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## **Legislative Process Off to a Good Start**

JEFFERSON CITY — The Senate's series of eight seminars on topics that lawmakers will likely address during this Legislative session concluded recently and gave my Senate colleagues and I an up-to-date and thorough review of our state's vital industries. Education, higher education, and economic development were the subjects of three seminars I attended in recent days and I want to highlight some of the key points that were discussed here.

There were two very good seminars on education. One focused on preschool, elementary and secondary education, and the other on higher education. Distribution of the education funds garnered from Proposition A — the casino tax and loss-limit voter-initiated initiative passed last year — was a key topic of the preschool, elementary and secondary education seminar. The way the proposition was written, it isn't clearly spelled out where the money should be specifically directed so there are several proposals being considered to address that. The benefits of initiating a quality rating system for daycare facilities was another topic explored, and the superintendent of the St. Louis Public Schools shared information on that district's progress, upcoming pilot schools, and the benefits of charter schools.

The higher education seminar included presentations by the presidents of Missouri's two largest public universities, each of whom stressed the need for a greater unified vision and higher education mission in the state. Educators also explored the need to boost higher education numbers as the state is falling behind in the number of people ages 25 to 34 who have an education beyond high school. Speakers also highlighted the impact of higher education as an economic stimulus.

Correspondingly, the economic development seminar also touted higher education as a key driver of economic growth. The potential of wind energy — also discussed during a previous energy seminar — was also amplified by economic development experts as an industry with great promise here. Presenters also echoed a need to invest more resources to market Missouri and highlighted the state's ranking as an ideal location for manufacturing.

Also recently, Senate Leader Charlie Shields of St. Joseph announced Senate leadership posts and committees. I am pleased to have been selected to serve as the chairman of the Small Business, Insurance and Industry Committee and vice-chair of the General Laws Committee. I will also serve again on the education and appropriations committees.

Now that Senate committees are in place, the legislative work moves into high gear as committees receive referred bills that have had a second reading in the Senate chamber. The committees then schedule public hearings to hear testimony on proposed legislation, and if the majority of any committee votes in favor of a bill, it moves to the Senate floor for debate.

I am sponsoring several bills this session, including three I will briefly highlight here. [Senate Bill 167](#) would require health carriers to provide coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders for individuals up to age 21 years of age. This would build upon the legislation I successfully advanced last year that enhances autism healthcare services in Missouri. [Senate Bill 207](#) would create a law addressing data security breaches and require consumer notification of such breaches. This is designed to help consumers take necessary action to protect against identity theft and from the risk of financial harm.

I also recently reintroduced a bill regarding dog fighting. The major goals of [Senate Bill 63](#) are to provide a disposition hearing within 30 days for animals seized following dog fighting incidents and to increase the second offense penalty for being a spectator at a dog fighting event. These animals rescued from this horrific activity deserve quick assessment and care and this law would ensure they don't linger in pounds until court cases are settled. The legislation is also intended to send a strong message that even spectators can expect to be punished for participating in these cruel events.

February promises to be a busy month at the state Capitol and I will keep you posted on the progress of all major legislation.

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.

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