



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



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A Common State and Federal Goal

JEFFERSON CITY—Dealing with illegal immigration has recently catapulted to the frontlines of the federal government's agenda and is also garnering attention at the state level. In 2000, at least 7 million undocumented immigrants were in the country, and more than 22,000 of them lived or worked in Missouri. This is a 38-percent increase from 1996, and the figure will undoubtedly continue to grow.

The matter is under legislative scrutiny because the presence of such a large illegal population carries with it complex social and economic concerns. Missouri will have to deal with the repercussions of illegal immigrants for years to come as more and more Hispanics and other minorities make the Midwest their home. Where legal immigrants settle, illegal ones tend to as well. Interstate 44 near Joplin serves as a common point of entry for many undocumented immigrants who cross borders into Missouri. In February, Immigration and Customs Enforcement raided a construction site in Carthage, and 56 illegal workers were arrested. Two other residents of Southwest Missouri were indicted that same month for falsifying work visas for 300 immigrants.

The way to deal with illegal immigrants has always been a contentious issue, but it has become even more so during this era when strengthening national security is of utmost importance. Because a considerable number of illegal immigrants provide cheap labor for jobs that Americans tend to reject, such as those in the construction, food-service, agriculture and tourism industries, rounding up people who are here illegally and deporting them en masse could have negative effects on our economy. Not to mention the sales taxes they pay. But on the other side of the argument, dire economic effects or no, the law is the law, and criminals should be treated like criminals.

The U.S. Congress is considering legislation that would tighten the country's borders, increase criminal penalties for violations and establish a guest-worker program to allow undocumented workers to work for a specific time and then return to their countries. Meanwhile, we lawmakers in Jefferson City are trying to address the problem within the borders of the Show-Me State.

Senate Bill 1250, which has been assigned to the Judiciary and Civil & Criminal Jurisprudence Committee, gives more power to law enforcement so illegal immigrants living or working in Missouri can be more effectively identified, detained and deported.

The measure enables the Missouri Highway Patrol to receive federal training from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and learn the best ways to enforce federal immigration laws on highways and interstates in Missouri.

As recent catastrophic events have indicated, the lines of communication connecting local, state and federal law enforcement agencies need to be reinforced. This measure will be a tool for all levels of law enforcement to coordinate resources and manpower to effectively control illegal immigration in Missouri. Another provision of the legislation will prevent people who are in the country illegally from receiving any taxpayer-funded assistance ranging from health-care benefits to public education.

The most detrimental threat illegal immigrants pose to the United States is the risk to national security. As your senator, I will be working to ensure that any new state law dealing with this issue balances the importance of tighter border control with that of the immigrant workforce's positive impacts on the economy.

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