

For Immediate Release
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SHARING A VIEW OF THE STATE

Issues and Comments – 33rd Senatorial District

Senator

Chuck Purgason

Webster's dictionary defines a lobbyist as one who conducts activities aimed at influencing public officials and members of a legislative body on legislation.

The role of lobbyists at your state capitol carries many varying opinions on whether or not they are a good thing or a bad thing for state government. A legislator will talk to a lobbyist who works for or against a bill in order to gain knowledge about what the bill does.

This makes it very important that a lobbyist tell the truth and gain the trust of elected officials or their job as a lobbyist will be short-lived at your state capitol. A lobbyist that loses the trust of elected officials becomes one to whom nobody pays any attention, becomes very ineffective, and becomes a liability to any person or organization who hires that lobbyist to work on their behalf.

With much regret, I must say that I believe that Missouri Farm Bureau (MFB) has become a lobbying group that is no longer effective at your state capitol. This is very unfortunate for agriculture as a whole, because agriculture needs strong voices to protect the number one industry of our state. As a MFB member, I believe that I must speak to concerns I have in order for MFB to once again become a strong voice for agriculture in the state of Missouri.

For the last couple of years, I have worked on legislation to ensure that the National Animal Identification System remains a voluntary program. This legislation has been opposed by MFB. They claim they are also in favor of a voluntary system, but do not want any state legislation that could interfere if the program were to be made mandatory by the USDA and the federal government. Although we disagreed on this position, I respected their view and still tried to work with MFB to craft a good bill that would address their concerns, but that would also protect the people I represent.

A few weeks ago, I was shocked to read a release sent out by MFB. The release said, *"Yesterday; at the direction of State Senator Chuck Purgason, the Senate Budget Committee put a hold on every one of the Missouri Department of Agriculture decision items for the fiscal year 2008-2009 budget. Apparently, this action was taken to remind the MDA and other legislators*

that Senator Purgason is serious about the passage of legislation dealing with animal identification.”

The problem is that this statement was totally false. In a meeting with MFB and the leadership of the Senate, it was relayed to MFB that over half the budget was closed at the department's and the Governor's recommendations and of the eleven items left open for discussion, only one was left open by me. The item left open by me dealt with an issue with the State Fair.

MFB admitted the information was not accurate and they would set the record straight. Their next news letter stated they misunderstood the actions of the committee and expressed their regrets.

Again, this past week in the MFB Capitol Connection, MFB reported, "The new omnibus agriculture bill HCS/SS/SCS/SB931 {Purgason} that was approved by the House Special Committee on Agri-Business last week appeared to have hit a roadblock on Monday when Senator Chuck Purgason held up Senate floor debate to complain at length about how the bill had been changed by the House committee. But, on Tuesday the bill zoomed through the House on it way to further negotiations to conference, and on Thursday won Senate approval."

The real story is that I held up a major bill, HB 1779, that dealt with regulating telephone companies. Any bill that deals with the telecommunication industry has thousands of dollars worth of lobbyists working for its passage. I simply stated that the telecom bill would pass after SB 931 began moving in the House. This sent thousands of dollars worth of lobbyists to the House to lobby for the Omnibus Ag bill for free.

This is why the bill zoomed though the House and is now waiting on final House action. If I had waited for MFB lobbyists to help move the bill, it probably would have died in the House like the Ag bill last year.

I do not relish reporting on negative actions of MFB lobbyists, but I am also growing very tired of being singled out and being misrepresented by an organization whose job is to promote agriculture in the state of Missouri. Farm families all across the state depend upon all us of working together to ensure a prosperous future and when the voices that speak for agriculture are not working toward a common goal, all of agriculture suffers.

As a member of MFB and a recipient of several MFB Friend of Agriculture awards, I do not understand why I have been singled out in the MFB communications.

I look forward to working with MFB, but, at this point, I cannot establish a working relationship with the lobbyist for MFB until that basic trust is once again restored.

As always, I appreciate any suggestions you may have that will help improve the lives of the people of this legislative district. You are welcome to contact me at: Missouri Senate, 201 West Capitol Avenue, Room 420, Jefferson City, MO 65101, my telephone number is 573-751-1882 or email at chuck.purgason@senate.mo.gov.