



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
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Missouri Senate Convenes

Lively, Challenging Session Expected

JEFFERSON CITY – The Missouri Senate, along with the House of Representatives, convened in their respective chambers at noon on Jan. 5 for the first regular legislative session of the 93rd General Assembly.

This year, the members of the Missouri Senate unanimously selected state Senator Michael R. Gibbons, a Republican senator from Kirkwood, to serve as Senate President Pro Tem, the chamber's top leadership position. In a show of bipartisan cooperation and support, the nomination of Sen. Gibbons for the office was seconded by the Senate's top Democrat, Senator Maida Coleman of St. Louis.

In his opening remarks, Sen. Gibbons called for bipartisan cooperation among the legislative and executive branches in order to properly address a number of challenges facing the state in 2005. Also, crafting and adopting a balanced state budget that adequately funds state programs and services is a top priority for lawmakers this session.

While local, state and national economic indicators show favorable signs of growth, recent estimates put Missouri's 2005-2006 budget some \$300 million in the red, a deficit due largely to the use of one-time funding mechanisms and federal dollars in the last two budget years. Missouri's Constitution prohibits deficit spending and largely prohibits raising taxes by more than approximately \$75 million without a vote of the people. I am hopeful that the state budget can be balanced without raising taxes by reviewing tax policies and by reducing waste, fraud and abuse in government.

Senate committee membership and leadership appointments were made this week, and I'm pleased to report I have earned the chairmanship of the Senate's Education Committee. This is a challenging time for the issue of school funding, but I believe we will make great progress in ensuring that all our children have access to an adequate and equitable education.

Also this week, Senators heard the first reading, or introduction, of Senate bills to be heard during session. Some legislative proposals are the same or similar versions of failed bills from earlier sessions. A number of bills seek to raise additional revenue for state services and programs. Others seek name changes for various universities. Education, "tort" (civil liability) reform, health care and transportation are among the scores of issues addressed in legislation already drafted by senators and representatives this year.

The Missouri Senate convenes again next week. Each Missouri General Assembly spans a two-year period, with Senators and Representatives meeting in the Capitol over much of the first five months of each year. The First Regular Session of the 93rd General Assembly ends at 6 p.m. on Friday, May 13.

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