



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

Protecting Democracy's Credibility

Expecting Continued Legislative Success for School Funding and State Budget

JEFFERSON CITY – My fellow lawmakers and I returned this week from a mid-session recess and because we have already accomplished a number of our main goals, we are eager to move on to other important pieces of legislation. One such measure of which I am a co-sponsor protects the integrity of legitimate voters. In this world of diverse governments with varying degrees of personal liberties granted to the countries' citizens, it is a privilege to have the right to vote. The U.S. Constitution bestows American citizens with the power of the voting ballot. Senate Bill 50, which will be taken up by the full Senate, requires people to prove they are U.S. citizens before they can register to vote. Those who are in this country illegally should not be allowed cast votes that essentially undermine our safety and rectitude as a sovereign nation.

We cannot afford to allow terrorist sympathizers and undocumented immigrants with anti-American views to use a ballot as a means to further their cause. At least eight of the 19 hijackers involved in the tragedy of 9/11 were registered to vote in Virginia or Florida. Throughout the past few years, other states such as Ohio have reported that potential political saboteurs were illegally living in the state and managed to finagle the system to register to vote. We can only guess how many illegal immigrants have marked ballots here in Missouri.

Not checking voters for legal citizenship degrades the credibility of our electoral system and also leads to future instances of benefit fraud in other facets of the social structure. Because this bill falls in line with the governor's objective to cut waste, fraud and abuse from the state government, this measure

is expected to receive bipartisan support. My fellow lawmakers and I will do what we can to protect the democratic process that has enabled us to serve the great state of Missouri.

Rewriting the educational funding formula, planning a balanced state budget and creating a public policy regarding embryonic stem-cell research are the next substantial issues the Senate will be undertaking in the coming weeks. A bill based on the Joint Committee on Education's recommendations for equitably distributing funding to Missouri public schools was voted on in a meeting of the Senate Education Committee of which I am chairman. By taking into account the overall base amount it costs for providing an adequate education per pupil, each district's property taxes and the purchasing power of a dollar, SB 287 addresses the problems of our current public school funding method. This bill will now head to the Senate floor for debate by the full body.

The state legislature is required by the constitution to write the state's budget. Missouri has \$19.2 billion to spend, but to continue funding the state at the same level it is now, we would need an additional \$1.3 billion. There are only two ways to make up for that lack of money. One is to raise taxes; the other is to cut programs. People have declined a tax increase three times in recent years, so we are left with no other choice but to trim expenses in areas such as departmental administration and Medicaid. Even after the proposed cuts go through, we are still spending more on Medicaid this year than we did last year. Writing a balanced budget is a difficult and oftentimes contentious process, but it needs to be done to reign in the state's out-of-control budget. We can only spend within our means, which forces us to make difficult decisions.

As is typical, the fiscal plan is currently being deliberated in the House Budget Committee. Once the House drafts the legislative package detailing the appropriations, the Senate will similarly consider the bills.

The Senate will also soon be debating SB 160, which outlaws cloning a person, as well as makes illegal a procedure known as somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT). The issue is a controversial one, but I will do everything I can to encourage a thorough deliberation on the implications of this bill so we can establish a public policy that is morally right.

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