



Collaring the State's Dogfighting Criminals

JEFFERSON CITY — You only have to read, watch or listen to the news to know that dogfighting is on the rise in America. The appalling and brutal crime, once primarily associated with rural areas, has spread with alarming numbers to urban communities. The Humane Society of the United States estimates as many as 40,000 people are part of this subculture in the U.S., with tens of thousands more involved in street-level dogfighting.

While dogfighting is a felony in 47 states, including Missouri, arrests and prosecutions are rare. The 2007 indictment of NFL star Michael Vick on federal dogfighting charges jolted the public's consciousness of this horrifying activity and reinvigorated efforts by legislators, animal-welfare organizations and others to create stiffer laws against dogfighting.

My Senate Bill 819 seeks to do just that by increasing the penalty for second-offense dogfighting spectators from a misdemeanor to a felony and allowing law enforcement officers making a lawful seizure to take possession of dogs and property used in the violation. This bill also focuses on the animals' welfare by requiring a hearing within 30 days to determine their fate, instead of waiting months or years for the criminal charges to be resolved, sometimes leaving the animals unable to get the care and attention they need.

It's time to enact this proposed legislation. We cannot continue to allow those who violate the sacred trust of our canine companions for their own sick amusement to escape prosecution from this senseless blood sport.

On a different note, several bills received full Senate approval last week and moved to the House for similar consideration. They include:

- SB 1038 - Campaign finance bill that repeals Missouri's campaign contribution limits for state candidates. This will provide transparency to who is raising contributions and end the "legal" money laundering in campaigns.
- SB 931 - Makes participation in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Animal Identification System voluntary instead of mandatory.
- SB 724 - Gives advanced practice registered nurses authority to prescribe additional drugs with the collaboration of doctors.
- SB 718 - Extends the life of the Missouri Quality Jobs Act, which offers tax credits to companies paying workers the average or above-average county wage, and offering to pay at least 50 percent of basic health insurance premiums.

-more-

Senate Bill 711, a property tax reform bill that mandates all taxing jurisdictions, regardless of whether they are operating at or below their tax rate ceiling, to roll back their tax rates to counter reassessment increases, received first-round approval last week and looks promising for full Senate approval.

I look forward to continuing to work on these and other important issues that affect the citizens of St. Charles and Lincoln counties as the legislative season progresses with a number of bills moving to the Senate floor for consideration and debate in the coming weeks.

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.

###