



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 331
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

Rob Mayer
25th Senate District

A Weekly Column for the
Week of February 28, 2005

Contact: Irene Murray
(573) 751-3859

Committed to Our Land

There Is Such a Thing as a Good Tax

JEFFERSON CITY—My Senate colleagues and I sent to the House last week a measure that would continue the funding of land preservation efforts for our state parks and farms. Senate Joint Resolution 1 would let voters decide every ten years whether to extend or end the one-tenth of a cent state sales tax that goes toward park maintenance and soil and water conservation efforts.

The tax was first enacted in 1984, and because of its expiration date, it can only be extended with a petition to put the issue on the ballot to be decided by the voters. Any change that has to do with taxes is a change to the constitution and therefore is only possible with voter approval. Missouri voters agreed to continue the tax in 1988 and again in 1996. The current tax is scheduled to expire in 2008. If SJR 1 passes, in addition to prolonging the tax, it would also eliminate the hassle of needing a petition initiative and instead, automatically place the tax question on the ballot every ten years beginning in 2006.

As voters have understood in the past, this tax is beneficial to all of Missouri because it improves the quality and productive power of soil and water in the state. Our agricultural sector is at the root of Missouri's economy. Erosion threatens our farms with about 59 million tons of soil wearing away from the land each year. Before the parks and soils sales tax was approved in 1984, Missouri had the second-

-MORE-

worst erosion rate in the country. Over the past two decades, our state's erosion rate has fallen by more than 50 percent and with continued efforts, it will continue to decrease.

The effects of erosion seep beyond the area where the land deterioration is occurring. Soil runoff enters our waterways and clogs our streams, reservoirs and lakes. This decreases holding capacity for the bodies of water and increases the chances for flooding. Sediment from the land that gets into our water also takes with it pesticides and fertilizers, which are dangerous to ingest. Mitigating erosion will improve and maintain water quality. Because agriculture relies so heavily on water, the need for steady conservation efforts is intensified.

You will see no difference in your purchasing power if you approve the continuation of this tax. It will simply financially sustain important projects that deal with our state's soil conservation and water protection needs. This tax, which has a low impact on you and me as individuals, has a huge bearing on the state as a whole because it brings in nearly \$78 million annually, which is divided between the state parks and soil conservation programs. To take that amount away would devastate the farming industry and hurt Missouri's economy.

Thanks to repeat voter approval of the tax in the past, we have made an impressive amount of progress during the last 20 years by reducing farmland erosion and protecting our water quality. But our needs are ongoing, and to assure that our farms and waterways are as productive and valuable as they can be in the future, Missourians need to once again vote "yes" on this sales tax.

Senate Joint Resolution 1 will be heard before a House committee sometime in the near future. If lawmakers approve the measure, the constitutional amendment will go before the voters in November of 2006.

-END-

Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid, Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.