



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
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Southwest Missouri Lawmakers and Business Leaders Lead Fight to Reform Missouri's Workers' Comp Laws

Workers' comp laws have been identified as one of the leading reasons our state has lost thousands of jobs. In the last 20 months, 90,000 jobs have left Missouri and we now have the dubious distinction of leading the nation in job loss.

Southwest Missouri lawmakers, businesses and industries have struggled for years to have workers' comp laws changed. On Wednesday, some of those business people testified in front of Senate and House committees on behalf of workers' comp reform legislation.

I'm co-sponsoring Senate Bill 347, while Rep. Kevin Wilson, R-Neosho, and Rep. Steve Hunter, R-Joplin, have co-sponsored House Bill 321. These bills have virtually identical language and would make simple, but important, changes to workers' comp laws.

Under SB 347 and HB 321, workers' compensation awards would be reserved for those for whom work was "the dominant" factor and not simply "a" factor, as the law presently reads. As a practical matter it would exclude from workers' compensation claims personal health conditions, injury from idiopathic causes and preexisting conditions.

Only an injury that took place while a worker performed his or her job would be covered by workers' comp. Awards would be reduced by the amount of permanent partial disability determined to be preexisting.

Businesses in the four-state corner have been especially hurt by these laws, since a business can relocate just a few miles, in any direction, and reside in a state with friendlier workers' comp laws.

Herb Schmidt, president of Contract Freighters, Inc., told the Senate and House committees that with Missouri's current laws, should CFI decide to expand he would recommend

to the board of directors that the expansion take place in Oklahoma – a state with friendlier workers' comp laws.

CFI estimates that it could lower its workers' comp costs by 40 percent if the company moved to Oklahoma and by 36 percent by moving to Arkansas.

According to Bruce Anderson, vice president and general manager of American Tripoli in Seneca, that company would also expand into Oklahoma if Missouri's workers' comp laws remain the same.

Losing these two businesses would be devastating to our area's economy.

Missouri cannot afford to lose another 90,000 jobs; we must reform our workers' comp laws this session.

In other business, Missouri Southern is one step closer to being renamed Missouri Southern State University – Joplin.

The Senate Pensions and General Laws Committee passed Senate Bill 55, which I sponsored. The bill now heads to the Senate floor for debate.

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