



MISSOURI SENATE

Rob Mayer
25th Senate District

JEFFERSON CITY

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 331
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

**A Column for the Week
of Feb. 6, 2006**

**Contact: Irene Murray
(573) 751-3859**

In the Classroom and the Voting Booth

Two new plans work to improve education and protect our democracy

JEFFERSON CITY – Two proposals from the past two weeks will work to provide increased funding for Missouri higher education and will offer greater protections against voter fraud in state elections. Together they will work to provide a better system of education and a healthier democracy for all Missourians.

Missourians received good news when the board of Chesterfield-based MOHELA voted to sell approximately half of its assets to generate an estimated \$450 million for higher education. Gov. Blunt had originally proposed selling the entire non-profit agency to the highest bidder. Fortunately, the new plan keeps MOHELA, and its approximately 300 jobs, in Missouri.

MOHELA is an invaluable resource for Missourians. It provides low-interest loans to send our young men and women to college, and its discounts to students are ranked among the best in the nation. Further, the agency's approximately 586,000 loans are processed right here in Missouri.

The current plan to sell approximately half of MOHELA's assets will provide an estimated \$450 million for projects throughout the state. Approximately \$300 million will go toward capital-improvement projects, \$100 million will be invested in student scholarships, \$30 million goes toward enhancing growth and development of technology businesses near college campuses and \$20 million will provide for endowed professorships at state universities.

While this plan could provide a host of needed upgrades to Missouri higher education, a new plan in the Missouri Senate works to crack down on voter fraud.

Senators this week introduced a plan to require Missourians to show their drivers licenses or other government-issued photo-identification cards to vote. The plan also works to reduce voter fraud and intimidation by tightening voter-registration methods, restricting campaigning at polling stations and banning the courts from extending polling hours.

Current law allows voters to identify themselves through a variety of documents, including utility bills, bank statements and paychecks. The new legislation requires voters to present a photo ID with a name that matches their voter-registration record.

Referred to as the Voter Protection Act, the bill would let people without photo IDs cast provisional ballots as long as they return with a valid ID before polls close. The bill would also allow the Department of Revenue to issue a free photo ID to those who can't obtain a driver's license.

This legislation is needed to eliminate voter fraud, which devalues the rights of citizens who have legitimately cast their ballot, the basis of our democracy.

These two plans will work together to improve our state at its most fundamental levels: the education of our youths and the preservation of our democratic rights.

-END-

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