



THE STOUFFER REPORT

Senator Bill Stouffer
Senate District 21

Capitol Building, Room 332
Jefferson City, MO 65101

For the Week of:
Jan. 30, 2006

Contact: Aaron Baker
(573) 751-1507

Protesters Cross the Line When They Abuse Fallen Soldiers' Families

A United States Flag is delicately folded and presented to the sobbing family of a fallen soldier. A casket is lowered into the ground as a trumpet plays "Taps." This is a sad occasion for the family and our nation as the life of another soldier has been taken while defending our country.

Now imagine in the background of this hallowed day people cheering, taunting and protesting at the funeral. These people are *celebrating* the death, not life, of a soldier. It is only fitting that the first bill passed unanimously by the Senate is SB 578, which stops this practice. The reason why these people are protesting will shock you.

This legislation was introduced after "church" members protested the funeral of Edward Lee Myers, a St. Joseph resident and specialist with the U.S. Army. Spc. Myers was killed by a car bomb on July 27 in Samarra, Iraq. He was just 21 years old. At a committee hearing earlier this year, Myers' wife testified about the affects the protests had on their family, especially her 6-year-old son.

However, funeral protests might seem an obscure subject to those unfamiliar with the issue. Members of the so-called Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kan., regularly attend the funerals of American soldiers who have died in combat overseas. These individuals celebrate the deaths of American soldiers directly in front of grieving family members because they say the deaths are due to God's revenge on the United States, specifically our military, for being tolerant to homosexuals. It is a spirit I certainly would never associate with Scripture.

No family should ever have to lose a loved one at such a young age, but to have this sort of hatred thrown in the face of a mourning family trying to pay its last respects is truly disturbing.

In response to this and other protests by radical groups, SB 578 prohibits individuals from protesting at funerals in Missouri within one hour prior to the beginning of the funeral service and until one hour after the service has been concluded. Under the bill, first violations are punishable as Class B misdemeanors, and subsequent violations are considered Class A misdemeanors.

This measure takes a stand against these offensive acts to protect the families of those fighting for our freedoms. American soldiers have earned our respect, and their families are no different. As I said, this legislation should not be necessary. But when protesters such as these abuse the rights of families trying to grieve, my colleagues have to step in to ensure their protections.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by email at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

-END-