

For Immediate Release

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SHARING A VIEW OF THE STATE

Issues and Comments – 33rd Senatorial District

Senator

Chuck Purgason

The Senate this week finished the FY 2007 budget in record time. We passed the final budget bill on Wednesday, two days ahead of the constitutional requirement to have budget bills passed by the first Friday in May. In my ten years in office this is the first time we finished our budget this far away from our constitutional deadline. The ability to start our budget early along with better than anticipated revenues and many long hours in the months of January, February, and March allowed us to put this budget cycle to rest for this legislative session.

Other legislation pending in our final days of session includes the MOHELA bill that contains capital improvements projects for our universities and funding of health care facilities across the state. To clarify, MOHELA (Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority) is a student loan fund that makes low interest loans to students to attend college. Over the years the funds and the amount of loans have grown and the Governor has proposed to sell some of these loans and assets to provide the funding source for the capital improvements bill.

This bill was debated and passed by the Senate and sent to conference with the House for crafting of the final version. The bill allows the MOHELA board to sell off some of its assets and put the money toward the funding of this bill proposal. The bill proposes several funding projects across the state at our public universities.

One of the problems I have with the bill is the disparity of funding for our universities and the lack of equitable funding at our campus of Missouri State University (MSU). Based on a per pupil amount for example, Harris Stowe University in St. Louis would receive \$13,148 per student; Missouri Western State University, \$7,715 per student; Missouri Southern State University, \$4,583 per student --- and our area's Missouri State University, which is the second largest university in the state, will receive \$2,461 per student.

What makes these figures even worse is that the MSU system has always been under funded as compared with other universities. MSU enrolls 16.1% of the students at our four-year institutions, but receives only 11.2% of the state appropriation for higher education. Funding for MSU lags behind enrollment 30.4%.

On the issue of academic and administrative space per full time enrolled student, the highest in the state is 360 square feet per student with the state average being 224 square feet per student. MSU trails the state with 169 square feet per student.

I viewed this bill as a golden opportunity to begin the process of equalizing this disparity across the state. I offered an amendment that would distribute this money on a per pupil basis across the state and would allow universities flexibility to spend these proceeds based on the needs of the individual universities.

Instead of building a new building, the university could, if they chose, use the money for upkeep, improving existing programs, scholarships, improving faculty, or even use it for operating funds so they wouldn't have to raise tuition costs to the students and working parents. The funding would have been a straight \$3,180 per student for each university based on 2006 full time enrolled students. The amendment failed on a 15-17 vote.

The MOHELA bill will probably move forward, but I cannot support a bill that does not put the students of this area on the same status and opportunity levels as other students around the state. This is especially important because the funding source is derived from students all over the state paying interest on student loans. I also find it ironic that some of the universities that benefit from MOHELA funds the most are the universities the utilized MOHELA funds the least.

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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