

Report from Senator David G. Klindt

April 6, 2006

Working hard for consumers

This was “consumer week” in the Missouri Senate. We passed and advanced several measures giving consumers more power, protection, and choice.

We passed SB 780, which I sponsored, to the House. This bill will lead to a more stable funding source for the Office of Public Counsel.

During debate, we added an amendment to make sure the OPC maintains complete independence over its appropriated budget. And we prohibit utility regulators from going to work for a regulated utility for two years after they leave the Public Service Commission. We also added an amendment to guarantee that the Public Counsel can only be removed for misconduct.

It’s the public counsel’s job to fight for what’s best for consumers. He’s “your lawyer” when utilities ask for rate increases. SB 780 will result in a more professional staff.

We also sent SB 1066 to the House this week. This bill, which I sponsored, gives the Public Service Commission another tool to use to help upgrade our telecommunications networks – especially in rural areas and small towns. The bill lets the PSC pool certain resources to be used for things like expanded calling scopes, which let telephone customers call neighboring communities without paying a toll charge.

The Senate also passed a number of improvements to the state’s “Do Not Call” list. SB 613 allows Missouri consumers to add their cell phone numbers to this list, which will keep telemarketers from wasting your cell phone minutes with unsolicited sales calls. The bill also allows for the registration of fax numbers as a way of putting a stop to annoying “junk” faxes. This is an especially troublesome problem for small businesses.

SB 613 also tackles the new crime of obtaining private cell phone information and selling that information to third parties. It’s a serious violation of privacy and this bill makes it a serious crime. The bill is sponsored by Senator Kevin Engler of Farmington.

The Senate Committee on Commerce, Energy and the Environment, which I chair, this week sent to the full Senate my Broadband Protection Act. SB 1092 is intended to promote the rollout of broadband access and services to more areas of Missouri. We do this by making sure broadband services are not subjected to heavy-handed regulation at the local level.

The future of television is changing rapidly. In fact, in tomorrow’s home, the center of video entertainment won’t be the standard “television set.” It’ll be the computer, which will be tied to everything else in your home that has a monitor – your TV, your laptop, and your cell phone. It won’t matter when your favorite program is aired – you’ll watch when your good and ready on whatever monitor you choose.

The best thing we can do to prepare for this exciting future is to keep the heavy-handed regulators away from it.

