



MISSOURI SENATE

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Week of May 8, 2006

A Measure to Attract Nurses and Teachers

With only one more week of the 2006 legislative session left, lawmakers have been working hard to get their priority bills approved by the time the General Assembly adjourns for the year on Friday, May 12. Fortunately, my fellow lawmakers jumped on board with one of my own priorities to make college degrees more obtainable for students who want to be teachers or nurses.

Many times, high school graduates are discouraged from following their dreams because they don't have enough money to go to a college or university that best help them accomplish their goals. If Missouri as a state puts a little more money toward those financially challenged college-bound students, the investment will pay off in the long run.

In line with this way of thinking, the House and Senate have approved Senate Bill 980, which I sponsored, creating the Urban Flight and Rural Needs Scholarship program to annually provide scholarships to 100 high school grads pursuing teaching degrees. To receive the financial aid, the students must commit to teaching at at-risk schools in Missouri, and for every two years they commit to, they will receive a one-year scholarship covering all tuition and fees. An eight-year commitment would enable the students to go to college for free. If a teacher does not fulfill his or her commitment, the scholarship will turn into a loan with a 9.5 percent interest rate.

The measure also changes the law so that students who have been accepted as full-time nursing students are eligible for student loans. Current law also states that 25 percent of a nursing student's loans are forgiven for each year of full-time employment as a licensed nurse in an at-risk area. My bill completely forgives the loans as soon as full-time employment is established. This is an extremely generous adjustment that will certainly encourage more students to seek nursing careers in places that don't have enough trained medical professionals.

With my bill, we are finally addressing the uneven distribution of teachers and nurses in urban and rural areas that are understaffed in those occupations. Offering students such an appealing financial aid package in turn for their much-needed service is a great way to help communities provide better education and more reliable medical treatment, and it is a great way to help students become successful adults.

The measure has been sent to the governor, who is expected to sign it into law. If signed it would take effect in August of this year.

As always, if there are issues you would like to see addressed or if you ever have a problem finding answers from state government, my official Capitol office is open for your conversation. Our toll-free number is 1.866.242.0810 and our email is Dan_Clemens@senate.mo.gov.

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