



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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The State of the State

JEFFERSON CITY—The Missouri Senate joined the members of the House of Representatives Wednesday night in welcoming Governor Matt Blunt for his State of the State Address. Governor Blunt delivered good news: the difficult decisions that we made last year have paid off for the citizens of the state, and Missouri's economy is strong.

For the first time in five years, we are beginning the year with a small but real budget surplus, rather than a shortfall. The budget choices that we made last year are paying off with improved funding for education, job growth and an improved business climate as a result of tort reform and workers compensation reform. The Governor called on us to continue down this path of efficient, effective and responsive government and we will deliver it to the people of the state of Missouri.

Governor Blunt's budget reflects the right priorities, ensuring that our children receive a first-class education is number one. The Governor has requested a \$167 million increase for K-12 education, fully funding our states new foundation formula. The Governor also called on the legislature to find ways to assure that education spending puts the dollars where they need to be, which is in the classroom.

I applaud the Governor's proposal for an increase for funding for public two- and four-year colleges and universities. That proposal would increase the higher education budget by more than \$17 million and enabling us to provide resources needed to provide a quality education and hold down tuition costs.

The Governor also called for a comprehensive energy action plan. We will be working to develop a wide-ranging policy that will focus on rising heating costs, home-heating assistance for low-income Missourians, and agriculture-based fuels, such as ethanol and biodiesel, to produce renewable energies that decrease dependency on foreign resources.

As I said in last week's column, Missouri's health-care system will require attention in 2006. Last year through new efforts to verify eligibility and cut waste in other ways, Missouri significantly slowed the rate of

increase in Medicaid spending. Without these changes, Missouri citizens would have been required to spend an additional \$935 million. The Governor has requested further scrutiny of Medicaid to completely eliminate waste, fraud and abuse. He also asked the General Assembly to take additional steps to ensure that low-income Missourians have access to health care. Additionally, the Governor requested more funding for residential-care facilities, smoking-cessation programs and in-home health care.

The Governor would also like to see Medicaid restructuring incorporate advanced technology to improve efficiency in benefits. To achieve this, he has requested the creation of the Health-Care Technology Fund that would invest funds from the revenue surplus to accomplish this streamlining.

Additional gubernatorial priorities include increased funding for law-enforcement facilities and increased penalties for criminals. This fight against criminals includes crime lab funding, drug courts and stronger penalties for sexual predators and those who abuse seniors.

Governor Blunt recognized the strong desire of Missouri citizens for eminent domain laws that respect the rights of private property owners.

The Governor's plan does provide a blue print for success in 2006 and beyond. I look forward to working with my fellow lawmakers and the Governor to guarantee that the state of the state remains healthy, strong and forward looking.

The Missouri Senate will stand adjourned on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Monday, Jan. 16, and will reconvene on Tuesday, Jan. 17.

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