



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



Room 433 - State Capitol Bldg. - Jefferson City, MO 65101 - Phone: (573) 751-2306

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For additional information contact:
Barbara Mustoe
(573) 751-2306

Disclosure of DNR Document Leads to Joint Committee Investigation of ‘Gag Order’

A troubling document issued by an employee of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources came to the attention of lawmakers this week and led to a decision by a joint committee to investigate the matter. The document summarized notes taken during a DNR staff meeting and stated that cooperating with members of the General Assembly during the budget process would be a firing offense.

I find this stonewalling by any state department very troubling, since Missouri law clearly requires state employees to answer all questions by lawmakers. The law is explicit in requiring direct answers to direct questions.

On Wednesday, during a meeting of the Joint Committee on Legislative Research of which I am the vice-chair, I introduced a motion to examine whether employees in any state department have been directed not to respond to lawmaker’s requests.

The General Assembly is entitled to this information, and we’re going to get it.

It is not acceptable for department directors to issue “gag orders.”

The document in question was written by Keenan Patterson, a drinking water unit chief in a Jefferson City regional DNR office that would be closed under the budget proposed by Gov. Bob Holden and presented in his State of the State address. Patterson took the notes while filling in for his office director at a Feb. 20 briefing for mid-level DNR supervisors.

In the document, which was sent to four or five people within the department, Patterson wrote: “If a senator or representative asks you for ideas about how to reduce the department’s budget, DO NOT DO IT. THIS IS A FIRING OFFENSE.”

Because of the budget situation this year, we must carefully investigate every dollar spent in every program. It is the governor’s legal, and moral, obligation to help with this.

We are asking the directors to give to the legislators the same advice and counsel they give the governor.

Department heads have no right to threaten employees for disclosing information to lawmakers.

Members of the joint committee will do everything within our power – including issuing subpoenas – in order to get answers.

Hearings will begin next week, and I will keep you updated on all developments on this matter.

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