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Time Marches On

With every tick of the clock we get closer to our constitutional deadline of 6 p.m., Friday, May 18th. That's when all legislation must be completed and sent to the governor... no if, ands, or buts. After the clock strikes six o'clock all bills not finally passed by both houses of the legislature automatically die. By the time you read this column the session will have ended.

We've already met one deadline for putting together a budget. That had to be finished by last Friday, and we worked together with our colleagues in the House and across the aisles in both chambers and put together a \$21.5 billion spending plan. Now, we as lawmakers have some more things we'd like to finish before that final gavel falls this Friday.

Obviously, not everyone's bills will become law. This year, more than 2,000 bills were introduced in the Missouri legislature. History shows that a small percentage pass both the Senate and the House and get sent to the governor. Some don't have enough support to win a floor vote. Some don't have enough support to make it out of the early committee hearings. And some simply run out of time.

Some highlights that did make it through all the legislative hurdles this session include passing a bill to remove the state taxes charged on senior citizens social security benefits. We've also added significant increases in money for education and law enforcement. We've put an additional \$1 million to help police shut down sexual predators who troll the Internet trying to snare our children. We've also clarified Missouri's law to protect homeowners from being sued if they are ever required to defend themselves or their families from an intruder.

There's still plenty of measures trying to finish the race. These include HB 1055, a bill promoting a culture of life by keeping our public schools from encouraging abortions. It also creates the Missouri Alternatives to Abortion Services Program. That program would provide services and counseling to pregnant women and either help mothers care for the children or help them place the children up for adoption. The reform of the state's Medicaid system is still pending in the MO HealthNet bill. We've also moved to limit how much tuition is charged to our veterans who return from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Whether or not all of these, and many other worthy measures, pass out of your legislature is now driven by whether or not they can beat our real taskmaster now – the big clock on the wall just behind the Senate President.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/07info/members/mem08.htm>.