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Prefiling Bills – The 2008 Session Looms on the Horizon

JEFFERSON CITY —With Thanksgiving and Christmas just around the corner and the leaves taking on their autumn hues, we are reminded again that we are entering one of the greatest seasons of the year. However, in addition to all of the activities of this time of year, the change in seasons reminds me how quickly the summer has passed and how soon another legislative session will begin in Jefferson City.

Unlike the U.S. Congress, which meets nearly year-round, the Missouri General Assembly is truly a citizen legislature. We convene in early January each year and adjourn in mid-May. We are generally in session from Monday through Thursday, although some weeks we may have session on Friday or even on the weekends if legislative business is especially pressing.

In preparation for the beginning of the legislative session in January, Missouri Senate rules allow bills to be prefiled on December 1st. By custom, each member of the senate, beginning with the most senior member, picks their top three priority bills and they are each assigned a number. Conventional wisdom holds that bills that are pre-filed and get a low number are more likely to pass. But passing bills is more art than science, so there is no guarantee.

This year I will be prefiling several bills. I'll have a chance to talk more about many of them in this column over the next few weeks, but for now, let me briefly mention some of my top priorities.

Special interests have become deeply entrenched in our state capitol. Every year, they help carve out special tax incentives for themselves, leaving the rest of the general public (those who can't hire lobbyists) to shoulder the tax burden. It is time that each tax credit that has been written into our law be brought before the legislature for scrutiny. I will file legislation to do just that.

I also plan to address our most pressing transportation issue: I-70. This road is both broken and dangerous. We must address it and the sooner the better. We need to think outside the box and find the necessary funding.

In addition, I plan on filing legislation to rein in the adult business industry in our state. For too long these purveyors of pornography have operated with little regulation and oversight. These businesses contribute not only to a decline in property values but also to a decline in community values. The negative effects of these businesses are far-ranging and it is time it is addressed.

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/bartle>.