



# WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler  
District 32



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## Gearing Up for a Session of Success

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JEFFERSON CITY – With the 2005 holiday season behind us and a new year stretched out before us, my fellow state lawmakers and I returned to the Capitol this week to begin the 2006 legislative session, which convened at noon on Jan. 4.

In his opening day address, Senate President Pro Tem Michael Gibbons expressed his hope that the progress of these next few months mirrors that of the 2005 legislative session. He called for unified efforts from both parties to advance legislation that will move Missouri forward.

Some familiar issues have returned to our legislative agendas. The solvency of our state-funded health-care system is one of them. Last year we were faced with the necessary, but difficult, task of streamlining Medicaid, because we cannot spend more on the program than our finite resources allow. Senate President Gibbons stressed the importance of every person in the state of Missouri having access to affordable preventative health care. The areas of our health-care system that require further scrutiny include the Medicaid eligibility verification process, fraud by Medicaid providers, and the need to replace paper medical records with electronic records. This session should be a turning point for Missouri's health-care system.

During the last session, we were able to rewrite the public school funding formula, which has made Missouri one of the most equitable school funding systems in the nation. Because we realize the importance of a solid education, we are committed to fully funding the formula. Our children's safety is also a primary concern of the legislature. A number of bills ensuring swift and severe penalties of sex offenders will be considered during this legislative session. With stiffer sentences and more concentrated enforcement efforts, our children will get the protection they deserve, and sexual predators will receive the punishment that they should.

Private property rights will also receive much deserved attention. The U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that local governments can seize private property and transfer ownership of the land to private developers if the development project is in the name of overall economic development. Since developmental projects such as strip malls and office complexes qualify as economic development, private property owners are concerned that their property rights could be directly threatened by the application of eminent domain laws. Fortunately, the court made it clear that the interpretation of eminent domain laws is up to each state. We will be addressing the issue so that farm, home and business owners are not victimized by unfair, unethical and arguably unconstitutional private development projects.

The availability and affordability of energy to Missouri consumers, is fundamental to the success of our state. We have all experienced the increased cost of energy these past several months from escalating prices at the pump and significantly higher natural gas bills. Because this trend is likely to continue, the General Assembly will be considering what steps to take in order to ensure that we have uninterrupted access to an adequate supply of energy at costs that are reasonable to consumers. A comprehensive state energy policy is necessary during these times, and I expect the legislature to succeed in constructing one that guarantees Missouri an energy-abundant and energy-independent future.

In addition to these priorities that I share with the majority of lawmakers, I personally have filed several initiatives positively affecting southwest Missouri and the state as whole. Some of my legislation seeks to reform Missouri's system of higher education, strengthen environmental regulations and find a permanent solution to fund state crime labs. I will further explain these and other measures in future columns as the session continues.

I hope your holidays were blessed and joyous and that you are as eager as I am to make 2006 a memorable year. I am optimistic that the coming session will include many opportunities to help improve the lives of the people of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Senatorial District and the citizens of the State of Missouri.

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