

Report from Senator David G. Klindt

January 19, 2006

Do we move ahead or sit still?

One of the biggest issues facing the Missouri General Assembly this year is technology. In many areas of our economy, technology is being put to good use. Are you waiting for an important package to be delivered? Your shipping company will track it the entire way, and one of their computers can call your cell phone to let you know the instant delivery is made. You can even go on the Internet and change where the package is headed.

While technology is embraced by some, it's having a tough time getting a foot in the door in two critical arenas: government regulation and health care. Here are two examples.

In the Senate Committee on Commerce, Energy and the Environment this week, which I chair, we held a hearing on SB 816. This is a piece of legislation designed to make it easier for telephone companies to get into the business of providing television services over the phone lines. The technology is called Internet Protocol Television, or IPTV.

The technology holds great promise. It's a lot like cable TV, but much more interactive and personalized. AT&T, the phone company that is actively supporting the legislation, predicts an investment of \$100 million in Missouri and the creation of several jobs if the bill passes. Two of the side benefits, the company says, would be a better availability of high-speed Internet access and increased distance-learning opportunities.

Of course, there are two sides to this story. SB 816, as currently written, tilts the playing field too much in the direction of the phone companies at the expense of cable. This disparity must be addressed. If we can do that, I firmly believe IPTV will be a welcome addition to the menu of video entertainment services available to Missourians.

The issue of technology also arose this week in a remarkable speech to the Senate by Newt Gingrich, the former Speaker of the U. S. House of Representatives. Mr. Gingrich is the founder of the Center for Health Transformation, which advocates the better use of technology in health care.

To quote Mr. Gingrich, our current health care delivery system is "stunningly stupid." He compared it to a stagecoach operator who decides to save money by not feeding the horses. He says we need to start planning five or ten years ahead when we budget for health care, and I agree.

We also need to move forward on the integration of technology and health care. I'm proud that Senate President Pro-Tem Michael Gibbons is already ahead of the curve on this issue. There's no reason why Missouri can't be a leader in this arena.

Technology is a wonderful thing if we're not afraid of it. We can use it to move ahead or make ourselves more comfortable while we sit still. I say we move ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Paul G. Lindbergh". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and "L".