

Senator Luann Ridgeway

## **Immigration Reform Passes Senate**

April 17, 2008

Illegal immigration is a problem that concerns many Missourians—and with good cause. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 35,000 to 65,000 non-citizens were illegally present in Missouri as of 2005. A report dated 2000 from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) estimated that the illegal alien population in Missouri rose 38% in a four year period and 175% in a ten year period. In 2007 the INS deported 8,900 illegal immigrants from a 6 state area that includes Missouri.

The Missouri Senate has passed sweeping legislation to tackle the illegal immigration problem facing our state. The primary responsibility for immigration control rests on the federal government but Washington D.C. has failed to act. Therefore as your state senator, I am aggressively working with other legislators to do whatever possible to address this problem.

Senate Bill 858 cracks down on employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants. When an employer knows that are using illegal labor, they cheat all our citizens. They undermine wages, legal workers, and our law abiding employers. SB858 allows for stiffer fines and penalties on employers who knowingly hire illegal workers. I want to emphasize the word “knowingly”. The legislation does not seek to turn Missouri employers into INS agents. Rather we are pursuing stiff fines and penalties on employers who know they are cheating the system.

Another part of the bill addresses public safety. The public is exposed to danger by the potential of illegal aliens jumping bail to escape criminal prosecution. SB 858 seeks to protect the public by requiring judges to determine whether an arrested person is illegally present prior to setting bail for pending criminal charges. Right now bail is set based on a number of factors including prior offenses, severity of the criminal charges, and potential of the defendant fleeing and never showing up for trial. I proposed a change in how bail is set. Basically SB858 requires a judge to consider illegal status as a flight risk for purposes of setting bail. It is much easier for an illegal alien charged with a crime to pay \$500 bail on a charge of first time DWI and then simply go underground and disappear. No conviction is ever reached because the defendant does not show up at trial. By requiring bail to be set at a level necessary to ensure that either a conviction acquittal or a plea agreement is reached, we ensure that our public is protected. As it currently stands, an illegal immigrant could be arrested for a DWI (or other criminal offense) pay a small bail amount and be released. The illegal could then disappear, obtain a new identity and never have a conviction record. This leaves the public exposed to danger. SB 858 would help correct this problem.

SB 858 also cuts the ability of illegal immigrants to receive public benefits or obtain a driver's license. In addition, certain cities in Missouri give illegal immigrants a sanctuary. These so-called "sanctuary cities" allow illegal immigrants to work and live like a citizen with no consequences. SB 858 prohibits Missouri cities from implementing any such policy. Any city, town or village that does provide sanctuary to illegal aliens would not be able to receive any state grants or funding.

SB 858 contains other provisions too numerous to cover in detail in this report.

You may review the entire text of the bill at

<http://www.senate.mo.gov/08info/bills/SB858.htm>