

For Immediate Release

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SHARING A VIEW OF THE STATE

Issues and Comments – 33rd Senatorial District

Senator

Chuck Purgason

This past week legislative action picked up here at your State Capitol as committees met throughout the week and some floor debate began in the Senate. Floor debate has been very sparse since most of the work being done at this time takes place in committee. The budget committee continued its work on the 2007 budget with hearings this week being centered upon MODOT and our transportation system.

Many people were in the Capitol this week. A very large group met to rally for quick passage of an eminent domain bill that will protect private property --- a bill that would not allow government to condemn property for reasons other than for the public good. In light of the Supreme Court ruling this last year, it is very important that the legislature pass a law defining the rule and scope as to how land can be acquired from individual landowners. It is important to maintain the ability to build highways and maintain electrical service, but not to allow government to obtain land through eminent domain and sell it to private investors to build commercial industry. Several bills have been filed that deal with this issue and they will be debated shortly, both in committee and by the full body of the General Assembly.

Another hot topic is the sale of MOHELA, the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority. This program supplies low interest loans to students who attend college. The Governor has proposed turning this into a private/public partnership and selling some of the assets in order to raise around \$450 million. He has proposed taking the proceeds of this sale and investing these funds in building projects across the state for our universities.

The Governor's plan calls for \$300 million for building construction, \$100 million for scholarships, and \$20 million for endowed professorships. Also, \$5 million would be used to bring technological businesses closer to campuses and \$25 million would be available for other initiatives proposed by the Governor. This plan does not have to be approved by the General Assembly, but it will be up to the General Assembly to appropriate the proceeds of the sale.

Now, the politician in me believes that this is a great opportunity for our state to build buildings on our state campuses, which gives us great opportunities to run around and get our

picture taken in an election year. The conservative part of me, who has spent the last 10 years on the budget committees in the House and Senate, still remembers the deep cuts that had to be made the past few years because our state spending had gotten out of hand and we had spent more than we brought in. The father in me wants to work to provide my kids and the young people of this district the opportunity to get a quality education while staying close to home without the student being saddled with a high college debt upon graduation. The senator in me wants to make sure that our district gets its fair share of the states resources and make sure we have a quality university in our area that our children will be able to access to obtain a world class education.

Also, we must consider the long-term expenses associated with maintaining our university system. If new buildings are built, we must know that we can pay for the upkeep and personal costs associated with the buildings or this cost will fall back on the students in the form of higher tuition fees. We also have the opportunity to think about using this income to improve existing structures through renovation and investing in upkeep on buildings we already have. We could consider increasing scholarships and opportunities for students to obtain their degrees without an overwhelming debt load.

I believe that in the weeks ahead we, as a legislative body, must enter this debate with long-term goals in mind. These goals should include keeping our state financially stable and keeping in mind what is best for our state in the long run - not just short-term gratification.

As always, I welcome your comments. You may reach me at 573-751-1882, e-mail to chuck.purgason@senate.mo.gov, or write to me at the Missouri Senate, State Capitol, Room 420, Jefferson City, MO 65101. If you would like to receive these newsletters electronically, please call or e-mail my office.

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