



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
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MOHELA Plan Benefits Missouri Students

JEFFERSON CITY — The Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority, or MOHELA, is a quasi-governmental organization that offers low-interest college loans to Missouri students. After months of hard work, members of MOHELA voted this week to go ahead with a plan to sell a portion of the agency's loan assets to raise \$350 million for new university facilities. However, due to intimidation tactics by the Missouri attorney general, MOHELA board members stipulated that they would vote on the plan only if it would go to the Legislature for final approval. This loan sale is needed to allow Missouri colleges and universities to step into the 21st century by building advanced academic facilities and attracting the best students in the nation.

When Gov. Blunt introduced his \$350 million MOHELA plan in August, board members were ready to move forward with a vote. Because of the support for the proposal among board members, it likely would have passed at that time. Further, a team of legal advisors held that the MOHELA plan could move ahead without approval by the Legislature.

However, Attorney General Nixon mistakenly argued that the Legislature needed to approve the plan and threatened to sue members who voted for the proposal. As a result, MOHELA board members said they would only vote on the plan if it would be sent to the Legislature for final approval. With no options left, Gov. Blunt agreed to send the measure to the Legislature next year. Following that announcement, the MOHELA board went ahead with a vote, and approved it 4-2.

This plan is vital for higher education in Missouri, and the attorney general's actions are inexcusable. He has allowed partisan politics to get in the way of a plan that will benefit colleges and students throughout the state.

The attorney general's bullying tactics have no place in public policy debate, and they might actually be costing Missouri real dollars. There are estimates that delays of campus construction projects could increase the combined cost by \$70,000 per day.

The executive director of MOHELA, Raymond Bayer Jr., has said the loan sale would not affect interest rates offered to students. Meanwhile, \$335 million will go toward the construction of needed academic facilities, and the remaining \$15 million will be used to attract high-tech companies to our state. This plan is a win-win for Missouri, and I will work to see it through to fruition.

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