



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

Workers' Compensation Reform, Drug War Measures Advance

My Senate colleagues and I this week approved legislation revising the state's workers' compensation laws. Among several provisions, Senate Bill 1 allows compensation only if a workplace accident was the prevailing factor (rather than the current "substantial" factor) in causing the condition. The measure also sets ceilings on benefits for pre-existing conditions exacerbated in work-related injuries and disallows claims for injuries occurring while traveling to or from work. The bill also makes defrauding the system a felony, rather than a misdemeanor, on the first offense.

The intent here is to allow for the stabilization of the worker's compensation program through a series of sensible checks and balances that will help weed out fraudulent claims and enable the continued payment of genuine claims. By doing this, employees hurt in the workplace will continue to be compensated for their job-related losses and employers will continue to be able to bear the costs of the workers' compensation fund without facing the prospect of downsizing, closing or moving to states where reform is already in place.

The workers' compensation program fills a very real need for employees injured while in the workplace, but what we're seeing now is the closing or migration of *workplaces*.

A new and proper balance *must* be struck.

Forty-nine other states and countless nations are competing with Missouri in the economic development race. Now is the time to put the Show-Me State out in front of the pack by making it easier to create, do and grow business in Missouri. Workers' compensation reform is a major facet of this initiative.

With the Senate's passage of the workers' compensation revision package, the bill now goes to the House of Representatives.

The Senate this week also sent the House a bill designed to curb the production of methamphetamine, an extremely addictive drug that stimulates the central nervous system. The measure requires that cold medicines containing pseudoephedrine – a primary ingredient in meth production – be purchased only from pharmacists or registered technicians. The measure also limits purchase quantities to nine grams of medicine in a 30-day period and requires that sales be logged in a database. The legislation does exempt gel capsules and syrup forms of pseudoephedrine-based as dry tablets are typically the form sought for meth production.

Other states have similar measures pending or on the books, and federal legislation has also been introduced. A final passing vote in the Senate will send the measure to the House.

Missouri, regrettably, ranks near top in the nation for meth production, distribution and abuse. The drug is filling our prisons, wrecking families, corroding lives and endangering life. Strengthening oversight and control of the sale of products like Sudafed and Actifed ensures their use as remedies for the common cold instead of ingredients for an all-too-common illegal drug.

The Senate, in addition, gave initial approval to legislation that tightens up retirement plan provisions for administrative law judges, legal advisors and certain state board and commission members.

The Missouri Senate convenes again on Monday, February 14. The state budget must be adopted by May 7. The First Regular Session of the 93rd General Assembly ends one week later.

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