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**A Column for the Week  
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## Several Bills Spark Debate in Committees This Week

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Jefferson City — We have entered the point in the legislative session where lawmakers focus on committee work to determine which bills will move to the floor for debate by the full Senate. And for those of you out there who think we don't earn our pay (wink), there have already been over 400 Senate bills and over 700 House bills filed this session. I'd like to touch on just a few bills that had hearings in my committees this week. The bills affect policy on child care, education and alimony, and they could have a real impact on the lives of Missourians.

The Senate Committee on Seniors, Families, and Public Health heard debate on legislation that would expand eligibility for state-sponsored child care. Senate Bills 71 (sponsored by Senator Jolie Justus) and 260 (sponsored by Senator Chris Koster), both of which I am co-sponsoring, are bipartisan attempts to ease the strain on working families with young children. Currently, parents with income levels above 108 percent of the poverty line (a family of three with earnings over \$18,216) are ineligible for child-care assistance. This is the strictest standard in the nation, which has led some to decline promotions at their workplace because the additional earnings would disqualify them from child-care services. This is the wrong message to send to families trying to move up in life. The new legislation increases the income threshold to 130 percent of the poverty line and parents with incomes of up to 185 percent of the poverty level can qualify for benefits.

Another bill that I co-sponsored receiving a hearing this week was a measure providing scholarships to the spouses and children of military veterans from Missouri who were killed in the line of duty. The Senate Pensions, Veterans' Affairs, and General Laws Committee heard the bill, which offers up to 25 educational grants that pay as much as 50 percent of the family members' tuition costs, the actual cost of books up to \$500 per semester, and up to \$2,000 per semester for room and board. Benefits will be awarded annually to recipients who maintain certain standards of academic performance. A chance for academic success is the least we can do for families of our fallen heroes.

Finally, the Judiciary and Civil and Criminal Jurisprudence Committee discussed legislation affecting alimony payments. Under SB 246, a former spouse is relieved of further payment of alimony if his or her spouse has lived with another person in a romantic nature for ninety or more consecutive days. Senator Koster asked a witness testifying in favor of the bill, what exactly constituted a romantic relationship, and the witness replied with an entertaining (albeit dubious) digression; he claimed that 80% of all newly-married women attempt to be unfaithful in the first six months of marriage. Needless to say, we hear from some very interesting witnesses. But divorce is an extremely sensitive subject, and I want to find a solution in the best interests of all those involved. My colleagues and I will continue examining this issue.

These are just a few of the measures up for debate this week, and I know there will be many more difficult issues considered in the coming months. As I consider them, I will be guided by my charge to represent the people of the 4<sup>th</sup> District, and by my 96 year-old grandmother's words: always do what you know is right.

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