



## MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the  
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# Back to Making Sausage

## *Second Half of Session Underway*

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JEFFERSON CITY – I enjoyed the opportunity to spend a week back in the district while the General Assembly adjourned for its annual Spring Recess. I got a chance to spend some time working on the family farm and had several opportunities to meet with folks throughout the district. But now it's back to making sausage.

There's an old quote that you hear a lot in political circles, "Those with a fondness for sausage or public policy should watch neither being made." I spent a lot of time this week working behind the scenes on some of the major issues still pending this session, including local control and Medicaid. Both of these issues are expected to be taken up by the Senate for debate in the coming weeks, and I have been working hard to make sure those bills address the concerns I've heard from people I've talked to in the district and those who have visited my office at the Capitol.

The Senate did give final approval to a bill this week that makes some major changes to the mental health system in Missouri. Senate Bill 3 requires people who work at nursing homes, group homes and related facilities to report all suspected cases of abuse, and it increases penalties for those who fail to report abuse or who file false reports. The measure also requires the state Mental Health Department to investigate complaints of abuse and report its findings to local law enforcement authorities.

SB 3 also creates a review board to investigate the deaths of mental health patients, similar to the state panel that investigates child deaths.

One part of SB 3 that I had some concerns with requires nursing homes, group homes and the like to install fire alarm systems by 2009 and sprinklers by 2013. This provision is in response to a fatal fire at a group home in southwest Missouri last year that killed eleven people.

I think it's important these facilities have smoke detectors and fire alarms, but I was worried that some older facilities could go out of business if they had to come up with the money to install new sprinkler systems, which can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. The renovations also could price some people out of the homes. However, the bill was amended to make these older homes eligible for state loans to cover the costs of installing sprinklers, which they can pay back over five to 10 years. I think this is a reasonable compromise that protects our most vulnerable citizens without putting too much of a financial burden on nursing homes or group homes.

We welcomed a number of visitors to our Capitol office this week, including Ann Henley, the daughter of Hannibal Courier-Post reporter Danny Henley. We also had a chance to visit with some young people involved with Farm Bureau in Pike County.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-7852.