

Weekly Report
February 5, 2004

By: Sen. John Griesheimer
(573) 751-3678

SMS NAME CHANGE LEADS TO FIRST FILIBUSTER OF THE 2004 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The Missouri Senate experienced its first filibuster this week all over the proposed name change of one of our state's universities.

The "filibuster" is a powerful Senate tool, included by the founding fathers at both the federal and state levels. It is designed to give the minority party the power to stop the majority party from passing bills that the minority disagrees with. It's generally done by having members of the minority party speak around the clock to prevent the majority party from voting.

However, in this case it was only a few Senators, one in particular who represents the UMC campus, who objected to this name change and the differences did not fall along party lines.

Senate Bill 714 changes the name of Springfield's Southwest Missouri State University to Missouri State University. I've co-sponsored this legislation, which I believe only makes sense. SMS is the state's second largest university and as such deserves this unique distinction.

This bill has been around for many years, long before I was elected to the Senate.

Opponents have argued that the name change would dilute the prestige of the University of Missouri – Columbia and eventually pit the two schools against each other in funding feuds.

I don't see it that way. I see the name change as a positive move for the State of Missouri and demonstrates to prospective out-of-state students that Missouri is fortunate to have two fine state universities.

The filibuster lasted for approximately 30 hours over five days and the debate at times was very heated and personal. The fact that the bill's sponsor and the main opponent would be opponents later this year running for the same statewide office just intensified the tension and tone of the debate.

Even though we recessed for an hour earlier Tuesday evening in an attempt to hammer out a compromise, both sides couldn't come together.

After initially agreeing to support a rarely used procedural move and shut off debate, I changed my mind and decided to take matters into my own hands and chastise both sides for wasting valuable floor debate time. I couldn't believe that neither side would give an inch and work out a compromise.

After I finished admonishing both sides for not reaching a compromise, the tone of debate changed and within a couple of hours an offer was made to make passage of the name-change bill contingent on the passage of a proposal to issue \$190 million in bonds for life science buildings for the University of Missouri. We then adjourned at 2 a.m. Wednesday after 16 straight hours of debate.

This proposal faces tough opposition in the House of Representatives, where members have expressed concern about the bonding proposal, which some say would put the state in debt for many years with no identified revenue source to repay the bonds.

As you can see, this name change bill still has a long way to go before it's finally passed. I will keep you updated.

If you are in Jefferson City, please feel free to stop by my office in Room 226 at the State Capitol. You may call me anytime at (800) 247-6102 or (573) 751-3678, or you may call my home at 239-2521 or 239-2523. My cell phone number is (314) 650-5777.