

NEWSMAKER

Bartle's faith guides him as state senator, plaintiff lawyer

'He's not a political opportunist,' liberal Senate colleague says

BY MARK KIND | STAFF WRITER

Sen. Matt Bartle hardly glanced at the menu, ordered the special and interviewed his interviewer about an ailing stepdaughter.

Then, at the center table in The Mango Room bar, over the din of jazzy covers of '80s rock, he bowed his head and asked God for an end to the girl's post-sillectomy hemorrhaging and for his blessing on the Greek salad.

"I think Matt practices his faith every day, all the time," said his friend and church mate Rich Hastings, president of Saint Luke's Health System.

Faith might explain a lot about Bartle's recent behavior. He has walked away from a respected Plaza law firm to hang a two-man shingle in Downtown, just a few months after stirring up respected Kansas City business leaders and "smut shop" owners by fighting cloning research and lap dances in Jefferson City.

The next election may end his political career.

"Surely I know that most of the business community will not be there this time," Hastings said.

But Bartle will run again, despite the demands of a new business, two children and the need to raise \$750,000 for the race.

"I'm getting a lot more done in the Senate than I ever thought I could," he said.

Successes have included legislation requiring DNA tests of the prison population, which Bartle said has helped solve 30 cold cases in Missouri. He also sponsored a law that created a state grant program for umbilical cord blood banks.

What he hasn't gotten done is a ban on cloning, a key technology in the minds of Kansas Citians promoting a life sciences initiative.

The local case for embryonic stem cell research goes like this: Kansas City could make a lot of money from the technology if lots of companies set up research labs here and discover how to cure diseases.

But Bartle opposes destroying embryos or using them for spare parts, and he supports instead the study of adult stem cells for potential disease treatments.

Some of Bartle's most loyal supporters are among the 7,000 members at First

Baptist Raytown, including Republican activist Laurel Morton, whose family attends the church because Bartle invited them one Sunday. She has campaigned for Bartle in most of his House and Senate runs and said she's not worried that Bartle's next effort will suffer backlash from his attempts to limit stem cell research.

"I don't anticipate that being a problem at all," she said. "I would say the people that helped us get him into that seat in the first place all have the same view of cloning and killing embryos that Matt has."

Hastings is less certain, though he remains a Bartle supporter, despite Saint Luke's official position supporting Kansas City's life sciences initiative.

"There's no doubt about it that Matt, in deciding to take on this one issue, has decided to fight the most uphill battle of his career," Hastings said.

Bartle has passed on another uphill battle on his "core principle" of protecting embryos. He hasn't attempted to ban the creation of surplus test-tube human embryos for infertile couples.

"It's not politically possible," he said. "There's no way to get that through."

Yet one Senate liberal said Bartle is clearly rooted in principle, not politics.

"Matt is a true believer," said Sen. Joan Bray, D-St. Louis. "That's why I can work with Matt because he's not a political opportunist."

Geographically and politically, Bray couldn't be further from Bartle. But on the question of whether to regulate lap dancing in strip clubs, Bartle and Bray were as close together as their names in an alphabetical listing of state senators.

"People should be free to do what they want to legally in their businesses," Bray said. "But I feel like there are too many circumstances (in strip clubs) where the woman is exploited, and we shouldn't allow that."

With Bray's help, Bartle has banned porn shop billboards from Missouri highways (although the law hasn't taken effect yet, it has been upheld in court) and passed a law prohibiting strippers from straddling customers or accepting tips.

Kansas City lawyer Dick Bryant represents strippers and club owners who have sued about the billboard law and the lap-dance ban.

"Certainly, my clients are concerned about the erosion of First Amendment



MATT BARTLE

Age: 40

Title: Partner, Bartle & Marcus LLC

Family: Wife, Annette; son, Mack, 10; daughter, Betsy, 7

Education: Bachelor's, University of Missouri; law degree, Northwestern University School of Law

Hobby: Running

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Matt Bartle says he's "getting a lot more done in the Senate than I ever thought I could."

rights and the intense legislation around what are religious and moral issues," Bryant said.

But Bartle, who grew up in Columbia, said rural Missourians have few options other than state law for combating smut shops and their billboards.

His heartland childhood and his parents instilled principles that guide his life but are subordinate to the biblical admonition to love God completely, he said.

For his children, he has "crystallized" the principles into four statements:

- Hard work and tenacity will yield success.
- Only fear fear.
- Let things roll off your back.
- If you encourage other people, you will never lack for friends.

Hard work for Bartle has included a college stint on a garbage truck and jobs as a farmhand and a grain stacker hefting 60-pound bags in a cleaning mill.

He's only 40, but he said that he's looking ahead to when he's 65 or 75 and that he doesn't want to look back and realize he failed to be a political leader on issues he believes in or failed to start a business or failed to spend enough time with his kids.

Because of the kids, he won't seek of-

vice beyond the state Senate, he said, but he thinks he can lead without enduring a statewide campaign.

On Aug. 1, Bartle and partner David Marcus left Berkowitz Oliver Williams Shaw & Eisenbrandt LLP and formed Bartle & Marcus LLC. Both said they wanted to serve a greater diversity of clients, including class-action plaintiffs.

"There are industries that depend on tricking the public into buying their products," Bartle said. "Actions on behalf of consumers will be a huge part of our practice."

He argued that the courts are a protection against big government and that lawsuits are therefore a tool in the service of conservatism. If victims can't seek redress in court, government has to create regulatory controls to protect the public, he said.

Marc Mader, president of Beacon Industries Inc., said Bartle has handled numerous legal matters for him because "he's ethical and you never have to worry about him doing anything under the table."

"He's just a good guy," Mader said. "He's a very faithful guy as far as when it comes to the Lord and the church."

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