



## MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week  
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### Legislative Process is Democracy at Work

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JEFFERSON CITY — There will be a wide variety of interesting and important topics to address in the 2007 session, and lawmakers are excited to get back to Jefferson City to pass needed legislation. However, this week I would like to offer a brief outline of the Missouri Legislature so constituents will have a better understanding of what goes on at the state Capitol.

The First Regular Session of the 94th General Assembly convened at 12 p.m. Jan. 3, 2007. Session will end at 6 p.m., Friday, May 18, in accordance with the Missouri Constitution. A spring recess has been scheduled to begin upon adjournment Thursday, March 15, with lawmakers reconvening Monday, March 26.

Each state senator is a member of several legislative committees specializing in certain subjects. This year I was honored to be renamed to the Senate Appropriations Committee and as vice-chair of the Education Committee. I will also serve on the Senate Agriculture, Conservation, Parks and Natural Resources; Governmental Accountability and Fiscal Oversight; and Judiciary and Civil and Criminal Jurisprudence committees; and the joint committees on Economic Development Policy and Planning; Education; and Terrorism, Bioterrorism and Homeland Security.

Senate committees take up bills they have been assigned by the Senate president pro tem. They hold public hearings on legislation and make recommendations for or against the measures according to the merits of the bills they've examined. Bills reported favorably from committee are then taken up by the entire legislative body for "perfection," essentially a first-round vote by the Senate in which amendments can be added to legislation. Once perfected, the final version of the bill goes on the calendar for final reading and passage by a constitutional majority.

When bills are up for perfection and final approval, debate can be at its most dramatic. This is the point when disagreements are most enthusiastically voiced on the chamber floor, and the Senate is the place where a single lawmaker's opposition can threaten to derail legislation. Filibuster is the practice of a senator or group of senators extending debate on legislation to delay or prevent its passage. Because a single senator can utilize such power, the filibuster has been valued in the American tradition as the ultimate protection of the will of the minority. Although rarely practiced, the threat of filibuster is often used to achieve compromise on contentious measures. However, there are mechanisms at the state and federal levels to end filibusters.

When finally passed, Senate bills are then reported to the House, where they undergo a similar process. Any provisions added in the House must be approved by the Senate; otherwise members of both chambers will convene in a conference committee to reach a compromise. The conference report then goes to each chamber, and upon approval the bill is declared "truly agreed to and finally passed" and is sent to the governor to be signed into law.

The legislative process is long and arduous, which is why the vast majority of bills do not survive. However, taking part is an honorable public service that instills great pride in all those fortunate enough to serve as Missouri lawmakers. Thank you for providing me that opportunity, and I promise to do my best to serve residents of the Bootheel.

Please feel free to contact my Jefferson City office any time by calling toll-free 1-877-291-5584.

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*Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid, Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.*