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Outstanding Lee's Summit Concert Performance Underscores Importance of Fine Arts

Recently, my family and I attended a Christmas concert at Lee's Summit High School. As I walked into the school on a Thursday evening, I was surprised by the amount of activity. The school was alive with various student activities, and not just sports. It is remarkable the number of opportunities available to high school students.

I was completely blown away by the concert. The large stage was full of young instrumental musicians, and the orchestra did not lack for student participation. They did a fantastic job with really tough music — the conductor had not tried to hide behind anything easy. Ruth Ann Miller, a junior, performed an incredibly complicated piano solo with precision and beauty. When she and the orchestra were done with the piece, the crowd jumped to its feet and gave a lengthy, thundering round of applause.

Then came the choirs. I listened to the best choir performance I have heard in many years at any level. Lee's Summit High's choral leader, Carla Oliver, is this year's Music Educator of the Year. I now know why. I watched her two choirs in action, and the first thing I noticed was that there were as many young men performing as young women. This teacher has clearly been meticulous as she has built a program that attracts students to its excellence. The processional, which the choir apparently does every year at this concert, was moving. I did not want it to end. I am a football guy, not a music guy, but I was moved. Beautiful music stirs the soul, especially at Christmas.

Here are my take-aways from my night at Lee's Summit High:

- 1.) There are some super things happening behind the doors of our schools, even though we usually only hear about the problems.
- 2.) Teachers who expect excellence and inspire students are a precious resource.

- 3.) The fine arts appear alive and well in the hands of the high school students I listened to last Thursday. In our understandable push to wring better performance out of our schools in math and science, we cannot forget the importance of fine arts.

If you are a teacher, thank you for what you have done for our community this year. And to all members of the 8th Senate District, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and your family.

If you have comments or questions about any 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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