

**2008
LEGISLATIVE
REPORT**

**Serving the
Citizens of the
9th District**

**Dear Citizens of the
9th Senate District,**

**Now in the history
books, the 2008 session of
the General Assembly was
one of challenges and
opportunities.**

**As in previous years, I
worked hard to advance a
number of legislative
priorities important to the
people of the 9th District
and to all Missourians.**

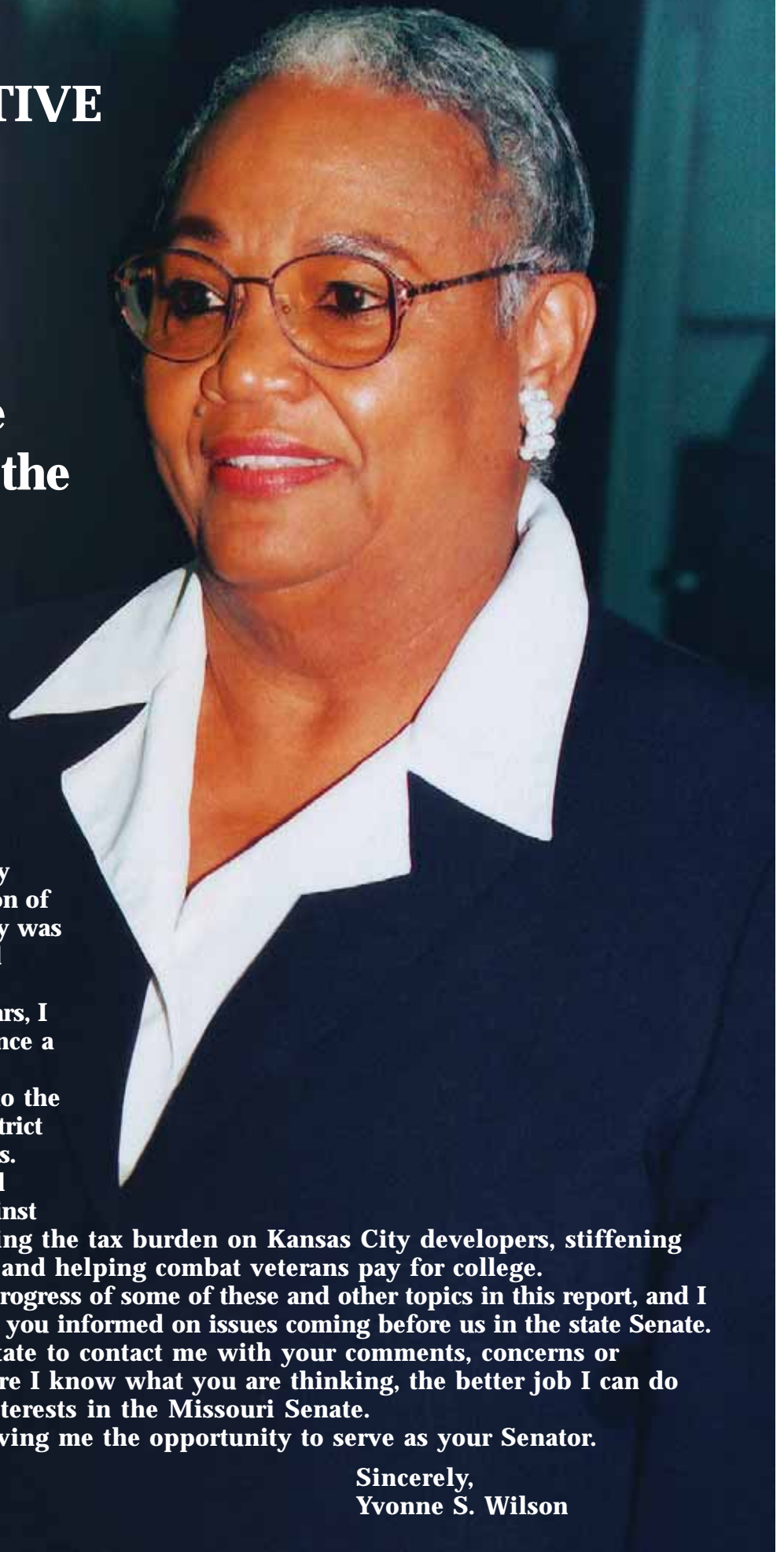
**These issues included
toughening laws against
cyberbullying, lowering the tax burden on Kansas City developers, stiffening
certain zoning laws, and helping combat veterans pay for college.**

**I've detailed the progress of some of these and other topics in this report, and I
will continue to keep you informed on issues coming before us in the state Senate.**

**Please don't hesitate to contact me with your comments, concerns or
suggestions. The more I know what you are thinking, the better job I can do
representing your interests in the Missouri Senate.**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve as your Senator.

**Sincerely,
Yvonne S. Wilson**



The Legislature Addresses Cyberbullying

This was the year my fellow lawmakers and I decided it was time to put an end to what is called “cyberbullying.” Last year, I introduced a bill that would have made laws tougher. This year, my proposal was picked up by others in the Senate and the House and wound up being passed.

Senate Bill 762 sought to modify the definition of “bullying” as used in school districts to include cyberbullying and electronic communications. A stricter version of my idea was passed under Senate Bill 818 and later signed by the governor.

Under the bill, harassment is now a Class A misdemeanor unless it is committed by a person 21 years of age or older against a person 17 years of age or younger; or the person has previously committed the crime of harassment. In such cases, harassment becomes a Class D felony.

Senate Bill 818 also expands the crime of stalking to include any course of conduct with two or more acts over a period of time that is communicated by any means. A “credible threat” includes those made with the intent to cause the person who is the target to reasonably fear for his or her family’s safety and not only his or her own safety.

As a former educator, I cannot tell you how important this issue is to me. We simply cannot ignore the pleas of our children. To me, there is no difference between a big kid bullying a smaller child on the playground and the incidents we are seeing online. It took a tragedy in the St. Louis area to bring this to the forefront. It is a shame this had to happen, but I am glad to see a new law to give prosecutors the tools they need to bring down these perpetrators.

Helping Veterans

An important bill that passed deals with the rising cost of higher education. Senate Bill 830 will make it easier for combat veterans to go back to college after they’ve returned from duty.

The “Missouri Returning Heroes’ Education Act” will limit tuition for combat veterans who have served since September 11, 2001, to \$50 per credit hour. These brave men and women do so much for the good of our nation. Helping them pay to continue their education after serving in harm’s way is a great way to say thanks.

Our combat veterans deserve some help after serving our country. I am glad to see this bill make it through the General Assembly and become law.



Fighting Breast Cancer

Another bill I was proud to vote for was Senate Bill 1105. This creates a check-off box on individual and corporate income tax forms so you may make contributions to the breast cancer awareness trust fund. The money collected will be used by the Friends of the Missouri Women’s Council for breast cancer services.

Aside from non-melanoma skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in women. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, breast cancer is the number one cause of cancer death in Hispanic women. It is the second most common cause of cancer death in white, black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaskan Native women.



Redeveloping Kansas City

The revitalization of downtown Kansas City is one of the greatest things to happen in years. Every day, you can see the progress being made. In just a few years, the next phases will be complete. New jobs and opportunities abound from this effort.

Along these same lines, I am proud to say one of my priority bills passed and was signed by the governor on July 10, 2008. Senate Bill 1131 excludes tax revenues, derived from certain transportation sales taxes imposed by Kansas City, from tax increment finance economic activity taxes used to pay redevelopment costs.

My bill expands the definition of "transportation purposes" to include development and operation of bus, para-transit, fixed-rail, and light-rail transit. The term transportation purposes is contained within the provision of the law authorizing the transportation sales tax.

Public transportation is proving itself to be more necessary all the time, as the cost of gasoline continues to climb. Kansas City could lead the nation with innovative ideas like this. I applaud my colleagues in the Senate for supporting a progressive plan and I thank the governor for giving it his approval.

In November, 2006, a ballot measure was approved by Kansas City voters to extend a three-eighths sales tax for 25 years to build and operate a light rail line that would run from Kansas City International Airport to the Kansas City Zoo, with a dozen stops between. Plus, 60 electric buses would have been brought in to help serve the light rail stops along with a gondola tram system in Penn Valley Park. After several proposals were brought forward, the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority said they would scrap the light rail plan approved by voters just one year earlier and come up with a less-expensive plan, which is in its infant stage.

At the same time, ridership on Metro buses is rising. In my opinion, Senate Bill 1131 could pay for itself in terms of bringing alternate transportation methods into the Kansas City area. If we can add to the options for people to use, cut down on emissions, and eliminate some of the

traffic concerns around Kansas City, then we all win.

Excluding these tax revenues from redevelopment costs gives developers more opportunities without tying their hands. This means more growth for all of Kansas City, not just downtown, but everywhere.



The Duty-Free Zone

I introduced a bill this year that would have created duty-free zones and would have granted tax-favored status for those areas for a 23-year period. The proposed Black Heritage District, which runs north to south from 9th to 29th Streets and east to west from Troost to Prospect avenues, would benefit greatly from such a proposal. The Jackson County legislature approved the plan.

Tax-favored status is defined as a reduction to, or elimination of, the rate of tax on transactions made under Missouri's sales and use tax laws. Duty-free zones may only be established in blighted areas located within qualified census tracts. Senate Bill 1012 would have required a city council to

hold public hearings prior to the adoption of an ordinance designating a duty-free zone.

The bill would have required the council to provide notice of such hearings to affected taxing districts and the public. The designation would then have to be approved by the county in which the city is located and by the Missouri Development Finance Board. Then, any business located within a duty-free zone would have received tax-favored status.

Had my bill been approved, Senate Bill 1012 would have gone to a vote of the people. I intend to introduce this bill again next year. This is an idea that not only would benefit Kansas City, but all of Missouri.

**"This could be a model for the state."
- Kansas City businessman Ollie Gates**

Fairness in Benefits

I introduced a bill this year that would have made changes to eligibility requirements for food stamps. Senate Bill 764 would have allowed some people access to assistance who are currently being denied. I tried to get the same bill passed in 2007 and may try again in 2009.

Senate Bill 764 said that in accordance with the option granted under the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, an individual who has a felony conviction under federal or state law involving possession, use, or distribution of a controlled substance shall be eligible for food stamp benefits if such person, as determined by the Department of Social Services, successfully participates in or has satisfactorily completed a substance abuse treatment program approved by the division of alcohol and drug abuse or complies with all obligations imposed by the court, divisions of alcohol and drug abuse and the division of

probation and parole. The individual must meet all other factors for foods stamp eligibility.

Under state law, a person convicted of a drug-related crime can be banned for life from receiving food stamps. However, a person convicted of other felonies — including violent crimes — does not face the same ban.

I fought very hard to get my bill a fair hearing. I thank the eight senators who voted with me. I do not understand how somebody convicted of rape or murder can eventually get food stamps again, but not those who paid their debt to society after a drug arrest. My bill sought to point out the inconsistency as much as anything. I think when people get a second look at the concept of Senate Bill 764, more of them will realize this would actually provide a benefit, not a cost, to society by helping those once involved in drug-related activities steer away from a return to crime.

Helping Our Children

I introduced bills this year related to child custody and foster care. Each of these important bills had a specific purpose.

Senate Bill 1249 was written to provide, in any case involving child custody or support, that the court may appoint a parenting coordinator as a neutral third party to assist the parents in resolving disputes concerning parental responsibilities and the implementation of a court-ordered parenting plan.

Senate Bill 1250 sought to establish a Foster Care and Adoptive Parents Recruitment and Retention Fund. The fund would have consisted of all gifts, donations, transfers, and money appropriated by the General Assembly. Money in the fund would have been used either in-house or through private partnerships to promote foster care and adoption promotion recruitment programs from the Department of Social Services.

Curbing Crime

I also introduced two bills that targeted crime that is thought of as urban, but is also seen throughout rural areas of Missouri.

Senate Bill 812 was meant to expand the crime of unlawful use of a weapon to include discharging a firearm for “celebrating” in an urban area. We hear stories every year, especially on New Year’s Eve, of people shooting guns into the air as a way of ringing in the new year. My bill would have outlawed the practice.

Senate Bill 812 would have prohibited owning, possessing, or using a Taser or stun gun. There would have been some exceptions, including police officers, prison employees, members of the armed forces, and probation officers.

Tasers and stun guns are very dangerous weapons. Some people may not understand how powerful these weapons are, and not everybody needs to carry one.

More Teachers in the Classrooms

As a lifelong educator, I cannot tell you how important it is to have qualified teachers in every classroom. We hear the stories every year about a lack of teachers for certain subjects. Some districts have to entice retired teachers to come back for another year because they cannot find enough math or science teachers.

I introduced Senate Bill 1273, which would have required the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop teaching standards for public, charter, and online schools by June 30, 2009. While my bill did not receive Senate passage, a related bill (SB 1066) creating an additional method of teacher certification was passed and signed by the governor. Prospective teachers may now obtain certification from the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence.

In addition to completing coursework and certification exams, teaching candidates already holding a bachelor's degree or higher must complete a background check and verify the ability to work with children by completing 60 hours of classroom instruction under the supervision of a mentor-teacher.

This alternative applies only to secondary education; traditional certification is still needed to teach elementary or special education.

Are You Ready for Digital TV?



The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) says the last day full power television stations can broadcast in both analog and digital will be February 17, 2009.

The FCC says if you subscribe to cable or satellite TV, the change won't affect you. But, if you have an outdoor antenna or "rabbit ears," and a television built before March 1, 2007, you will need a converter box. All televisions built after March 1, 2007, have a digital tuner and will still receive signals after February 17, 2009.

For more information about digital TV and a list of frequently asked questions, you can log onto dtv.gov. For more about the Digital-to-Analog Converter Box Coupon Program, visit <http://www.dtv2009.gov/>



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A Day in the Life of a Missouri Senator

“If we EDUCATE our constituents on what we do, they won’t have to WONDER what we do.”

— Senator Yvonne S. Wilson

You may wonder what we do in the Senate, aside from debate bills and have committee meetings. I remember seeing a cartoon in a local newspaper that featured some kids asking if they could go into the Capitol and find out what we’re doing in there. Every day for me is different. Even though we’re only in Jefferson City for the session from January through May, we’re still working during the months before and after.

I serve on eight different committees:

- Senate Appropriations, which deals with the state’s budget.

- Senate Education, which hears all of the bills related to teachers and education.

- Seniors, Families, and Public Health, which handles health bills that pertain specifically to senior citizens, your family, and the public in general.

- Joint Committee on Economic Development Policy and Planning, which hears bills from both the Senate and the House that delve into economic policies for the state.

- Joint Committee on Education. House and Senate members convene this committee to review and monitor progress in all public schools.

- Missouri Emancipation Day Commission. The Commission will establish a statewide historical monument designating June 19th as “Emancipation Day”.

- Missouri Health Facilities Review Commission. This group reviews health cost management, assurance of community need, and tries to prevent unnecessary duplication of service.

- Second State Capitol Commission. This commission advises the governor on restoration and preservation of the Capitol and ensures accessibility to the Capitol for the disabled.

During the session, I’m usually in the office by 8 a.m. If I am not going to a committee meeting, then I am meeting with constituents and other groups who are concerned with our state and its future. I also meet with school groups throughout the year. On Fridays, I meet with people locally here in Kansas City. I enjoy getting together with the great people who make up our neighborhoods in the district, whether I see them at the Capitol, in my Kansas City office, or anywhere else I may be during the course of the day.

In addition to the dozens of people I talk to on

any given day, I also receive hundreds of phone calls, letters, and e-mails daily during the session. There will be more if there is an issue receiving the most attention by lawmakers. You can double or triple these numbers when there is something big in the works in the Senate.

The interim — the time from roughly June through December when the state legislature is not meeting — is spent meeting with constituents, answering

letters, phone calls, and e-mails, and beginning to work on the following year’s legislation. We start drafting legislation even before we finish one session. In December, pre-filed bills are numbered for introduction on the Senate floor in January. Then they are assigned to committees.

We convene Monday through Thursday during the session. It’s not uncommon to have debates that last late into the night. We not only vote on bills, but amendments, and other orders of business. Once a bill is introduced, it is debated and can be amended before going to a final vote and onto the House.

So, as you can see, being a Missouri Senator is a full-time job. And I can’t think of any better way to serve the people of the 9th District.



Senator Wilson mentors interns and speaks with school and community groups every year.

Tips for Getting Scholarships

I often get questions about scholarships. Being a lifelong educator, I think you can't have enough information, especially when paying for college.

If you look for financial information online, the amount of outlets that appear on your screen will number in the thousands. Browse around and look for a site you can trust.

Experts recommend students search a minimum of two of the free, online databases to make sure they haven't skipped over any possible scholarships that are out there. Just like anything else online, make sure you're viewing a legitimate site. As with anything online, there are scam artists who try and rip off people. There's nothing wrong with visiting a free site. Just because a web site charges you does NOT mean it's better.

Some sites feature scholarships offered by individual colleges and smaller, local awards along with national scholarships and fellowships. Some sites also help people see if they're a precise match for any awards, so you know which scholarships you qualify for and don't have to waste time applying for something you couldn't get.

You don't have to rely on the Internet for all of the information. College financial aid offices are a good way to find out what scholarships are available. You can also check the bulletin board outside of the high school guidance counselor's office or check your local public library. And be careful if you use a book that lists scholarships. If the book is over a year old, chances are most of the information inside is outdated. Federal aid and many scholarships change from year to year.

Recent studies show around 7 percent of undergraduate students receive private sector scholarships, with the median amount won being about \$2,000. For students at four-year institutions, the average rises to around 10 percent, but the amount stays at \$2,000.

Taking the time to see if you qualify for a scholarship is well worth it. Every dollar you get is one more you won't have to borrow. It's rare to get a free ride, so work studies and loans can help make up the difference. There are thousands of scholarships and loans available every year. I hope you take advantage of them.



Sen. Maida Coleman has been my friend and colleague for years. This was Maida's final year in the Missouri Senate. She did an excellent job serving as Senate Minority Floor Leader and will be missed by everybody.

You make a lot of friends while serving in the legislature. It's really like having a second family. To have somebody who you can talk to, depend on, and work with is a blessing. I consider Maida to be one of my closest friends and I cherish the times we've had together while working in the legislature.

Selected New Laws of Interest

SB 1131 - Excludes tax revenues from tax increment finance economic activity taxes used to pay redevelopment costs. The goal is to expand transportation opportunities in Kansas City.

(See Page 3)

SB 1002 - Modifies the penalties for certain zoning violations. A property owner will be fined between \$10 and \$500, or imprisoned for ten days for each day of a violation. For second or subsequent offenses involving the same violation at the same place, the punishment will be a fine ranging from \$250 to \$1,000 or imprisonment for ten days for each day of the violation.

SB 718 - Modifies provisions of certain tax credit programs administered by the Department of Economic Development.

SB 720 - Creates the Hot Weather Rule, which further limits when utilities can be disconnected.

SB 818 - Cracks down on "cyberbullying" and changes the punishment for stalking. (See Page 2)

SB 830 - Known as the "Missouri Returning Heroes' Education Act," this bill limits college tuition charged to combat veterans to \$50 per credit hour. A "combat veteran" is defined as any person who served in armed combat after September 11, 2001.

(See Page 2)

SB 711 - Modifies provisions regarding property taxation. Charter counties, including Jackson County, will be the first to follow the new law in 2009. Jackson County will be required to roll back property taxes before they can reassess property.

SB 714 - Strengthens sex offender sentencing provisions and registry requirements.

SB 748 - Requires property taxes paid by certain non-resident taxpayers to be added back to adjusted gross income.

SB 768 - Creates the Missouri Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders and the Office of Autism Services.

SB 765 - Reverses a controversial law passed during the 2007 session and subsequently signed by the governor that modified the provisions for incorporating a village.



For a complete list,
visit www.senate.mo.gov

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