



## **Priorities in the Missouri Senate for the Next Seven Weeks**

**Dear Friend,**

This is the first of what will be periodic email updates of what's going on in the Missouri Senate for the remaining seven weeks of this year's session. I hope it will provide you with not only information but also insight into the legislative process.

This past week was our first week back after a much needed spring break the previous week. The Republican majority wasted no time in bringing a couple of its priorities to the floor for extended debate. I will give you more detail on these debates than I probably will in the future because we did so little else last week and these debates are particularly instructive of how things operate in the Senate.

### **Gambling**

On Tuesday we dealt with Senate Bill 430, which addresses several issues related to gambling boats. The bill would repeal the maximum loss limit of \$500 per individual player per gambling excursion; allow a maximum of 13 licenses for gambling boats in the state; and raise the tax on the boats' adjusted gross receipts above \$40 million by one percent. The increase in revenue – estimated between \$85 million and \$115 million – would go into a new scholarship fund administered by the Department of Higher Education.

The issue is interesting because it crosses party lines and interests. Some senators favor repealing the loss limit, imposing the cap on the number of boats and raising the tax, while others favor just the opposite or a different mixture of pros and cons on the three elements. That made for a robust debate – and difficult vote counting.

For the first time in my five sessions in the Senate, both Democrats and Republicans were fully engaged in a contentious debate. Most of the time when the Republicans bring one of their priorities to the floor the deal has been cut among the interest groups and amendments of any substance proposed by Democrats are rejected. In this debate, amendments were offered by both Democrats and Republicans and were variously adopted, defeated or withdrawn.

Finally at 4 a.m. Wednesday, apparently unable to determine majorities on the various issues to the satisfaction of the gambling industry, the sponsor, Majority Floor Leader Charlie Shields "laid the bill over" on the Informal Calendar. That means it can be brought up again for debate at any point.

My stand: I have always thought that imposing artificial restraints on an industry was counter-productive to that industry's fulfilling its potential. I am not happy that we have gambling in Missouri, but since we do, each business should succeed or fail on its own merits. I would vote to lift the loss limits and do not favor the cap on the number of boats. (During debate I did vote in favor of a cap of 18 boats – a number no one expects to reach in the foreseeable future.)

HOWEVER, I will not vote for the bill unless the tax on gross receipts is increased considerably – providing the state a healthy return for lifting the loss limit. I voted with the majority in rejecting a two percent tax increase, and the amendment on the tax was withdrawn when I then proposed a 4.75 percent increase instead.

### **Reproductive Rights**

On Wednesday afternoon, with senators and staff operating on three to four hours of sleep, the majority floor leader took up Senate Bills 370, 375 & 432. These bills combined have three major provisions relating to sex education and reproductive rights.

One revises state law to allow school districts to opt for abstinence only sex education (Current law requires that students be presented the latest medically factual information regarding side effects, health benefits and failure rates for all methods of contraception as well as sexually transmitted diseases.)

A second provision would require a clinic or doctor's office that performs or induces more than five first trimester abortions and any second- or third-trimester abortions to be licensed as an ambulatory surgical center. This would put two of Missouri's three clinics that perform abortions out of business and prevent any doctor from prescribing RU-486 in the office.

The third major provision of the bill would put into legislation the alternatives to abortion program that the state has been funding for several years. The program provides health and social services to a woman during her pregnancy and for one year after the birth of her baby. But the program will NOT provide contraception in the year after the baby is born.

My stand: I have long been an advocate for reproductive rights, for preventing unintended pregnancies through education and contraception, and for providing for safe abortions. The bills described above would have just the opposite effect. Students would be more ignorant about their sexuality, putting them at increased risk for unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. It would also leave the state with only one clinic to perform abortions, resulting in more unwanted births and "back alley" abortions. And while the state can be helpful with women who want to carry their pregnancy to term, it should also provide contraception in the first post-partum year for the health of the woman and her child.

The seven pro-choice senators – with some help from anti-choice Democratic colleagues -- rallied for a very effective filibuster. We used a binder of information and bill analysis compiled by Planned Parenthood with additional information from NARAL Pro-Choice Missouri. After four and half hours – and having caught wind of our schedule to go through the night – the sponsor, Senator Delbert Scott, laid the bill on the informal calendar, making it available to pick up again.

## **Bill Hearing**

Last Thursday, March 29, the Commerce Committee granted me a hearing on SB 674, which we call the Easy Connection Act. Under the bill, customers who also produce energy from a renewable source could get credit for excess energy they put into the utility's power grid. Net metering would be available on a first-come, first-served basis up to a total from all energy-producing customers of 5 percent of the peak load capacity of the utility.

The hearing was excellent, with testimony in favor from groups such as the Heartland Renewable Energy Society, League of Woman Voters of Missouri, Missouri Alternative & Renewable Energy Technology, Missouri Votes Conservation, Sierra Club, Cromwell Environmental, and Missouri Coalition for the Environment.

Only the Missouri Electric Cooperatives testified against (with just a few objections). Additionally, the Missouri Energy Development Association, which represent Investor Owned Utility Companies like Empire, AmerenUE and Kansas City Power and Light, testified for informational purposes while adding that they are in full support of net metering. We are trying to work with opponents to meet their concerns and perhaps attach the bill as an amendment to another bill in the House or the Senate.

## **Budget**

The bills that make up the state's \$21 billion-plus budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1 passed the House last week and will be "marked up" in the Senate Appropriations Committee beginning this week. As the ranking Democratic member of that committee I am heavily involved. We will be meeting every morning and every evening of the legislative day for the next few weeks.

When the committee finishes its work, the bills must be passed by the full Senate. They then go to a conference committee of the Senate and House – of which I will be a member – that works out the differences between the two chambers' appropriations. That final product must then be adopted by the House and Senate. Under the Missouri Constitution the budget must be done by May 11 this year.

## **Appointments**

The governor's appointment to the transition board that will govern the St. Louis Public Schools when the state takes control requires the advice and consent of the Senate. Governor Blunt has asked Rick Sullivan, who lives in my district, to take on that job. His approval requires my sponsorship. I have visited with Mr. Sullivan several times and will be talking with him further before I commit to sponsor him.

This is a very difficult time for St. Louis Schools and for the state. We are entering uncharted territory and must tread carefully and thoughtfully. I am interested in whom Mayor Slay and Board of Alderman President-Elect Reed will be appointing as the two other members of the board. My hope is that each of the three members bring unique and strong qualities that will make the whole stronger than the sum of the parts and that they can provide new leadership and success to the students in St. Louis' schools.

I will be in touch with you again soon. In the meantime, please be in touch with me or my staff at the District Office or in Jefferson City. We're always pleased to hear from you.

Regards,



*P.S. If you know others who would like to receive this e-mail update, please feel free to contact our office at the information below. If you would no longer wish to receive this e-mail update, please respond with the word "unsubscribe" in the subject field.*

**Contact Information**

Capitol Office State Capitol Building Room 431 Jefferson City, MO 65101	Web Site: <a href="http://www.senate.mo.gov/bray">http://www.senate.mo.gov/bray</a>	Office Phone: 573.751.2514 Office Fax: 573.526.2612
--	--	--

*Senator Bray Serves Part of St. Louis County*