



MISSOURI SENATE

Rob Mayer
25th Senate District

JEFFERSON CITY

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 331
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

**A Column for the Week
of Aug. 7, 2006**

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

State Funding for SEMO Crime Lab will Benefit Southeast Missouri

JEFFERSON CITY — The regional crime lab on the campus of Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO) has been a vital resource for state law enforcement since it opened in 1969. For the past several years, the crime lab has processed nearly 3,000 cases annually. Because the lab's importance to Missouri law enforcement, this year I joined efforts with Sen. Jason Crowell of Cape Girardeau to help secure state funding to ensure it continues operating.

The crime lab has always been funded through governmental grant programs and certain fees collected by the state. Staff members of the university crime lab, as is the case with any lab, are required to go through a separate accreditation process for all of the areas in which they perform testing. Without accreditation, test results cannot be admitted into court proceedings.

Because SEMO's crime lab provided testing for drugs, ballistics examinations, blood, trace evidence, arson, fingerprints, alcohol in blood, urine toxicology and DNA, the accreditation process was extremely expensive. That high cost, combined with the price of equipment and salaries for highly qualified staff, made it harder and harder for the SEMO lab to remain a stand-alone entity.

To increase efficiency and guarantee the program's vitality for years to come, interested parties pursued a merger with the Missouri State Highway Patrol Lab. By folding the campus crime lab into the authority of the highway patrol, the SEMO Troop E lab will be able to specialize in particular areas of evidence testing, such as controlled substances, and still maintain its presence as a full-service crime lab.

Sen. Crowell and I succeeded in getting nearly \$625,000 appropriated to cover the costs of the merger, which took effect on July 1, the first day of the 2007 fiscal year. The money went toward the campus-facility lease and testing materials, as well as salary and benefit adjustments for the staff, which will now be employed by the state.

The SEMO lab recently moved to a new location and currently operates in a modern, state-of-the-art facility. Now, with the new merger, the lab will see even more improvements, such as a bridge in communication, organization and administration gaps that had frequently hindered a quick and smooth caseload turnaround.

Crime labs exist so that collected evidence can be interpreted and justice can be served. This merger will mean more Missouri criminals behind bars and a better overall working environment in Southeast Missouri.

-END-

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