



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 20, 2005

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

Senate Committees Gear Up

JEFFERSON CITY – The Missouri Senate stood adjourned on Martin Luther King Day to observe the holiday honoring the civil rights leader and his accomplishments. The Senate had traditionally worked through all recognized state holidays in order to complete the business of the people by the Constitutional deadline of mid-May. This year is the third consecutive year in which the Senate suspended operations on the day marking the (approximate) birth of Dr. King.

Senators began the shortened legislative week introducing a number of bills ranging in intent from revising business tax policy to addressing animal feeding operations. Once bills are introduced, they are referred to the Senate committee whose title most closely matches the bill's purpose. Bills in committee are often given public hearings to enlist the thoughts, comments and suggestions offered by people outside the capitol.

As chairman of the Senate Education Committee, I had the opportunity this week to preside over a public hearing on a bill (SB 25) that would rename Southwest Missouri State University to Missouri State University. Many in the region know that similar legislation has been advanced in the state legislature for 15 or more years.

The ultimate failure of past efforts stemmed from opponents contending, erroneously, that dropping the school's regional distinction would somehow dilute the mission of, and/or create problems for the University of Missouri. In actuality, shortening SMSU's present name to MSU will boost collegiate prestige, and in turn enrollment, while also fostering partnership opportunities with UM and other college systems across the state.

Name change support this year appears stronger than ever before, and with good reason (having a new governor who hails from southwest Missouri sure doesn't hurt) – now is the time to make the change to MSU.

Also heard this week in the education committee was Senate Bill 98, which is an omnibus name change bill that would affect Southwest Missouri State University, Missouri Western State College, Missouri Southern State University-Joplin and Harris-Stowe State College. This legislation will likely be the first bill voted out of committee and reported to the floor.

As vice-chairman of the Appropriations Committee, I heard insightful public testimony on the first of the budget bills funding the state's programs and services. Traditionally, the public did not have an opportunity to express their views on state spending before the budget panel. (The budget meetings could be publicly attended, but no public comment period existed.) However, recognizing the merits of listening to ideas from people outside the capitol, panel members this year actively sought public input. The total state budget has come in at around \$19 billion in recent years.

All bills earning committee approval travel to the Senate floor for debate by the full body. Senate passage moves bills to the House of Representatives, where the legislation must earn similar approval. Joint passage moves bills to the governor's desk.

The Missouri Senate convenes again on Monday, January 24. Later that week, lawmakers will hear Governor Blunt's State-of-the-State address and budget message, which he will deliver to a joint session of the General Assembly.

– END –