

State Senator Robert Mayer 2008 Capitol Report



Dear Friends,

The 2008 Regular Session of the General Assembly was another productive one, mainly due to the input from you. We found more money for our schools, taxed our citizens less, implemented strong illegal immigration measures, boosted laws to address industrial metal theft and passed incentives to encourage the growth of our economy.

Here are some of our top priorities that I pushed for that made it through this year:

Cracking Down on Copper Theft

Senate Bill 1034 – Modifies recordkeeping requirements for purchasers of scrap metal and creates penalties for unlawful purchases of certain scrap metals.

Rebuilding Our Schools

SB 1170 – Creates the Rebuild Missouri Schools Program and allows loans to rebuild certain damaged school facilities such as the one in Caruthersville.

Expanding Access to Education

SB 967 – Allows the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority to originate federally guaranteed student loans under certain conditions.

Increasing Deputy Sheriffs' Pay

HB 2224 – Creates the “Deputy Sheriff Salary Supplementation Fund,” consisting of money generated by a \$10 fee collected for serving civil summons, writs, subpoenas and other court orders. This will bolster the pay of county deputy sheriffs.

Strengthening Meth Laws

SB 724 – Establishes a drug monitoring program and modifies existing recordkeeping for controlled substances and pseudoephedrine products. This strengthens the monitoring procedure for purchases of over-the-counter

drugs that contain pseudoephedrine, a key ingredient in the production of methamphetamine.

Property Tax Relief

SB 711 – Modifies provisions regarding property taxation. This protects taxpayers from the rising bills brought on by property reassessments and requires cities, school districts and other taxing bodies to roll back tax levy rates when additional revenues from reassessment exceed inflation.

Stopping Illegal Immigration

HB 1549 – Modifies the law relating to illegal immigrants by cracking down on employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants and barring illegal immigrants from receiving driver’s licenses and state or local benefits.

Remembering A Fallen Hero

SB 753 – Designates certain stretches of highway after law enforcement and military personnel.

Many of these and other measures are highlighted on the following pages. Please don’t hesitate to contact my office with questions, comments or suggestions.

Sincerely,



OTHER LEGISLATION SPONSORED BY SEN. MAYER AND PASSED IN 2008

SB 805 (incorporated into SB 711) – Modifies the definition of “agricultural and horticultural property” for property tax purposes.

SB 1015 (incorporated into SB 1140)– Requires health insurance premiums of state employees to be run through a cafeteria plan.

SB 1016 – Directs part of the tort victims’ compensation fund be transferred to the basic civil legal services fund.

SB 1068 – Establishes the Pharmacy Rebates Fund for use with the MO HealthNet Program.

SB 1144 (incorporated into HB 1807) – Changes the name of the State Schools for Severely Handicapped Children to Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled.

SCR 29 – Requests the U.S. Department of Agriculture to add June 1 and Sept. 1 as additional rice reporting dates on the Agricultural Statistics Board Calendar.

Curbing the Copper Theft Epidemic

The State Legislature gave full passage this session to my proposal to provide more protections for farmers, homeowners, businesses, and utilities from the theft of industrial metals — a growing and troublesome problem occurring across the state and nation.

Senate Bill 1034 now requires stronger recordkeeping by scrap dealers and increases the penalties for stealing or unlawfully selling copper, brass, bronze or aluminum. Under the new requirements, scrap dealers are required to obtain a driver's license and other sales transaction information from customers and to maintain those records for at least two



Governor Blunt signs Sen. Mayer's copper theft bill into law. Photo courtesy of Dexter Daily Statesman.



Sen. Mayer, flanked by Stoddard County Sheriff Carl Hefner and Governor Matt Blunt, during the copper theft bill signing in Dexter. Photo courtesy of Dexter Daily Statesman.

years. Information will be available to law enforcement officers upon request. Scrap dealers who fail to keep accurate records will face a Class A misdemeanor charge. A related provision from a companion bill creates a Class C felony penalty, punishable by one to seven years in prison, for stealing and unlawfully selling utility wire or any utility infrastructure.

Thieves will no longer be able to profit from selling stolen scrap metal with no record of who they are and where the metal came from. Common sense recordkeeping will give law enforcement the tools they need to track, catch and lock the door on these brazen metal thieves.

Stretch of Highway Honors Soldier's Sacrifice

During the recent legislative session, the General Assembly passed a measure I sponsored that designates certain stretches of highway after military personnel and law enforcement officers. I am very pleased that part of Highway 84 in Pemiscot County will be named the "Corporal Rickey L. Bell Memorial Highway."

The 21-year-old Caruthersville soldier, who was a member of the 4th Squadron, 6th U.S. Air Cavalry Regiment, stationed in Ft. Lewis, Washington, was killed last August in Iraq following a helicopter crash. Naming this expanse of highway will serve to recognize this young man's brave service and to honor his memory.



Corp. Rickey Bell



Sen. Mayer and members of Corp. Rickey Bell's family meet at the State Capitol to officially name a portion of Highway 84 in Pemiscot County "The Corporal Rickey L. Bell Memorial Highway."

Rebuilding Disaster-Affected Schools

In recent years, residents in southeastern Missouri have experienced several natural disasters and incurred devastating property losses. That's why I proposed the **Rebuild Missouri Schools Program** (Senate Bill 1170) that will now allow school districts with one or more school facilities declared a disaster area by the governor or president to apply for no-interest loans through a 20-year repayment agreement.

I am very pleased the State Legislature approved the new program, which will provide school districts across the state in communities like Caruthersville with the financial means to recover and rebuild when their schools are affected by such catastrophic events. Two years ago, a tornado ripped through Caruthersville and nearly destroyed the school.

Under the program, school districts eligible for the **Rebuild Missouri Schools Program** must have experienced a pre-set level of damage or destruction as determined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) due to an act of God.



The Caruthersville High School suffered extensive damage following an April 2006 tornado and must be rebuilt to strict standards because of its location within the New Madrid Fault Zone.

Schools are the heart of any community. Equipping school districts with the means to recover and rebuild following a natural catastrophe is vital to keeping these schools open and available for students.

Boosting Deputy Sheriff Pay

County deputy sheriffs will receive better pay for their public service thanks to the passage of House Bill 2224, which was modeled after legislation I introduced. The bill allows sheriffs to receive an additional \$10 fee for processing any civil summons, writ, subpoena or other court order. This money will go into the newly created "Deputy Sheriff Salary Supplementation Fund," which will be used to bolster the pay of county deputy sheriffs.

I'm pleased we're able to put a new plan in place so these brave men and women will receive a respectable salary for the important work they do to ensure the safety of our citizens and property. The measure shows we value their dedication and commitment to law enforcement and appreciate the risks they take each and every day.

Our county sheriff departments cover thousands of Missouri miles to protect our citizens. Providing adequate pay is the right answer to attracting and retaining some of the best and brightest law enforcement officers for these areas.

Protecting the Unborn

As an ardent believer in the protection of unborn children, I introduced Senate Bill 1058 that would have expanded Missouri's abortion law to include providing a broader range of educational materials to pregnant women considering an abortion **and** would have made it a crime to coerce an abortion.

The goal of my legislation was to offer stronger protections for pregnant women and unborn children in Missouri by strengthening the area of the law that requires prior, informed and written consent before an abortion. The bill also sought to punish those who knowingly coerce a woman to seek or obtain an abortion or who knowingly perform, induce or assist in an abortion on a woman who is a victim of a coerced abortion.

The General Assembly debated the issue, but no decisive action was taken. As you know, this issue is a top priority of mine and I pledge to continue to work to ensure that those who cannot speak for themselves have a voice in state government.

Ensuring A Quality Education & B



Advance 5th Graders visit with Sen. Mayer at the State Capitol.



Sen. Mayer with a group from Caruthersville High School on the Senate dais.



Sen. Mayer meets with Poplar Bluff teens at the State Capitol.



Sen. Mayer meets with a group of students from Senath/Hornersville at the State Capitol.

Alternative Teacher Certification

Missouri is in desperate need of qualified teachers in the classrooms, especially in the areas of math and science. To fill these positions, it's necessary that we look to alternatives to get capable educators into our classrooms as soon as possible.

The General Assembly approved Senate Bill 1066, which I supported, that creates an alternative route for career-changing professionals to become certified to teach in secondary schools. Under the program, teachers are required to complete certification from the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE), a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., that is funded through federal grants. In addition to coursework and certification exams, prospective teachers need to already hold a bachelor's degree or higher, complete a background check, and verify the ability to work with children by completing 60 hours of classroom instruction under the supervision of a mentor-teacher.

The program is designed to offer working professionals an opportunity to bring their real-world experience to the classroom. A person who has earned a bachelor's degree or higher in any discipline is eligible to participate in this alternative certification program to earn his or her teaching certificate for grades 6-12 in both public and private schools in Missouri. The legislation exempts early childhood, elementary and special education, where a teacher must still receive traditional certification.

The ABCTE program has been very successful in other states and I am confident it will have a positive outcome in Missouri, too.

Building A Framework For S

Following last year's Missouri Supreme Court ruling that now allows state public employees, including public school teachers, to bargain collectively, I sponsored a bill (SB 1158) to establish statewide procedures for teaching groups and school districts involved in collective bargaining negotiations. The measure was called the **Professional Relationships Between Teachers and School Districts Act**.

My proposal sought to create an employee representation council that would have worked with school district administrators to resolve salary, benefits and other issues. Any disputes would be handled by the State Board of Mediation, which would be given some oversight in the state's collective bargaining process. Appeals would be considered by a circuit court.

Bright Future for Missouri Students

Expanding Student Loan Opportunities

My proposal (SB 967) that allows the Higher Education Loan Authority of the State of Missouri (MOHELA) to expand its student loan offerings by originating federal Stafford loans was signed into law during the legislative session.

MOHELA and other student loan lenders have been affected by a national credit market crunch and a reduction in federal subsidies to lenders.

This measure allows MOHELA to loan millions more per year to students seeking funding to further their education.

Federal loans are generally the most affordable loans available to students with the best interest rates and deferred payments until after graduation. By allowing MOHELA to expand its current offerings, students approved for Stafford loans can choose MOHELA from among a list of eligible lenders.

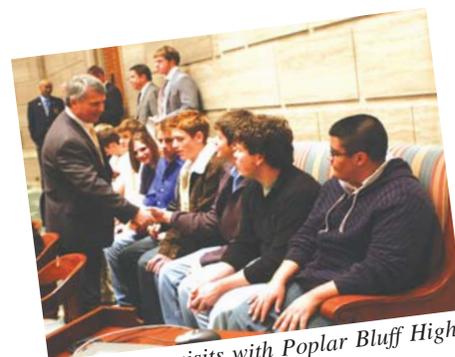
This levels the playing field for college loans and will also help maintain and ensure MOHELA's long-term financial ability and availability of low-cost student loans to Missouri students and families to help them achieve their education goals.



Three Rivers Community College student government members Gina Bubanovich, Terry Wilcox, Jennifer Cook, DeDe Whitlow, Keesha Treadwell, Shane Holt and Anisha Burton meet with Sen. Mayer at the State Capitol.



Sen. Mayer with Dexter students on the Senate dais.



Sen. Mayer visits with Poplar Bluff High School students.



Malden High School Teacher Mary Howell and high school students Cassidy Maddox and Brittany Berry meet Sen. Mayer during a visit to the State Capitol.



Poplar Bluff students Mitchell Davis and Kody Knodell with Sen. Mayer on the Senate dais.

School Collective Bargaining

Other provisions of the bill included a six-month time limit to file claims, with some exceptions, and the prevention of strikes and lockouts.

As chair of the Senate Education Committee and a longtime supporter of quality education for all students in our state, I believe my collective bargaining procedures would allow teachers and other school personnel a genuine voice at the bargaining table and contribute to greater public schools for Missouri students.

I intend to continue my efforts to garner support for and move this bill through the Legislature next year because establishing an appropriate framework will help make this new era of collective bargaining more successful for elementary and secondary and junior college educators and their respective governing bodies.

Fighting Illegal Immigration

With the recent passage of House Bill 1549, which included provisions forwarded and supported by my Senate colleagues and me, illegal immigrants are barred from applying for food stamps, housing and other public benefits and from obtaining state driver's licenses.

The new law will also crack down on employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants and will give the State Highway Patrol authority, training and resources to enforce immigration laws.

While considered a federal issue, illegal immigration is a growing concern in Missouri and other states because of the hundreds of millions of dollars in jobs, benefits and services it costs each year.

“Illegal immigration costs Missouri taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars each year.”
-Sen. Mayer

Supporting English As Official Language

As many of you know, I support a constitutional amendment to make English the official language of Missouri and am urging citizens in southeast Missouri to support the measure. Last year, the General Assembly passed the legislation, which now requires voter input during the November general election.

I support this initiative for several reasons. First, I am concerned with the growing number of students in our state who are not proficient in English. (Nearly four times the national average.) Also, if we make English the official language, we will save taxpayers millions of dollars by ending the duplication of thousands of government documents that are translated into other languages.

Just as importantly, I firmly believe that English promotes unity in our state and nation. I hope you will join the effort to make English our official language.

Property Tax Relief

Some relief from skyrocketing property taxes is now a possibility after legislation was passed by the General Assembly to protect Missourians from property tax increases caused by reassessment.

The property tax reform package (Senate Bill 711) requires cities, school districts and other taxing entities to roll back their tax levy rates whenever additional revenues from reassessments exceed inflation — a requirement that will prevent some people from being taxed out of their homes.

The legislation also protects our senior homeowners, who are often hit the hardest when property taxes rise. The bill expands the Property Tax Credit Program (“Circuit Breaker”) for elderly and disabled homeowners who struggle to pay their property taxes by increasing the assistance amount from its current \$750 to \$1,100 and expanding the income eligibility threshold to \$30,000 for singles and \$34,000 for married couples. Also, those who qualify for assistance through the Homestead Preservation Tax Credit and who have over a 5 percent increase in their property

taxes will now be guaranteed some level of help, regardless of the funding appropriated to the program by lawmakers.

The bill requires that by 2011 all Missouri counties provide an early projected tax liability statement to taxpayers along with their reassessment notices.



Sen. Mayer meets with the U.S. Rice Producers Association and the Missouri Rice Research and Merchandising Council during their annual visit to the State Capitol. Pictured (from left): Greg Yielding, field rep with the U.S. Rice Producers Assn., Sen. Mayer, and Sonny Martin of the Missouri Rice Council.

Missouri's Budget: From Deficits to Surpluses

As vice-chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, chair of the Senate Education Committee and a member of the General Assembly's appropriations conference committee that ironed out the details of the state's \$22.4 billion budget for 2008-2009, I was very pleased that we presented a balanced budget, complete with increased funding for K-12 schools, public colleges and universities, transportation, agriculture, health care, and life sciences, among other areas.

While many states' budgets are unstable, Missouri's budget remains in relatively good financial shape, thanks to the commitment of elected officials dedicated to the tenets of the state living within its means — just as you are required to do. You will recall that just a few years ago, Missouri's budget shortfall had reached almost \$1.1 billion, but with key reforms and conservative budget practices, the state has experienced surpluses in recent years, including \$500 million just this year.

During negotiations for the 2008-2009 budget, budget committee members kept a particularly close eye on taxpayers' money considering the current economic climate. Our goal was to avoid spending in a way that would require us to scale back in the future by committing dollars that may not be available in future years.

When the final numbers were put to ink, I was pleased we were able to provide a 2.4 percent increase in funding for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, including more for A+ Schools — for a total

appropriation of \$5.3 billion. This also includes an increase of more than \$121 million for the Foundation Formula, which now appropriates money to local school students based on student need, not property value.

In addition, higher education will receive a 7.8 percent increase, for a total appropriation of \$1.2 billion. This includes a \$48.7 million increase in Access Missouri scholarships, a \$6.2 million increase for community colleges and a \$33.6 million budget increase for four-year institutions.

The transportation department budget includes a \$483 million increase in funding for the department's construction program to maintain our roads and infrastructure. Among those projects is \$6.7 million for several Missouri Port Authority capital improvement projects, the bulk of which are in southeast Missouri. Other highlights of this year's budget include a \$21 million increase for life sciences research and funding for health care services, such as an additional \$7.4 million for autism services and \$13 million to provide better access to health care for low-income women.

The 2009 fiscal year budget went into effect July 1. Let me assure you that your tax dollars are all being directed to beneficial programs, departments and facilities that are designed to improve the lives of citizens in the 25th District and throughout the state.

Budgeting for the 25th Senate District in 2008-2009

Operating Funds

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| Three Rivers Community College | \$4,839,311 |
| Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled | \$2,667,683 |
| School Foundation Formula | \$159,136,604 |
| Sam A. Baker State Park | \$440,466 |
| Lake Wappapello State Park | \$355,166 |
| Hunter-Dawson State Park | \$205,570 |
| Poplar Bluff Regional Center | \$891,448 |
| Southeast Missouri Residential Services | \$5,972,093 |
| Bloomfield Veterans Cemetery | \$430,663 |
| Total | \$174,939,004 |

Capital Improvement Funds

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| Poplar Bluff Vocational Technical Center | \$250,000 |
| Pemiscot County Port Authority | \$3,066,000 |
| WE Sears Youth Center | \$716,836 |
| Total | \$4,032,836 |

Money to Spur Economic Growth for Agriculture

Biodiesel grants upped from \$26.7 million to \$34.2 million;
Boll Weevil Eradication Program, \$106,350.

Senator Mayer's 2008 Gubernatorial Appointments



Clockwise: Liz Rowland, Dexter; Kathleen Hampton, Bernie; and Julie Robinson, Cape Girardeau - Child Abuse and Neglect Review Board; David Johnson, Dexter; State Blasting Safety Board; James Tweedy, Bloomfield, Missouri Ethics Commission; and Joseph Knodell, Poplar Bluff, Board of Probation and Parole.

Reappointments (not pictured) - Baughn Meredith, Caruthersville, State Soil and Water Districts Commission; James Frakes, Portageville, Hazardous Waste Management Commission; Mike Geske, Matthew, Missouri Alternative Fuels Commission; Robert Lawrence, Steele, Well Installation Board.



The Bootheel Caucus

Sen. Mayer and state legislators who represent portions of the 25th Senate District meet every Tuesday morning during the legislative session to discuss issues that affect southeast Missouri citizens. Pictured from L-R, Rep. Tom Todd, Rep. Billy Pat Wright, Rep. Gayle Kingery, former Senator Bill Foster, House Speaker Rod Jetton, Sen. Mayer, Rep. Ellen Bandom, Rep. Terry Swinger, Rep. Steve Hodges and Rep. Mike Dethrow.

Senator Robert Mayer

201 W Capitol Ave
Room 331
Jefferson City MO 65101

PRESORTED STANDARD
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
Jefferson City, MO 65101
Permit No. 220

Contact Senator Robert Mayer

Capitol Address:

201 W. Capitol Ave., Rm. 331
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Online: www.senate.mo.gov/mayer

Capitol Phone:

(573) 751-3859
Toll Free: (877) 291-5584
Fax: (573) 526-1384

E-mail:

rob.mayer@senate.mo.gov