

Column For Week of February 16, 2009

Senator Eric Schmitt

Weekly Column

15th District



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Valuing Time at the Capitol

With the Senate bill-filing deadline approaching, I thought this might be a good time to reflect on the experiences I have had at the Capitol so far. While this is truly an impressive and picturesque place thanks to the grand architecture and stunning murals, I am struck more by the legislation that has the potential to come out of this building and the positive impact it can have on you and I.

Walking the halls of the Capitol is inspiring, and I am often reminded of the great responsibility we have to do the work of the people. Here, you see many folks of different backgrounds and different areas of the state coming together to work on meaningful reforms. Regardless of political affiliation, lawmakers and officials in this building hold a common desire to make a difference for the people they serve. Our system of government is validated by the diversity of this body and how, by and large, each Senator “fits” their district.

On to the happenings this week in the Senate, we had our first filibuster of the session on legislation; this is a tactic long-protected in the Senate Rules in which debate is extended to delay a vote. Also this week, I presided over part of the Senate session for the first time in lieu of the Lieutenant Governor, who is the president of the Senate.

I have also received many meaningful visits, phone calls, and e-mails from constituents. Government works best when it is personal, and I am regularly reminded that this job is one that depends on your comments, concerns, and feedback. Please feel free to come by or contact me anytime. Some of the visitors from this week include Kevin Drollinger, Director of Epworth Children’s Center; Becky Mulvihill McKenna, LMFT, Individual, Couple and Family Therapy; Janet Gillow, National Multiple Sclerosis Society; Richard Schuessler, constituent, US Green Building Council; Roy Gergel, Missouri Votes Conservation & Republicans for Environmental Protection; and Wendy Sullivan, Life Skills.

I also met in my office with elected municipal officials including Kirkwood city council member Gerry Biedenstein, Webster Groves city council members Kathy Hart, Toni Hunt, and Debi Salberg, and Mayor David Willson of Manchester.

When listening to the real-world troubles of my constituents, I sometimes hear disturbing or upsetting stories. I consider myself privileged to be in a position where I can help. This is the case with a recent event not far from our district.

In March 2008, several parents at the Mapaville State School for the Severely Disabled pulled their children out of class after discovering abuse by hiding tape recorders on the students. The allegations of abuse include evidence of children being slapped, yelled at, and neglected for hours. On one recording, a worker was heard ringing a bell and saying she was trying to send a student into a seizure. This led an inquiry panel to sustain the complaints of abuse and neglect. That decision is being appealed. (Read a recent [St. Louis Post-Dispatch article here](#).)

This is an issue that reaches across party lines, and I have been working with Sen. Ryan McKenna (D-Crystal City)—the Senator that represents Mapaville in Jefferson County—to take action. We sent out a press release in January calling for a thorough review and have since sent a letter to Sen. Charlie Shields (R-St. Joseph), the Senate Leader, requesting that the Senate investigate the Mapaville incident further, as well as the state school system for the severely disabled. The treatment these students received was absolutely unacceptable, and the Legislature has the responsibility to demand accountability and ensure the safety of all students at state schools for the severely disabled. I will continue to work to protect our most vulnerable citizens. Put simply, it is the right thing to do, and I will keep you up to date on the progress we make on this issue.

Every day at the Capitol is exciting and meaningful and so I thank you for the opportunity to serve the 15th District. It is truly an honor that I take seriously.

Contact Me

As always, I appreciate hearing your comments, opinions, and concerns. Please feel free to contact me using the information below. If you would like to begin receiving this column regularly, click on the subscribe link on the bottom of the page.

Thank you,
Senator Eric Schmitt

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