



Column For Week of: March 10, 2007

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Issues Affecting the 16th District

As an elected official, it is my job to make sure that needs in the district are being met by the state. Whether issues are addressed by our state's laws or reflected in funding, I try hard to make sure that the concerns of constituents are addressed. While there are many issues being tackled this session, there are two that I consider to be especially important to the district. One is the prisoner per diem—the amount of funding the state gives to counties that house state prisoners. The other centers on the military members living in our district that works to take care of our military members and veterans throughout the state.

Several weeks ago, county commissioners from throughout the state came to the Capitol to discuss issues affecting their areas. The issue that I noticed coming up the most from officials in our area was the prisoner per diem. Counties often house state prisoners, and the state pays counties on a per prisoner rate. State law allows the state to pay these counties up to \$37.50 per prisoner, per day, but appropriations only allow for the current payment of \$21.25. This is a slight improvement over the amount the state paid in fiscal year 2007—\$19.90. The problem that county officials are facing centers around the fact that they are currently losing funding because the average cost of keeping a prisoner is between \$34-\$36.

This year, I am hoping to increase the prisoner per diem to \$25. While the increase would not solve the funding problem, it would be a step in the right direction and result in a sizable increase for these counties. Pulaski County, for example, received \$307,000 in per diem payments under the \$19.90 rate in FY 2007. In FY 2008 with the \$1.35 increase instituted last year (assuming the same billable days), the county would receive a \$19,187 increase. A per diem of \$25 under those same conditions would result in an increase of

\$76,750. As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I will work hard to put this increase in place, which could help counties in the 16th District.

The 16th District is the home of Ft. Leonard Wood, a post that houses the Army Police School, Chemical School, and Engineer School. Many military members and their families call this community home, and I work hard to make sure that we pass legislation that helps our military men and women. One such bill is [Senate Bill 830](#), also know at the Missouri Returning Heroes' Education Act. The legislation allows "combat veterans" who served in the Armed Forces after September 11, 2001, to take classes at state higher education facilities in Missouri for \$50 a credit hours. These men and women have worked hard to defend our country and deserve this thanks from our state. Senate Bill 830 has been approved by the Senate and is now being discussed in the House.

These are just two of the issues that are important to the 16th District, and I will continue to make sure that the needs of our area are heard in the Senate. We are almost half-way through the legislative session, but there is still plenty of work to be done on issues affecting our communities, as well as Missourians who live within them. It is important that I know your concerns, so please feel free to contact me to let me know how I can work to help you.

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 me at Frank Barnitz, Missouri Senate, State Capitol, Jefferson City, MO 65101.

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