



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



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If the Name Fits

My Senate colleagues and I worked together through a lengthy and worthwhile overnight session this week to adopt Senate Bill 98, which renames Southwest Missouri State University as Missouri State University.

Without question, shedding the university's regional name designation will boost the school's recruiting power and expand its sphere of educational influence. Students at SMSU/MSU – which is Missouri's second largest university – are not just from the southwest portion of this state. They are from every county in Missouri, nearly all 50 states in the nation and 87 foreign countries. The name "Missouri State University" reflects this drawing power.

As widely reported, the measure met with pockets of resistance based on a misplaced notion that the renaming may dilute the University of Missouri system's mission and might present greater competition for state funds. These concerns put debate on the measure into a 14-hour hold of sorts. In the early morning hours, senators engaged the presidents of both universities in an important round of conversations that led to a filibuster-ending agreement.

At 6:30 Tuesday morning, the name-change bill earned a bi-partisan 23-7 first-round Senate vote. A day later, Senators sent the measure to the House with a bi-partisan 25-7 final vote. House passage moves the bill to the desk of the governor, a Springfield native who has long supported the Missouri State University name.

Bringing about UM acceptance are provisions stipulating that SMSU/MSU would not receive added funding based solely on the name change, nor would it offer certain doctoral degree programs identified by UM, which is also labeled as the state's primary research university in the legislation.

Raising virtually no opposition were provisions in the bill changing the name of Missouri Western State College to Missouri Western State University, Harris-Stowe State College to Harris-Stowe State University, and an amendment allowing Central Missouri State University to initiate a name change to the University of Central Missouri if a majority of board members vote to do so within the next two years. The bill also enables Missouri Southern State University–Joplin to become Missouri Southern State University. As with the reasoning behind the SMSU/MSU change, inserting “university” for “college” and dropping city/region/state designations better reflects a school’s advancement in the educational arena.

Developing as I write this is the operating budget for state services and programs. In his budget request to lawmakers, Governor Blunt specifically calls out the need to make permanent appropriations of \$250,000 for Missouri Southern State University (which, as I mentioned, is now slated to shed the somewhat limiting “–Joplin” name appendix) and \$200,000 for the alternative energy program at Crowder College. While both schools received these appropriations this year, the governor’s plan ensures that this important funding is automatically renewed each budget cycle.

In taking action like this and in calling for an overall boost of \$170 million to public schools, the governor is backing his commitment to education with a progressive school funding plan.

As chair of the Senate’s education committee, and on behalf of Missouri’s schoolchildren, I’ll be working to place his plan into action.

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*Senator Gary Nodler represents the people of Newton, Jasper
and Dade counties in the Missouri Senate.*