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Into the Abyss: Combating Child Sexual Predators

During my time in Jefferson City I have listened to debate on and voted on literally thousands of issues. These run the gamut from mundane to fascinating. By and large it is an interesting and thought-provoking exercise, as a free people work through the myriad matters necessary to the functioning of a democracy.

However, the past several days have taken the Missouri Senate on a journey through the dark, unseemly world that I wish did not exist. But far from the ordered, civilized world where the vast majority of Missourians reside, there is another dimension—a dark abyss of child sexual abuse.

In modern times, in many circles, political correctness has tried to convince us that sexual predation is merely an illness, and I have been criticized in the past for stating that this is an evil. But I firmly believe the horrors inflicted on innocent children by sexual predators stem from what for hundreds of years in English and American common law judges referred to as “a malignancy of heart,” a cancer that utterly destroys an individual’s moral fabric.

This week the Senate took a firm and decisive step towards stemming the tide of child sexual abuse with the passage of a bill I sponsored that dramatically increases the penalties for forcible rape or sodomy of a child. This bill, SB 588, multiples the number of years those convicted of these crimes are required to serve and takes away options such as suspended imposition of sentence and early release on parole—even for first time offenders. Similarly, the bill requires hard time for the crime of child trafficking and ensures that certain repeat offenders of sex crimes will spend the rest of their lives behind bars.

A few days ago the Senate Judiciary Committee heard testimony on the rampant misuse of the Internet by child predators who pose as adolescents and attempt to set up sexual liaisons between themselves and unsuspecting children. SB 588 also addresses this problem by setting up a program to funnel personnel and resources into the fight to protect kids from exploitation on the Internet.

Child sexual abuse is an uncomfortable topic but we cannot and will not ignore it. The Senate has met this issue head on and has passed a bill that dramatically increases penalties for these horrific crimes in Missouri. The bill will now move on to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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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