State rep talks health, money

BY LAURA PRATHER
Features Editor

Through the years, Rebecca McClanahan has cared for patients, students and now about 35,000 people she represents.

Rep. McClanahan, D-Kirksville, is in her first term in the House and loves it. McClanahan, who has spent most of her life residing in northeast Missouri, represents District 2, which covers Adair, Putnam and Sullivan counties.

"I see my job as representing my constituents to the state and then helping to interpret the state or help improve the responses of the state to my constituents as well," she said.

Even though the House is not in session now, McClanahan said she always is busy representing her district and preparing for upcoming legislative meetings and proposals.

"I attend a lot of community events in the way of just being available to constituents and to other officials throughout the area, helping to represent them and [helping] them find the things they need," she said.

Prior to her position as representative, McClanahan was a professor of nursing at Truman for more than 30 years.

"I really expected to finish out my career teaching nursing and to retire from that position," she said. "But I just felt like I couldn't continue doing that — that I needed to do something more direct in trying to influence policy at the state level."

McClanahan, who said she always has been fascinated with the political process, decided it was up to her to take action on important local issues. With her nursing background, McClanahan knew she could bring a new perspective to the House.

"I think what really prompted my decision to run for office is my fundamental concern that we're going in the wrong direction in the state of Missouri," she said. "I feel like we need to change that direction, especially on issues like health care. Of course, as a nurse myself, I've been very concerned about those issues of health care. While many other states around us and across the nation are increasing the health coverage for their citizens, we here in Missouri are actually reducing the coverage."

Health care has been a hot topic in the legislature, and people will continue to make proposals about health care policies, McClanahan said. McClanahan and a small group of other democratic representatives will make one such proposal in the near future.

"I think we're going to provide good plans that would increase insurance coverage for Missourians," she said. "The announcement has just been made within a month or so that the rate of uninsured in Missouri has increased at three times the national rate. So we're really seeing a growing problem of a lack of access to health care coverage in Missouri."

McClanahan said that even though they are a minority party presenting the issue, it is an extremely important one that needs to be taken into consideration.

In addition to her strong support of health care issues, McClanahan said she also is a member

of the higher education committee and agricultural policy committee. Again, her enthusiasm in these other issues is motivated by her teaching career and her close ties to the Missouri economy, which is strongly based in agriculture.

"Having spent most of my career in higher education, I'm very interested in issues related to higher education and trying to work on funding as well as reasonable policy for higher education," McClanahan said. "I have seen some real problems there as well, ... so I'm very concerned about these policy decisions that are being made that affect all of higher education."

In reference to the quickly approaching 2008 presidential election, McClanahan said she is impartial. She said she has not yet committed herself to which candidate she thinks will win.

"I'm just kind of watching from afar and watching to see what happens," she said. "Once we get through some of these early caucuses ... I think we'll have a better idea of who the candidates will be. It's a very full field at this point."

McClanahan said that more than anything, she is impressed with the number of candidates and their caliber.

"I'm very gratified to see that there are just outstanding candidates who are running," she said. "I'm really encouraged that we will have very good choices to make in the '08 election."

The only downfall to the abundance of presidential candidates is the enormous amount of money that is being accumulated for their campaigns, McClanahan said. It creates a wide gap between candidates that can work against those who have less access to private funding, she said.

"I feel very strongly that we should have campaign limits that have now been reinstituted in the state of Missouri," she said. "I think that kind of thing really helps in holding people accountable and leveling the playing field."

When the House is not in session, McClanahan resides in Kirksville with her husband Marvin. The couple has two sons, Bryan and Andrew, who respectively reside in Columbia, Mo., and Arizona. McClanahan said she cherishes the time she spends with her family and in particular, enjoys singing with her husband.

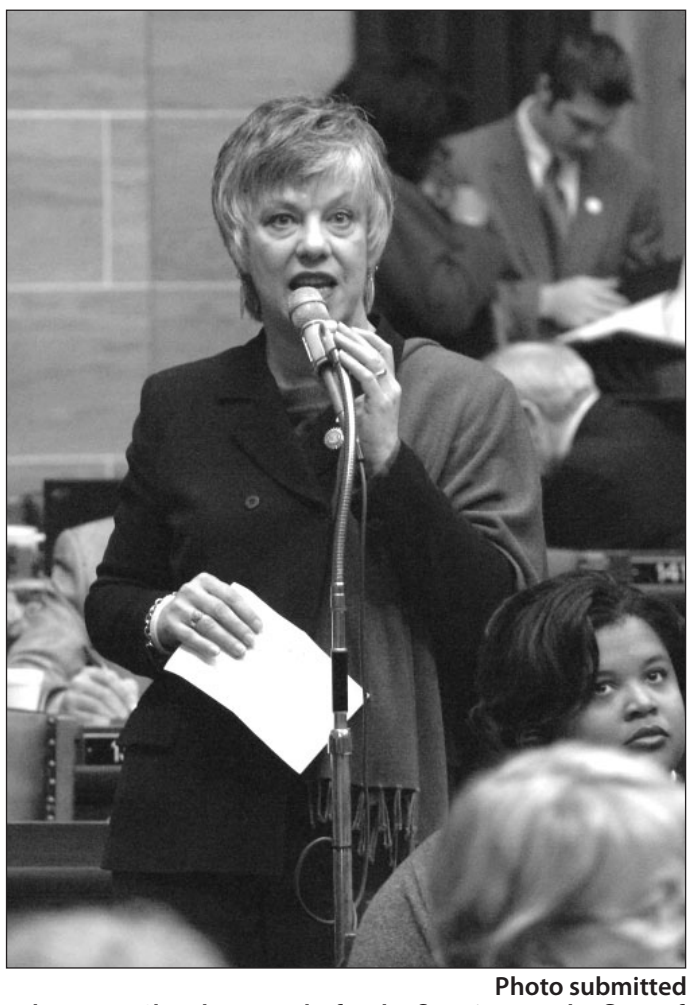

Photo submitted
Rebecca McClanahan speaks for the first time on the floor of the House of Representatives in 2006. She is a member of its committees on higher education and agricultural policy.

McClanahan said she also likes to read and walk in her spare time. She said walking is a nice recreational activity that also is a way to stay in shape. Reading always has been a hobby of hers, and she said she often has multiple books that she is working on at once.

"I always have enjoyed reading about health care issues and health care policies, so that's fun for me, it's not just work," she said.

Although still in her first term, McClanahan said she thoroughly enjoys her position. She said she likes being involved in the community and gets a lot of gratification out of helping the people she represents.

"I'm just honored to serve," she said. "... Just this opportunity to take the plunge into this role, to serve the people of this area and to really give voice to some of the concerns that I've been hearing from constituents is a real honor for me."

Unwelcome, allergy-prone roommate edges her way in

la dolce vita

with Sara DeGonia

I could become a stand-up comedian with the material I've accumulated in Italy.

Many of my daily occurrences lend themselves nicely to the type of joke that usually starts out with two people journeying into an eatery or drinking establishment: A Jew and a Catholic walk into a pizza place. ... Yup, did that today.

Yet, as is often true in regard to riddles, some are infinitely better than others. Again, drawing from my own life, I'm a big fan of the one that starts like so: Four college-age women and a crazy, 40ish, incense-burning, fun-hating vegan walk into a housing office.

It has potential.

I'm always telling you folks about the great, wide wonders of studying abroad and specifically singing the praises of Firenze.

But now it's time to tell you a tale — a bedtime story as my roommates would call it — about the random things that occur in life. It's chockfull of intrigue. It boasts copious amounts of hilarity. The best part about it is that it's the God-honest truth.

So cross that Reading Rainbow and come along because LeVar Burton was wrong: You do have to take my word for it.

But back to my joke.

The apartment that Cara, Lauren, Jenn and I share is actually made for five people. We started out with a fifth roommate, Jane, but she unfortunately left after only two days due to a family emergency. The room sat empty for a few weeks stripped of any desirable décor by us scavengers and occasionally accommodating a half-naked man, although I certainly won't reveal to which roommate he belongs.

Soon, our landlord Christopher (who, by the way, most closely resembles a darling puppy) informed us of the school's intention to fill the spot. Having no feasible ability to resist this news and certainly not wishing to seem ungrateful tenants, we gracefully soaked in this possibility. Or at least pretended to.

Despite our crossed fingers, prayers to the god of apartments and vigilant rabbit's foot rubbing, our newest roommate appeared a few days later, promptly un-Velcro-ing her sandals at the door.

I'd be lying if I said her age wasn't the first thing we noticed. I mean, the woman has lived twice as long as us, which isn't exactly what you expect of your fellow college student. She told us her name, but to this day we're not really sure what it says on her birth certificate, although we finally settled on Eif. It rhymes with beef.

Something suitably unique for someone who certainly made our lives an adventure.

What can I say about Eif (whose name is probably actually something normal like Eve or Eva)? She cooks odd-smelling foods first thing in the morning. She told roomie Lauren that she could cure her of her allergy to incense if only Lauren would come into her room — Lauren didn't. And our personal favorite, she firmly believes that music played in her presence at any time of day makes her swell up and vomit. Her words exactly.

Eventually we took our complaints to the housing department: We just didn't sign up to live overseas only to have a woman old enough to be our mom telling us to turn off the music just like our mom. The housing director, a determined young woman, initially laid down the law, saying we'd need to work it out. But less than 10 minutes later, Eif had dug her own grave, having mentioned the little music-plus-her-equals-vomit problem.

It was deemed that our "lifestyles are just too different," and we were given word that the petite female, from Canada by way of India, would be leaving soon.

With an end to our hardship in sight, enduring Eif's quirks (to put it nicely) became much easier. Being scolded for talking at a normal level complete with the finger-to-the-lips usually reserved for 3-year-olds was almost pleasant. Even enduring a knock at the restroom door when she felt her toilet needs were greater than ours — despite one of us being mid-pee — was bearable with the knowledge of her imminent departure.

And when Eif finally did leave, the relief was sweet.

Four college-age women and a spacey, almost elderly hippie say goodbye. One 20-something says to the departing lady, "Good luck with everything." The woman replies, "I never bothered to ask your names, and I never actually went to your school, although I told everyone I did."

Hmm. Not exactly Dane Cook, but it has potential.

"So cross that Reading Rainbow and come along because LeVar Burton was wrong: You do have to take my word for it."

Health Talk

www.nermc.com
with Ralph Boling, D.O.
Northeast Regional Medical Center

Breast cancer fight sees recent advancements

This year, more than 178,500 American women will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer and about 40,000 will die. Although researchers still are working toward a cure, they are making progress in fighting this deadly disease. Breast cancer death rates have dropped recently because of early detection, new technology and improved treatments.

Early detection is one of the most important factors in the lower breast cancer fatality rates. Although the chance of a woman having breast cancer during her life is one in eight, the chance of dying from breast cancer is only one in 33. If the cancer is found before it spreads to other parts of the body, it is much easier to treat. Therefore, it is recommended that women perform monthly breast self-examinations beginning at an early age. When women know how their breasts usually feel, they can detect unusual lumps early and report them to a physician.

According to the National Breast Cancer Foundation, women in their 20s and 30s should receive a clinical breast exam from their doctor every three years, and women age 40 and older should have a clinical breast exam and a mammogram, a type of X-ray for the breast, every year. Women with relatives who have had breast cancer should begin getting mammograms five years before that relative was diagnosed, as breast cancer can be passed down genetically.

Scientists also have identified genes associated with a higher risk of breast cancer and are able to track these genes.

Doctors are exploring different ways of examining the internal structure of the breast to detect cancer. Although none have proven as effective as high-quality mammography, many different types of images help doctors learn more about the causes of breast cancer, the way it spreads and new treatments. Mammograms are less effective for young women and women who are pregnant because they have denser breasts that could hide a tumor more easily. For these women, an MRI, an internal imaging system that uses magnetic waves, sometimes is recommended in conjunction with a mammogram. A breast ultrasound often is used to determine if a lump is a cyst or a solid mass, as well. After other tests indicate the possibility of breast cancer, a biopsy might be performed to determine if the lump is cancerous.

As technology has improved, so have breast cancer treatments. Where once a mastectomy to remove the entire breast was the only surgical option for breast cancer, doctors now routinely perform lumpectomies, leaving the breast intact. Combination chemotherapy, the use of multiple drugs to combat breast cancer, is standardized practice and less experimental.

Although improved technology has led to better outcomes for breast cancer patients, the best tool in early detection is a woman's familiarity with her own body and medical history. Women should talk to their doctors about the correct way to perform a monthly breast self-exam and discuss any incidence of cancer in their family's history.

For more information on breast health Contact Dr. Boling at 660-665-6174

King's Buffet & Restaurant
1707 S. Baltimore 665-6622

College Student Discount
Sunday to Thursday Evening Buffet
$6.28 (plus tax)

Buffet includes:
Grand salad bar,
variety of appetizers,
cocktail shrimp, sesame shrimp,
beef, chicken, pork and more,
ice cream and desserts.

CAN YOU SEE THROUGH THE CLUTTER?

WWW.TRUMANINDEX.COM