



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



Room 433 - State Capitol Bldg. - Jefferson City, MO 65101 - Phone: (573) 751-2306

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Week of March 20, 2006

For additional information contact:
Barbara Mustoe
(573) 751-2306

A Week For Recessing and Recapping

JEFFERSON CITY – While the Senate stands adjourned for the annual mid-session break, I wanted to sum up the significant legislative progress that we have made since the Second Regular Session of the 93rd General Assembly convened on Jan. 4.

Although lawmakers head to Jefferson City with a legislative agenda in mind, sometimes unexpected events occur that require immediate attention. So was the case this year. A radical Kansas church had been abusing their freedom of speech by protesting the funerals of American soldiers to spread their anti-gay message. This insensitive and cruel behavior only caused more pain for the grieving families and friends. Because state lawmakers wholeheartedly believed that the church members' First Amendment rights ended where the mourners' rights began, we quickly passed Senate Bill 578, which states that funeral protests cannot be held within one hour prior to and one hour after the completion of funerals in Missouri. Because the bill had an emergency clause, the law immediately went into effect upon the official signing in February.

The Senate just recently gave final approval to a \$192-million supplemental spending bill, much of which will go toward Medicaid. The funding outlined in House Bill 1014 goes toward the 2006 fiscal year, which runs through June 30. Because House members have passed a \$185-million version of the bill, members of both chambers will meet in conference to come to an agreement on the legislation. The House and Senate must approve identical versions of legislation to send bills to the governor.

We just recently sent to the House a comprehensive measure to protect our children from sexual predators. Senate Bill 588 strengthens penalties against sex offenders in Missouri by imposing stricter mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines and life sentences against certain repeat offenders. Among its many provisions, the omnibus bill also requires lifetime electronic supervision of certain sexual predators, establishes a toll-free hotline to report sexual abuse, and allows probation and parole officers to have access to registered sex offenders' personal computers to look for evidence of child pornography.

To move Missouri toward a more environmentally sound energy policy and keep consumer utility rates at affordable levels, the Senate has passed SB 915. The legislation calls on Missouri utility companies to get 3 percent of their electrical energy from renewable sources by 2012, 7 percent by 2015, and 10 percent by 2020. This measure, which will soon be heard in House committee, represents our commitment to bringing sustainability and responsibility to Missouri's energy supply.

Because Missouri's health-care system is out-of-date with the 21st century and out-of-sync with the needs of citizens, it is time for us to modernize the system accordingly. With the Senate's final approval of SB 858, we are one step closer to establishing the Health-Care Technology Fund, which would direct money to streamlining state-funded health-care services by improving computer hardware and software, replacing paper records with electronic ones and exploring the potentials of telemedicine. The legislation is now being considered in the House.

The 2006 session promises to be a turning point for Missouri's system of higher education. In addition to considering a significant budget increase for public universities and colleges, we are also advancing legislation to make the system stronger. A bill I am sponsoring to reform several state education laws has also made its way to the House. SB 590 gives the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education binding-arbitration authority, enabling it to enforce its policies and discipline educational institutions that disregard board policies. Other provisions in the bill call on state education officials to work together to improve higher education in Missouri and offer tuition grants to Missourians who have served in the Iraq war.

Provisions from a bill I drafted were included in Senate Bill 575, which has also advanced to the House. Senate Bill 575 establishes a program to recycle unused prescription drugs, which may be transferred from long-term care facilities to city or county health departments for distribution to qualified low-income Missourians. Also under the bill, drugs donated under the state Prescription Drug Repository Program that are not used by state pharmacies, hospitals or nonprofit clinics may be distributed to out-of-state charities.

For the last seven weeks of session, we will continue working diligently to complete our legislative priorities. Some of our top goals yet to be accomplished include protecting the rights of private property owners from eminent domain abuse, addressing the problem of fraud by Medicaid providers, protecting consumers from legislation that would hurt their interests, and writing a budget that reflects our commitment to education. Lawmakers will return to the Capitol on Monday, March 27, 2006.

– END –

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