

For Immediate Release

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SHARING A VIEW OF THE STATE

Issues and Comments – 33rd Senatorial District

Senator

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The Missouri State Senate resumed work this week and it seems like another rerun of the movie Ground Hog Day where everyday is just about like the day before. For the most part this Session has been marked by contention and late night filibusters and so the routine has continued.

The Senate was in session all night long on a couple of occasions and recently worked until 4:00 a.m. as the repeal of riverboat gambling loss limits was debated. Tied to the legislation were measures increasing the tax on casino revenue and providing scholarships for Missouri college students. Opposition to the bill centered mainly on the removal of loss limits. Missouri is the only state in the nation that enforces loss limits. The bill was eventually set aside when it became apparent the filibuster would continue indefinitely and so far the Senate has not returned to that issue.

This week most of the debate was centered on Senate Bill 577, which will begin the implementation of the new HealthNet program for the poor and elderly replacing the old Medicaid system in the state. It sets up the basic foundation networks that the program will need to operate and strives to guide the state's health care system into more of a preventative type of health care rather than a system that just pays providers for services rendered.

If you talk with some of the political observers that always seem to be around the Capitol, most would agree term limits have changed the dynamics of the Senate. With a four-year term, a senator could reasonably expect to be in the senate for twelve, sixteen, or even twenty years. A handful stayed even longer. As a result, patience was a virtue that you could expect to be rewarded. A legislator could spend years building coalitions and support for an issue or philosophy. They knew if they didn't work together, they would quickly be isolated from any future negotiations, so members worked together to find solutions a majority could live with. They knew the person working against them may still be there ten years from now. While the final compromise may not be everything they wanted, it was still a means to an end.

This Senate membership is the first where every legislator was elected under term limits. No one will serve more than eight years. As a result, the virtue of patience no longer exists. Nor does the thought they may be working with someone for a decade or more. Every two years at

least a few senators will be pushed out by term limits. This has led to a greater sense of urgency to pass a bill or keep a bill blocked. Senators also know someone they may be at odds with on an issue will only be able to stand for reelection one time. This takes away the mandate for coalitions and compromise.

Is this good or bad for the process? Honestly, I am not sure, but it has changed the rules for decorum and debate. If given a choice, I still support term limits but it has changed the rules and dynamics that your state government now works under. Rather than negotiate for a reasonable compromise, the minority party can use the filibuster to indefinitely block a vote. By the same token, the majority party can use what is known the previous question to end debate and force a vote. By tradition, the previous question was rarely used because a senator knew it might be used against them on a future issue, maybe years down the road. Now this concern is outweighed by the knowledge they only have a limited number of sessions to accomplish their objectives. The traditions of the Senate are undergoing a change and we have a front row seat to a civics lesson.

I welcome your opinions and suggestions. You may reach me at 573-751-1882, e-mail to chuck.purgason@senate.mo.gov, or write to me at the Missouri Senate, State Capitol, Room 420, Jefferson City, MO 65101. If you would like to receive these newsletters electronically, please call or e-mail my office.

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