

# The Mayer Report



TOP

## Giving Students The Best

APRIL 24TH 2012 BY UNKNOWN

### Giving Students The Best

*By Rob Mayer*

Every student in Missouri should have access to a world-class education. This is why education remains one of our major priorities in the Senate. In order to prepare our students to enter the workforce and become an economic driver for our state, we must continue to make needed reforms that will provide for a quality education.

Last week the Senate gave overwhelming approval to [Senate Bill 677](#), which helps students trapped in a failing school district. The measure cuts the waiting period between declaring a school district unaccredited and the Missouri State Board of Education taking over governance of the district.

If the bill is passed by the Legislature and signed into law, the Missouri State Board of Education would not have to wait to appoint a replacement board for a school district that fails to meet the standards to become accredited. By removing the two-year waiting period, there can be a quicker transition in beginning the process of regaining the district's accreditation. The measure also gives power to the state board to set a specific length of time to reach improvement and become accredited or be kept under the state board's supervision.

The Senate also advanced [Senate Bill 576](#). Provisions in this bill made changes to charter schools creating new educational possibilities for Missouri students. Charter schools provide an option for students in low-performing or unaccredited school districts. It is similar to a public school, receiving tax dollars for funding and open to all students in the districts where it operates, but a charter school is governed by an independent school board. SB 576 brings both transparency and new accountability to current charter schools, as well as makes changes on where charter schools may operate. By affording any unaccredited district with the choice to start a charter school, rural districts now have the ability to give students options in improving their education.

As the legislative session progresses, there are still many actions in which we need to move forward, the first of which takes place this week as the Senate begins debate on Missouri's \$24 billion budget. Education funding is a key component in the decisions made in passing the final balanced budget. In the last few years, we have kept our commitment to education by making tough fiscal decisions, allowing us to pass balanced budgets that held the school funding formula level. This year we will do the same and prevent cuts to our K-12 schools.

We also will continue the broader discussion on fixing classrooms and putting our students first. This includes conversations on changing teacher tenure to ensure our students have good instructors in the classrooms and how to best provide resources to our school districts.

We know the greatest investment we can make is in the mind of a child. By making improvements and remaining committed to providing the funding and resources to our education system, we are giving our children every opportunity to succeed.

*Rob Mayer of Dexter represents the 25<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District in the Missouri State Senate and is the Senate President Pro Tem.*

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## Planning For Future Floods & Natural Disasters

APRIL 17TH 2012 BY UNKNOWN

### Planning For Future Floods & Natural Disasters

*By Rob Mayer*

Last year communities across our state experienced historic floods, resulting in many devastated Southeast Missouri homes, farms, and livelihoods. This unacceptable destruction is why I introduced, and the Senate overwhelming passed, [Senate Concurrent Resolution 25](#).

In the wake of last year's rising waters, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was forced to make unenviable decisions without full understanding of its consequences. One such decision was to release water from upstream along the Mississippi River. This caused pressure on river levees that protect our communities, businesses, and agriculture from water damage. The resulting levee

breaks caused massive damage impacting the economic stability of our state. The Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute of the University of Missouri found the economic loss, because of the flooding of crop lands, to be \$60.6 million in Southeast Missouri alone.

This concurrent resolution encourages our representatives in the U.S. Congress and the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop a better plan to deal with severe flooding. It is vital for the Corps of Engineers to have a plan in place that eliminates, when possible, or otherwise minimizes damage to homes, farms, and businesses so further economic hardship is not handed to people across the state of Missouri.

Last year's devastation cannot be repeated. Senate Concurrent Resolution 25 is one of the many ways we continue to press the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to be better prepared for future flooding and natural disasters in our state.

Missouri's natural disaster recovery is also one reason why it is a priority to move forward in making important changes to our prevailing wage laws. Many needed public projects across the state, especially in disaster areas like Joplin, are unaffordable because of our prevailing wage laws and are therefore being put on hold.

Currently in Missouri the prevailing wage is set by the Division of Labor Standards. The goal with prevailing wage is that it is supposed to use data on the wages paid for occupations in each county to set the rate contractors are paid on public works projects. Unfortunately, our current system does not work well, and wages are then artificially inflated, causing taxpayers to pay more than they should for public projects.

I have proposed in [Senate Bill 439](#) that Missouri no longer use the Division of Labor Standards and the MODE method of statistical analysis in determining the prevailing wage. Instead, wages would be based on the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics data for each county. With this new system in place, we have the right balance between spending of taxpayer money responsibly and maintaining good wages for workers.

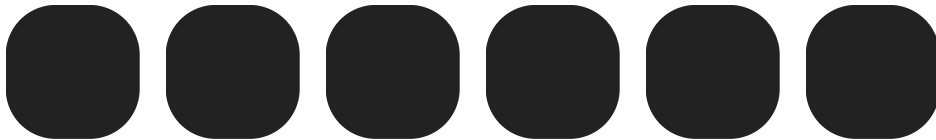
I expect the Senate to continue moving forward this week on this priority, as well as working on strengthening our educational system and passing a balanced budget.

*Rob Mayer of Dexter represents the 25<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District in the Missouri State Senate and is the Senate President Pro Tem.*

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# Moving Forward on Senate Priorities

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## Moving Forward on Senate Priorities

*By Rob Mayer*

At the beginning of this legislative session, we set three specific priorities we would work tirelessly to accomplish. As we approach the later stages of the session, there is still much work to be done to fulfill those goals for Missourians, but we continue to press forward.

This past week, the Senate Appropriations Committee began the process of editing the state's \$24 billion budget. As it carefully goes through the budget line by line, we remain committed to passing a balanced budget without a tax increase.

Because of the stagnant economy, the state has seen slow revenue growth, along with federally required increased expenditures in areas like Medicaid. Yet, just as so many Missourians who have been affected by the economy are examining how they spend money, we too are working to scrutinize how every tax dollar is spent. And we are prepared to make the tough decisions to reshape state government to rid it of waste and ensure your tax dollars are used effectively and efficiently.

Improving Missouri's budget situation though is directly related to improving Missouri's economic situation. In order to create a budget that is sustainable for Missouri taxpayers, we must work to spur job creation. That is why the Senate has been focused on returning Missourians to work in good-paying jobs with benefits. To do this, we quickly passed both [Senate Bill 572](#) and [House Bill 1219](#) to remove the barriers that are preventing businesses from investing in new workers.

SB 572 would have restored protections for co-employees from personal lawsuits for their role in honest accidents at work and ended lawsuit abuses, while HB 1219 would have restored balance to Missouri's employment law. Both pieces of legislation would have fixed the current failed policies, created certainty for businesses, and cut the costs businesses incur on expansive legal fees. All of which would have allowed employers to invest in new jobs.

It is disappointing the governor does not share our priority of helping businesses put Missourians to work and vetoed both bills. There are far too many Missourians out of work and the governor's vetoes do not change our determination to put Missourians back in good-paying jobs. To demonstrate this, the Senate voted 24 to 9 to override his veto of SB 572.

We also know the education of our children is the biggest investment we can make, as well as a huge driver in Missouri's economic stability for years to come. Our third major goal has been to address key education reforms so every student has the opportunity to a world-class education.

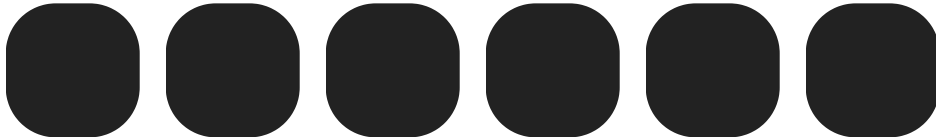
Last week, we began debate on a number of reforms to Missouri schools, specifically addressing students trapped in a failing school district. This discussion is only the beginning of making the needed changes in improving our students' educational opportunities. We also plan to look closely at how Missouri is funding our schools.

I will keep you informed as we continue our work to pass these important changes for Missouri.

*Rob Mayer of Dexter represents the 25<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District in the Missouri State Senate and is the Senate President Pro Tem.*

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## Protecting Religious Freedom

APRIL 02ND 2012 BY UNKNOWN

Protecting Religious Freedom

**By Rob Mayer**

One of our country's core principles found in the First Amendment is our freedom to exercise religion without government interference. Recent actions by the federal government have threatened this freedom and we have taken action to defend this fundamental right.

As part of the president's health care law, the federal government is mandating that employers offer to cover, through their health care plan, services such as abortions, contraception, and sterilization. This goes against many Missourians' religious or moral beliefs, yet, the federal government is still forcing the employer to cover those services.

This is why last week the Senate advanced Senate Bill 749. The bill prevents individuals, employers, or other entities from being compelled to obtain insurance coverage that is

contrary to the individual, employer or other entities' religious beliefs or moral convictions. The legislation also prevents discrimination against or punishment for declining or refusing to provide coverage that is contrary to the person, employer or other entities' religious beliefs or moral convictions.

Passage of this legislation goes a long way in defending the rights of employees and employers in practicing their religious beliefs.

As the Senate worked to pass this important religious protection act last Tuesday, we were greeted by overwhelming support for Senate Bill 749. Thousands of Missourians came to the Capitol and rallied for the protection of their religious freedoms. I am thankful for the many that stopped by my office and expressed the importance in defending our religious freedoms and moral beliefs. I believe their voice was heard and many of my colleagues took notice, passing Senate Bill 749 with bipartisan support.

There is still plenty of work to be done. This week, the Senate Appropriations Committee will begin the process of editing the state's \$24 billion budget. As the former chairman of the Appropriations Committee, I know the importance of transparency in the budget process so you have a clear understanding of how we are spending your hard earned tax dollars.

That is why I introduced and last week the Senate advanced unanimously Senate Bill 877 to require regular reports on the number of state employees. Under the legislation, each department would have to present quarterly to the Speaker of the House and the Senate President Pro Tem the number of full-time employees of the department by job classification or job description and the geographic location of state employees. The act also requires the report to indicate the number of vacancies over the past quarter and the number of such vacancies that were filled over that quarter.

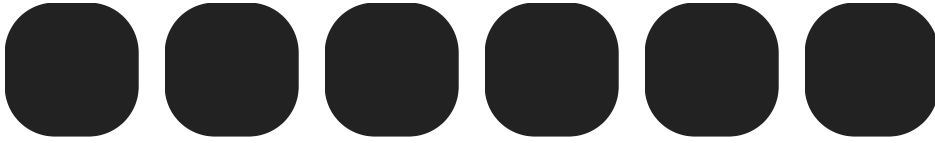
There will be many tough decisions crafting a budget that lives within the taxpayers' means and protects our priorities. Senate Bill 877 provides greater and more accurate information to the budget process so we can ensure every dollar is spent efficiently and effectively.

*Rob Mayer of Dexter represents the 25<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District in the Missouri State Senate and is the Senate President Pro Tem.*

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## Continued Work On Job Creation

MARCH 28TH 2012 BY UNKNOWN

[Continued Work On Job Creation](#)

*By Rob Mayer*

One of the Senate's top priorities this session is to help put Missourians back to work. We believe we can no longer continue to do business in our state using the same policies we have relied on and expect a different result. There are far too many Missourians without a job and it is important we improve Missouri's business environment so businesses can grow and hire more employees.

In an effort to ease the pain Missouri workers are going through, we worked quickly this session to pass Senate Bill 572 and House Bill 1219 to help employers put Missourians back to work in good-paying jobs with benefits.

SB 572 restored protections for co-employees from personal lawsuits for their role in honest accidents at work and ended lawsuit abuses. It is difficult for businesses to hire employees if they are going to need to spend money for additional insurance to cover these honest accidents. Passage of the bill rejected a 2010 appeals court decision that opened up co-employees to this risk. It also returned Workers' Compensation as the

exclusive remedy for workplace accidents. This bill gave a level of certainty to the risk employers take when hiring employees.

HB 1219 simply harmonized our state employment law with federal Civil Rights Act. Missouri's employment law originally resembled federal law, but differences have surfaced through case law. Over the past few years, Missouri courts have drastically changed Missouri employment law so that it no longer matches federal law. Employers are slow to invest in jobs in Missouri when faced with different employment law standards creating lawsuit abuses. Passage of HB 1219 made Missouri's standards meet the provisions set out in the historic Civil Rights Act, giving employers and workers more certainty.

Unfortunately, for as quick as we moved both bills to the governor's desk for signing, he just as quickly vetoed them. Had the governor signed SB 572 and HB 1219, businesses could spend less money on expansive legal fees and instead invest those dollars towards expanding their businesses, putting Missourians to work. Instead, because of the veto, business growth will continue to be strangled with the same failed policies these bills were aimed to fix.

Luckily for Missouri, the legislative session is not over and we will continue to work on the Senate's priority of putting people back to work. For businesses to grow or consider moving to Missouri, we must change both Missouri's employment law and Workers' Compensation system. There are a number of different options we will consider to do this, including a veto override or passage of new legislation the governor finds acceptable. We invite him to join us for discussions on passing legislation that put Missourians back to work.

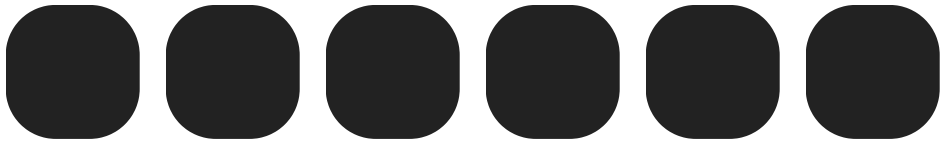
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