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Week of February 14, 2005

Deliberate Success

I am proud to say that the first all-nighter of this Senate session ended in multi-faceted success for Senate Bill 98, which renames Southwest Missouri State University as Missouri State University. We started debating the bill Monday afternoon, and the back and forth conversation between those for and those against the initiative stretched into Tuesday morning.

The name change will benefit our area because dropping the regional designation from SMSU's name allows the institution to shed its regional image. Because SMSU has more students than any other bi-directionally named institution in the nation, the word "Southwest" falsely indicates that the school's reach is limited to southwest Missouri. Changing the name will boost the school's ability to attract out-of-state students, something that helps the Springfield area, as well as the state of Missouri as a whole.

Some argued that the name change would negatively impact the University of Missouri system because it might diminish its funding and stature. But the differing perspectives regarding the issue were accompanied by the desire to compromise. After a few calls were made to the officials who represent SMSU and the UM system, concerns were addressed one by one, and the filibuster came to an end. Provisions were fastened on to the bill stipulating that SMSU/MSU will not receive additional funding based solely on the name change, nor will it offer certain doctoral degree programs that only UM offers. UM will also maintain its status as the state's primary research university. Along with other

less controversial name changes to colleges, the Senate resoundingly voted for renaming SMSU with strong bipartisan support.

This legislative attempt has been made in some form for the past two decades. Last year a measure similar to the current one passed through the Senate, but did not receive parallel acceptance in the House because it was attached to other legislation. Governor Blunt, a Springfield native, stands behind this year's version. The bill must receive approval from the House before it lands on the governor's desk to be signed into law. Our goal is to have it successfully exit the legislative process by March 17, which is when SMSU celebrates its 100th anniversary.

Our untiring efforts were made in order to put the legislation to bed before we ourselves rested. Cooperation and willingness to negotiate enabled the original bill to be shaped into legislation that would help SMSU better reflect its role and mission in the higher education system without stepping on the toes of other esteemed universities. Each of the 14 hours of debate was a triumphant example of Missouri's most deliberative legislative body at work.

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Sen. Larry Gene Taylor represents the people of Ozark, Stone, Taney, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald counties.