



SENATOR MATT BARTLE

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State Legislative Process Born of Constitution

This past week another legislative session began in Jefferson City. Between now and mid-May, our citizen legislators will travel to the State Capitol to hammer out Missouri's public policy priorities for the new year.

We are privileged in this land to have these decisions made through an open and democratic process. In much of the rest of the world, policies are handed down from unelected rulers with little or no input from those who must live under them. The beauty of our form of government is that many of the laws we live under are created right here in our own state by our neighbors that we send to Jefferson City to represent us.

While many issues (such as foreign policy, treaties, international trade and interactions between the states) are within the jurisdiction of the federal government in Washington, the state legislature is responsible for many of the issues citizens confront on a daily basis. Our primary duties include passing a yearly budget, as well as setting policy for education, transportation and public safety. This year, with more than 200 bills pre-filed, we already have plans to touch on issues such as property tax relief and stopping illegal immigration, plus many others.

Back in 1787, the Founding Fathers showed remarkable foresight as they began to piece together the U.S. Constitution. This masterpiece of political thought guaranteed that each state would have a republican form of government that allowed the active involvement of citizens. The rights of the citizens were further protected with the addition of the 10th Amendment which states: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." These two provisions combined ensure that citizens really do have the right and opportunity to participate in their government.

To be involved in the legislative process at the state level is to see democracy up close and personal. I have the privilege of chairing the Senate's Judiciary Committee, and as the session gets underway, we will be meeting each week to consider a wide range of issues dealing with changes to our criminal and civil laws as well as court procedures. These hearings are open to the public, and citizens from across our great state travel to Jefferson City to testify. It is the essence of democracy to hear a citizen tell their story about how the law (or lack of a law) has directly impacted them or their family.

Remember that our government is designed to represent the interests of its citizens. If you would like to weigh in on any issue pending in Jefferson City, please contact my office or consider coming to your state capitol to one of the many public hearings where citizens are invited to testify.

If you have any 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 e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.