

State Senator Robert Mayer The Mayer Memo

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Cracking Down On Illegal Immigration & Voicing Support for the English Language

JEFFERSON CITY — During this year's legislative session, the General Assembly made good on its promise to pass legislation to fight illegal immigration. Over the last several years, no federal issue has been more hotly debated. And no issue has seen so little resolution...until now. At least in Missouri.

With the recent passage of House Bill 1549, which included provisions forwarded and supported by my Senate colleagues and me, illegal immigrants are barred from applying for food stamps, housing and other public benefits and from obtaining state driver's licenses. The new law will also crack down on employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants and will give the state highway patrol authority, training and resources to enforce immigration laws.

While considered a federal issue, illegal immigration is a growing concern of state governments because it costs taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars in jobs, benefits and services each year. The Federation for American Immigration Reform estimates there were 50,000 illegal immigrants in Missouri as of 2005 — which is estimated to cost Missouri taxpayers \$116 million each year.

Missouri will continue to heartily welcome legal immigrants, but we simply cannot tolerate this kind of illegal activity and its harmful economic impact. When people immigrate illegally, they jump in front of people who are legally waiting to get here, and that's unfair. While Missouri is not responsible for securing our national borders, we *can* prevent illegal immigrants from harming our state. One of the best ways to do that is to stop rewarding them with jobs and benefits so that they will think

twice about breaking the law to come to Missouri.

As many of you know, I also support a constitutional amendment to make English the official language of Missouri, and am urging citizens in southeast Missouri to support the measure. Last year, the General Assembly passed the legislation, which now requires voter input during the November general election.

I support this initiative for several reasons. First, I am concerned with the growing number of students in our state who are not proficient in English (we have nearly four times the national average). Also, if we make English the official language, we will save taxpayers millions of dollars by ending the duplication of thousands of government documents that are translated into other languages.

More importantly, I firmly believe that English promotes unity in our state, and nation. When we try to accommodate people in their native language, we desensitize people from learning English, create linguistic enclaves and slowly erode some of the important aspects of our American culture and national heritage.

Fighting illegal immigration activity with enhanced laws and working to promote English as our state's official language are just two of the progressive measures Missouri is taking, and I have eagerly pursued and supported, to benefit citizens in southeast Missouri and across the state.

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