



SENATOR MATT BARTLE

District 8 – Capitol Building, Room 431 Jefferson City, MO 65101

**Column for Week of:
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Bill Outlawing Funeral Protesting Protects the Rights of Grieving Families

Last week the Missouri Senate passed its first piece of legislation of the new 2006 legislative session. This bill protects the privacy and dignity of the families of soldiers killed in the line of duty. While many of us can agree the bill should not be necessary, the disturbing actions of some individuals have required us to pass this measure.

Although funeral protests might seem an odd subject to those unfamiliar with the issue, the acts of a few have proven so reprehensible that legislation is needed. Sadly, certain citizens have seized on this most sacred of ceremonies to be a platform for their political views and regularly attend the funerals of American soldiers who have died in combat overseas. This time to commemorate the sacrifices of those brave Americans who have given what President Lincoln once called “the last full measure of devotion” has become a time when protesters celebrate the deaths of American soldiers directly in front of grieving family members. Protesters taunt and berate mourning families in an attempt to draw attention to their political views.

This legislation was introduced after a protest at the funeral of Edward Lee Myers, a St. Joseph resident and specialist with the U.S. Army. Spc. Myers was killed by a car bomb on July 27 in Samarra, Iraq. He was just 21 years old.

On January 18, members of the Senate judiciary committee, which I chair, heard testimony from Myers’ wife, Jean, about the effect the protests had on their family, especially her 6-year-old son.

Committees usually take weeks to review legislation before sending it to the Senate chamber for a full vote. However, due to the compelling testimony from Mrs. Jean Myers, I called for a committee vote during that same hearing where the bill passed unanimously out of committee. It then received unanimous approval by the full Senate and was sent to the House of Representatives for their consideration.

While we must respect the Constitutional free speech rights of all Americans, no family should ever have to lose a loved one at such a young age and then have to endure the situation experienced by the Meyers family.

SB 578 prohibits individuals from protesting at funerals in Missouri within one hour prior to the beginning of any funeral service and until one hour after the service has concluded.

This measure helps to protect the families of those fighting for our freedoms. American soldiers and their families have earned our respect. This bill ensures that their sacrifice will be honored.

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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