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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 11, 2006

Sen. Crowell and Sen. Mayer Announce \$625,000 in State Funding for Crime-Lab Merger

JEFFERSON CITY— At a press conference today, Sen. Jason Crowell, R-Cape Girardeau, and Sen. Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, expressed their support for the recent merging of the Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO) Regional crime lab and the Missouri State Highway Patrol crime lab. The press conference took place at 1 p.m. in the ballroom at the University Center on the SEMO campus.

“The decision to pursue the merger was based on the need to guarantee future funding for the lab and to ensure that it would continue to be a vital resource to the Southeast law enforcement community for many years to come,” said Pam Johnson, director of the SEMO crime lab.

For more than 30 years, SEMO had owned and operated its own crime lab, which was funded through grant programs and certain fees collected by the state. Staff members of the university crime lab, as is the case with any lab, were required to go through a separate accreditation process for each lab test they performed. Without accreditation, the test results cannot be admitted into court proceedings.

“But accreditation is extremely expensive for small labs, and that cost, when combined with the cost of equipment and salaries for highly qualified staff, made it harder and harder for the SEMO lab to remain a stand-alone entity,” Sen. Crowell said. “By folding the lab into the Missouri State Highway Patrol, the SEMO Troop E lab will be able to focus on specialized areas of testing, which will enable investigations in the region to be completed more efficiently.”

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This past session, Sen. Crowell and Sen. Mayer worked to secure nearly \$625,000 to cover the costs of the merger, which took effect on July 1, the first day of the 2007 fiscal year. The appropriation 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.

“Interpreting evidence in crime labs is how we can be assured that justice is served,” Sen. Mayer said. “Because we’re talking about the difference between sending people to jail or allowing them to walk free, adequate funding is essential to getting accurate, reliable results, so therefore this merger is good for our region.”

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