

For Immediate Release

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SHARING A VIEW OF THE STATE

Issues and Comments – 33rd Senatorial District

Senator

Chuck Purgason

As you know, voting is one of the most basic rights and privileges we have as citizens. We should always remember that our forefathers fought and died so we could enjoy our freedom to vote. Today, it is also very important that we maintain a fair and honest election system so Missourians can vote as easily as possible and be confident that our vote counts.

Unfortunately, voter fraud is a problem in our state's urban areas, especially in the St. Louis City area. For example, then Secretary of State Bekki Cook looked at the 2000 election and found 135 ballots cast by people who were not even registered to vote. In a separate investigation of the 2000 election, Secretary of State Matt Blunt found over 1500 fraudulent ballots in the St. Louis area. This investigation included ballots cast by dead people, ballots cast by people registered at vacant lots, and the name of a deceased person on the lawsuit to extend the polling hours. In addition, State Auditor Claire McCaskill identified more than 24,000 questionable registrations in St. Louis City in 2004, including the names of family pets and cartoon characters.

When the votes of people who do not exist are counted and when people vote more than once, the votes of hardworking, honest citizens are not protected. This is why your General Assembly worked to adopt the Missouri Voter Protection Act, SB 1014. Hopefully, this bill will help protect everyone's right to vote in fair and honest elections by cracking down on voter fraud, reforming voter registration, protecting voters from intimidation at polling places, and extending provisional ballots to include all ballot issues and races.

The Missouri Voter Protection Act is a good faith attempt to clean up the voting process by requiring people to simply prove who they say they are by providing a photo ID. I am sure that may seem a little overboard to some of us from small towns to have to prove ourselves with a photo ID since the poll workers probably know who we are. However, this is not the case in the urban areas and that is where most of the fraud occurs.

My hope is that your General Assembly has made sure that it is as easy as possible for everyone in Missouri to vote, but hard for anyone to cheat. It is important to protect our constitutional right to fair elections and not allow special interests to steal away our God-given rights. The bottom line is that new proposed voting requirements will probably create some burdens, but in order to protect our vote it will be necessary to stop voter fraud in the urban areas of our state.

In other legislation, the General Assembly also passed HB 1944, which protects and helps property owners by preventing eminent domain being used in projects solely for economic development. The legislation also prohibits farmland from being considered “blighted.”

In the rare cases where eminent domain could be used, HB 1944 requires factors such as fair market value and heritage value to be considered when deciding fair compensation for property taken. Those who have had their homes taken by a condemning authority are required to receive 25 percent more than the home’s value. Under the heritage value provision, homes, farms, or businesses that have been in the same extended family for at least 50 years will automatically receive an additional 50 percent of the land’s value.

These measures will work together to make it harder for private developers to pressure local governments into seizing private property through eminent domain. It also ensures that those who are affected by eminent domain will be adequately compensated.

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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