

Column For Week of January 12, 2009

Senator Eric Schmitt

Weekly Column

15th District



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Taking Office as Your State Senator

It has been an exciting and busy couple of weeks here in Jefferson City. On January 7, the 2009 legislative session officially began, and I was sworn in as your state Senator. I thank you for the opportunity to serve you and look forward to the progress I can make for the 15th Senate district. On January 12th, the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Auditor, Treasurer, Secretary of State and Attorney General were sworn-in. Hopes throughout the Capitol are high that this will be a productive session.

While I have been spending time learning the ins and outs of Jefferson City, I have also been focused on my legislative priorities for this year. I have filed three pieces of legislation to begin my work.

One issue that is very important to me is being a leader in advocating for children with special needs and their families. Thus, I recently filed two bills to that end.

Many of you know that I am the parent of a child on the autism spectrum, so it is my goal to make sure the parents of children with disabilities are informed and play a role in the services available to their child. [Senate Bill 157](#) codifies each of the five regional autism projects (Central, East, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest Missouri) to have a parent advisory council. Parent advisory councils would include seven to nine individuals that have family members with autism, including young children, school-age children, and adults. The bill also would require the Division of Developmental Disabilities to establish the Missouri Parent Advisory Committee on Autism. The legislation would ensure that parents and family members have a voice in how important resources in their area are spent.

Some parents of children with disabilities are unaware of the educational rights they have as it related to their child's individualized education program (IEP). This is why I also filed [Senate Bill 175](#), which would require the Department of Elementary and Secondary

Education to produce “The Parents’ Bill of Rights,” to inform parents of children with an IEP of their educational rights. Each school district would then provide a copy of “The Parents’ Bill of Rights” at least 10 days prior to an IEP meeting.

Following up my pledge to fundamentally reform a property tax system that is flawed and out of touch, I also recently filed [Senate Joint Resolution 5](#), a constitutional amendment that, if approved by voters, would require the assessor in St. Louis County to be elected, rather than appointed. St. Louis County officials have made recent comments that assessed values are expected to remain close to the same as years’ past, even as the housing market continues to struggle. Making sure the voters have a say in who holds the office of assessor in St. Louis County and ensuring that property tax bills reflect changes in the market is an issue of fundamental fairness and accountability. In 2007, St. Louis County’s reassessment values increased 22 percent on average. The Legislature passed a measure in 2008 to close a loophole in property tax law that allowed taxing jurisdictions operating below their tax rate ceiling to approve back door tax increases with no legal recourse. My legislation continues this work, promoting fairness and accountability in the property tax process. This issue affects homeowners throughout St. Louis County, especially during tough economic times when many are struggling to afford necessities such as medication and housing. I will continue looking at additional ways to ensure the assessment process throughout Missouri is more open and transparent.

As the legislative session continues, I will keep you posted on the issues that are important to our community and our state. Please feel free to visit Jefferson City and meet me and my staff; we are here to serve you.

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 S. Schmitt

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