rates for customers. The concept is very similar to the current practices and oversights of the propane gas utility industry. Unlike you imply, there are a number of safeguards still in place to guarantee no undue costs are being passed on to the consumer.

Electric utility providers will still have to go before the Public Service Commission for a "prudence review" within 18 months after any additional charge was instituted. At that time the PSC can revoke fuel adjustment costs made by the utility if they find the company was not making wise fuel purchases that were in the best interest of their customers. If any adjustment is revoked, the utility would then be responsible to credit consumers for those adjustments. This measure only addresses the fluctuation in fuel costs; therefore, any undue costs that are not associated with increases or decreases in fuel costs will not be added to consumers' bills.

In an article published on Saturday, May 7, 2005, I was represented as a senator who is not interested in protecting consumers. This falsehood was further perpetuated by your editorial board which again misrepresented my words.

I have never been anti-consumer. I come to the capitol each day to represent the best interests of the constituents who have so graciously elected me. I am appalled that as reported by your Mr. Sorkin and repeated by the editorial staff to be labeled as anything other.

My statements regarding paid consumer advocates, especially that of "We're not mind-readers here... I'm not going to do their job for them." was clearly taken out of context. I responded to the lack of their appearance by noting that it is not my job to make sure these paid advocates do their jobs, nor can I be responsible for whether or not they participate in public hearings. But in no way is that meant to suggest that I will not do my job, which is to protect the interests of my constituents.

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If at any time, either the Public Service Commission consumer-advocate or any other person wished to contact me, they would find I am extremely easy to reach and would have invited them to participate.

You state it as: "Funny, but in the old days, that was precisely what a fair-minded state senator or representative was elected to do: represent the best interests of consumers as well as the legitimate needs of industry. Not any more."

I find it "funny", that in the old days, editors did not judge a man, his character, or his job performance based on a single statement taken out of context by a reporter who did not even attend the event he so ineptly depicted to the public.

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