



Ready to Begin

JEFFERSON CITY — This week will mark the beginning of another legislative session, as lawmakers come back to the State Capitol starting Wednesday, January 9th, 2008 and continuing through May 16th, 2008. During this past interim, we've been able to make some real progress on some measures that I hold as top priorities to become law. I'd like to spend a few moments and give you some of the highlights on my agenda for the coming session.

First, there are the legislative changes this state can make to better handle the growing epidemic of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). I have introduced [Senate Bill 768](#) that will put together a commission to advise and make recommendations to the governor, General Assembly, and relevant state agencies regarding matters concerning all ASD services, including healthcare, education, and other adult and adolescent services. We cannot afford to ignore this problem, and I hope to convince my colleagues of the same.

Another big issue this legislative session will be the problem of cyberbullying. The tragic suicide of a teenager in my district and the lack of laws to prosecute those who might have bullied her into that choice have prompted me to file [Senate Bill 818](#) to close the loopholes cyberbullies now exploit. Our children need to feel safe from all forms of bullying, including those done by electronic means.

[Senate Bill 819](#), a measure to strengthen our laws against dog fighting, is long overdue. Dog is man's best friend. We cannot continue to allow those who violate that sacred trust with our canine companions for their own sick amusement to escape prosecution with just a misdemeanor conviction. It is time we made this horrendous crime a felony and gave our law officers the means to pursue and stop it.

Another measure I see as a priority is [Senate Bill 858](#), a three-pronged attack to our problem of illegal immigration. For too long, we have relied on Washington, D.C. to adequately address this issue, and lawmakers in the nation's capitol seem unwilling or unable to properly fix this problem. If passed, the bill would make sure that individuals, the state government, and private employers are not helping those who should not be in this country maintain that illegal status. Employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens would be held accountable for their actions. Those employers who receive state-administered or subsidized tax credits, tax abatements, or loans from the state and employ illegal aliens would be subject to criminal prosecution. Illegal aliens would not be allowed to attend public universities in the state, and SB 858 would reiterate the federal law that says illegal aliens may not receive state or local public benefits with certain exceptions. Those applying for benefits will only qualify if they can provide proof of citizenship, residency, or lawful presence.

In addition to these priorities, we will discuss how to fund our public schools and institutes of higher education, measures to deal with health insurance in Missouri, and monies for our law enforcement agencies and the courts. You can see a complete list of legislation I have already filed on my web site: www.senate.mo.gov/rupp.

As you can see, it will be another busy session, with plenty on our plates. However, there's always room for what you might consider a priority that the Legislature needs to act upon. I encourage you to contact me or my staff, and let us know of your concerns. I'm proud to be at the State Capitol to do your work, and I will continue to work through this session to make sure your priorities are my priorities.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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