



MISSOURI SENATE

Rob Mayer
25th Senate District

JEFFERSON CITY

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 331
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

**A Column for the Week
of July 26, 2007**

**Contact: Irene Murray
(573) 751-3859**

Irrigation Pivot Thefts

JEFFERSON CITY — There's an epidemic happening this summer in Southeast Missouri that seriously worries me. Thieves are taking metal from center-pivot irrigation systems and selling the metal for scrap. Unfortunately, it's costing farmers much more to fix the systems again than the scrap prices the metal goes for. Plus, they lose critical time caring for their crops. It's an epidemic we need to stop.

Thieves that take metal from the center pivots are after the scrap aluminum and copper that they get. They might be able to cash in a few bucks for this metal, but it costs our farmers huge dollars — \$4,000 to \$10,000 to fix each pivot damaged. If you take that times half a dozen or so systems that get hit, all of a sudden you're talking about big money that cuts into already-thin margins. Adding to the problem is the fact that farmers are losing the vital benefits of their irrigation systems just as the summer heat is making the extra water absolutely necessary for the crop's survival.

Last year, a measure concerning this issue came up in the legislature. The Senate passed a bill that would require more information be gathered on those who sell scrap metal to dealers. But since the bill was filed late in the session, it ran out of time and died in the House.

This coming year, I am going to introduce legislation to address the problem again. My bill will require scrap metal dealers to gather information such as vehicle license plate numbers and sellers' identifications on transactions. That information could then be shared with law enforcement agencies to help track down those suspected of stealing and selling the scrap metal. I believe that will serve as an effective deterrent to the next thief who thinks he can just get away without any way of tracing the stolen scrap metal back to him.

I realize that this would put more responsibility on the scrap metal dealers, those who probably haven't done anything wrong. But I think if we craft the bill just right, there will be a minimum of effort for them... while farmers who rely on these center-pivot irrigation systems

will be able to sleep a little easier knowing their crops will get the water they need when they need it.

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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.