



Column For Week of: January 21, 2008

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The Legislative Process

Since we are just starting the 2008 legislative session, I have been spending much of my time in committee meetings. As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee; Agriculture, Conservation, Parks and Natural Resources Committee; Education Committee; Transportation Committee; and Ways and Means Committee, just going to hearings keeps me engaged. For many, the fact that committee hearings are the beginning of a bill's legislative process is familiar, but I am aware that there are some new readers out there. I want to take the time to explain the legislative process for those who might not be familiar with how bills become law.

The process of crafting policy begins with the creation of the bill. When the legislation is completed, it is introduced and first read on the floor (for this example, we'll say it's the Senate, but a bill can be introduced by either legislative body). Then, the bill is referred to a committee. The legislation is heard before the committee that is related to the topic of the bill; for example, a bill about farming would be heard in the Senate Agriculture, Conservation, Parks and Natural Resources Committee. During a committee hearing, bills are discussed and the public has the opportunity to testify on pending legislation. If the majority of the committee members approve the bill, it can go on and be debated on the floor.

After the bill makes it through committee, it is put on the Senate calendar. However, this does not guarantee it will be discussed because the majority floor leader decides which bills will be taken up for debate. Often, throughout the process, bills will be

combined and modified so that important provisions are passed, even if the original bill does not progress through the process. By design floor debate is a tenant of the Senate— an important part of the legislative process that works to ensure a bill is created through fair discussion and compromise — with few exceptions. Unfortunately, recently, these exceptions have become more of the rule. It is my hope that this session, we will be able to work together as a Senate to make sure that all legislation is handled fairly. When the majority of senators agree on a bill, it is brought to a vote. A majority vote sends the bill through the same process in the House of Representatives.

Any changes or additions made to a bill need to be agreed upon by the two legislative bodies. This is when senators and representatives meet in a conference committee to discuss and ultimately come to final agreement on the legislation. Once the bill has been accepted and signed by both the House and Senate, it is sent to the governor for his approval. The governor has the option to sign or not sign the bill, but either way legislation will become law. If the governor vetoes the bill, it fails to become law.

Over the next few months, many bills will go through this process — some will succeed while others will not. The important thing is that we look at each bill carefully and make sure that all new policies will improve out state for the better.

Contact Me

As always, I appreciate hearing your comments, opinions and concerns. Please feel free to call me in Jefferson City at (573) 751-2108. You can also write to at the address listed below.

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