



MISSOURI SENATE

Jeff Smith
4th Senate District

JEFFERSON CITY

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 425
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

**A Column for the Week
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**Contact: Stacy Morse
(573) 751-3599**

Lawmakers Prepare for Lengthy Legislative Process

JEFFERSON CITY — It is an honor to represent St. Louis residents in the Missouri Senate, and I look forward to addressing a wide variety of important issues in the coming year. However, with the 2007 session underway, I would like to offer a brief outline of the Missouri Legislature to give constituents a better understanding of how I will serve them this year.

The First Regular Session of the 94th General Assembly convened at 12 p.m. Jan. 3, 2007. I was inaugurated into the Senate at that time after Sen. Kevin Engler, R-Farmington, formally introduced me to my colleagues. He noted that I had earned three degrees in political science and concluded that my “real” education would now begin. How prophetic he was. In addition, there were hundreds of people who came up for the inaugural ball. It was wonderful to have so many constituents wish me well on my new endeavor.

In the opening weeks of the new Legislature, each senator is assigned to a number of committees specializing in certain legislative subjects. This week I have joined the Senate committees on Governmental Accountability and Fiscal Oversight; Judiciary and Civil and Criminal Jurisprudence; Pensions, Veterans’ Affairs and General Laws; and Seniors, Families and Public Health committees.

Senate committees are assigned bills by the Senate president pro tem, and they hold public hearings on legislation to make recommendations for or against the measures. Bills reported favorably from committee are brought before the full legislative body for a first-round vote, which is known as “perfection.” At this point, lawmakers can add amendments to the legislation, and once perfected, the measures go to a final vote.

These votes are when debate on the chamber floor can become most gripping. Although lawmakers often give their opinions on legislation, individual senators can have a major influence on whether bills even come to a vote. Filibuster is the practice of a senator or group of senators extending debate on legislation to delay or prevent its passage. This American tradition, though rare, is valued as the ultimate protection of the will of the minority, and it is most often used to procure compromise. However, there are mechanisms at the state and federal levels to end filibusters.

When finally passed, Senate bills are then reported to the House, where they undergo a similar process. Any provisions added in the House must be approved by the Senate; otherwise members of both chambers will convene in a conference committee to reach a compromise. The conference report then goes to each chamber, and upon approval the bill is declared “truly agreed to and finally passed” and is sent to the governor to be signed into law.

I look forward to working for the people of the 4th District to make a real difference in St. Louis and throughout our state.

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