



Gibbons Capitol Report
July 27, 2006

Important Lessons to Learn from the Past

Last week I attended a conference where I heard a woman named Immaculée Ilibagiza share her story of how she survived during the Rwanda genocide in 1994. She and seven other women huddled silently together in the cramped bathroom of a local pastor's house for more than 90 days. What struck me most about Immaculée is she shares her story to show others how to discover the importance of forgiveness and understanding, even in our darkest hours.

Sharing Stories

Immaculée lost most of her family during the Rwanda Genocide in 1994. But she has written the book Left to Tell because she survived to share her story. Her story is so important because since the genocide, she has transitioned from anger and grief to forgiveness and understanding.

Important Lessons from the Past

A constituent came to me earlier this year wanting to share a similar message with all Missourians. Jean Cavendar is the Director of St. Louis Holocaust Museum & Learning Center and she wanted to find a way to share the educational programs already offered by the St. Louis Holocaust Museum. She believes the lessons of the Holocaust are fundamental and that we need to start teaching kids at an early age that differences are not wrong. I agreed and we got to work.

The Holocaust Commission

Teaching future generations of these horrific events in history is a key to not repeating the past. If you've ever visited the St. Louis Holocaust Museum, you know it's a compelling place. It's not fun, but it's compelling. Even more compelling is the lesson many survivors of the Holocaust and Immaculée teach us, which is to understand our differences and learn to forgive.

Now, more Missourians will learn the invaluable lessons taught from the Holocaust and other genocides like the one in Rwanda. Last month, Gov. Blunt signed a bill I sponsored to create The Holocaust Education and Awareness Commission. The commission will sponsor programs and publications to educate the public about the crimes of genocide in an effort to deter indifference to crimes against humanity and human suffering wherever they occur.

As survivors like Immaculée share their stories, future generations can realize a much deeper and more profound meaning of the golden rule. Together, we can all better understand our differences and treat each other as we would want to be treated.

**For more information on the St. Louis Holocaust Museum and Learning Center visit <http://www.hmlc.org/>*