

State Senator Robert Mayer

The Mayer Memo

Senator Robert Mayer - Serving Butler, Dunklin, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Ripley, Stoddard & Wayne Counties



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2009 Legislative Session Ends with Many Successes

The Missouri General Assembly's 2009 legislative session concluded May 15 — ending a very challenging and unique year unlike any I have ever experienced in Jefferson City. Crafting a conservative, fiscally responsible budget during these tough economic times was a top priority — and one I'm proud to say we accomplished — as well as passing a jobs bill to spur job creation and help get Missourians back to work. The Legislature was also successful in passing a progressive, wide-ranging education bill that I helped to advance that will benefit Missouri school districts, students and teachers and supports our state's commitment to keeping education our number one priority.

State lawmakers knew this year's budget would present unique challenges by the weakened economy and the federal government's bailout efforts, but in spite of this scenario our state succeeded in passing a \$23.1 billion budget that increases funding for education at all levels — without a tax increase — and protects taxpayers with a nearly \$1 billion reserve for spending in future budget years. For the fourth year in a row, the Legislature also increased funding for higher education in support of our state's commitment to ensure our future workforce is the most educated in the nation.

The General Assembly's jobs bill — another priority during this Legislative session — passed on the final day of the session and included a bipartisan effort to expand tax incentive programs geared to spur job creation coupled with common-sense tax credit reforms aimed at protecting taxpayers. Other provisions of the jobs bill would phase out the corporate franchise tax on 3 out of every 4 Missouri businesses and cap the state's largest tax credit program known as the Historic Preservation Tax Credit.

Regarding education, I was very pleased that lawmakers passed a comprehensive education reform bill that included a proposal I sponsored to change the state's school funding formula so that money derived from the passage of Proposition A last November by Missouri voters will go to students in Missouri classrooms as intended. The bill also includes my proposal that would allow for the removal of the current 5 percent growth cap in the state adequacy target calculation in the school foundation formula, which would allow state funds to flow more quickly to school districts through the school formula and allow hold harmless school districts to receive additional state funds. The bill also included measures to expand virtual classrooms, enact statewide performance standards for teachers and would allow school districts hammered by inclement weather to make up no more than 10 days. The school

makeup days provision applies to the Malden, Kennett and Senath-Hornersville school districts that were impacted by January's ice storm.

An omnibus crime bill also received approval from the General Assembly. One of the major elements of the bill provides people a defense against civil liability or criminal prosecution for killing a dangerous dog that threatens them or their family. This legislation would help ensure that the law won't punish those who are just trying to defend themselves and others. The bill also makes dog owners liable if their dog bites a person without being provoked and an owner could be subject to criminal charges if their dog bites people repeatedly.

The omnibus bill also makes it a crime to use a false or misleading diploma for admission to higher education institutions or in connection with employment; requires a photo to be taken of an incarcerated individual prior to his or her release, at the victim's request, and then be provided to the victim; expands the crime of assault of a corrections officer; and extends the amount of time a prosecutor has to bring a case against an arsonist. The bill would also make it easier for law enforcement to run blood alcohol tests on minors who are visibly intoxicated and would outlaw devices called "vaporizers" that are designed to quickly rush alcohol to the brain.

In addition, the bill would require any person who steals animals or livestock worth more than \$3,000 and who has pleaded guilty to this offense before to serve 80 percent of the sentence before being eligible for probation or parole. The bill also contains language that would prohibit those under the age of 21 from text messaging while driving on Missouri roads.

As the legislative session comes to a close, I want to thank you for your phone calls, emails, letters and visits and the invaluable input you provide all year long as I work to represent your interests in Jefferson City.

As always, if you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at 1-877-291-5584.

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