



MISSOURI SENATE

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Partisanship and Pandering Trump Life-saving Research

JEFFERSON CITY — The governor's plan to sell student loans from the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority (MOHELA) to pay for campus construction projects has occupied lawmakers since it was introduced early last year. It is a complicated issue, and legislators have been working together to come to a compromise suitable for all sides. However, Senate Republicans recently took a step backward when they stripped, and then reinserted, life-sciences projects planned for Democratic districts, including St. Louis. The back-and-forth has been due to the Republican majority's desire to appease Missouri Right to Life, which opposes the construction of life-science research facilities due to concerns the buildings will house embryonic stem cell research. This obstruction has no place in civil debate over academic research, and I implore all senators to do what is right for Missouri.

Under the governor's plan, known as the Lewis and Clark Discovery Initiative, MOHELA would sell off a large portion of its assets to raise approximately \$350 million for construction projects at Missouri institutions of higher education. Senate Bill 389 would implement the plan with legislative approval.

In recent weeks, bowing to pressure from Missouri Right to Life, the Republican leadership inserted into the plan a provision prohibiting embryonic stem cell research at facilities built using MOHELA funds. Naturally, Democrats opposed the new version because it places restrictions on a vital procedure that promises to lead to cures for many harmful diseases. However, the leadership had not anticipated that some conservative lawmakers would also oppose the plan because of their fear that the stem cell provision would be overturned in the courts, due to the recent approval by voters of an amendment giving constitutional protections to the procedure. In other words, social conservatives oppose the construction of all life-sciences facilities as long as embryonic stem cell research is protected by the Missouri Constitution.

To fix this inconvenience, Republicans simply removed from the plan all of the life-sciences projects, which happened to be at campuses in Columbia, Kansas City and St. Louis — all in Democratic districts. The eliminated projects included the \$5.5 million CORTEX Accelerator Facility at Harris-Stowe State University and the \$5.5 million Center for Emerging Technologies II at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Understanding the need for these vital projects, Republicans have proposed an amendment reinserting the life-sciences facilities into SB 389. Although I approve of that action, I cannot support a bill that continues to place restrictions on needed, constitutionally protected research. As a part-time academician who values the idea of free and open academic inquiry, I will do everything in my power to move ahead with a plan that funds vital facilities without imposing restrictions on embryonic stem cell research.

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