



# WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler  
District 32



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Politicizing Education at the Cost of Students**

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JEFFERSON CITY— It is unfortunate when politics gets in the way of legislation that will benefit our state. When that legislation has bipartisan support and has been approved by the House and Senate, political roadblocks are even more disheartening. Nevertheless, a wide-ranging education bill I sponsored in 2006 that would give meaningful authority to higher education officials was held up by a single senator in the final day of session. Following that spectacle, Missouri's esteemed commissioner of higher education and an ardent supporter of the measure, Dr. Greg Fitch, resigned from office this week. Although I will certainly work to pass this legislation in 2007, this mess could have been avoided had the Legislature been allowed to pass this measure, which the overwhelming majority of lawmakers wanted to do.

Senate Bill 590, the omnibus legislation I sponsored, would have made a number of changes to Missouri higher education policy to improve administration and better prepare Missouri students for the real world. The legislation would have given the Missouri Coordinating Board of Higher Education the authority it needs to do its job.

Although the board was created in the 1970s to limit duplication of programs among state colleges, the nine-member board was not given the authority needed to carry out its mission. SB 590 gives the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education binding arbitration authority, enabling it to discipline educational institutions that disregard board policies. In other words, this bill gives the higher education board the enforcement capabilities needed for it to do the job it was assigned 30 years ago.

SB 590 also calls on state education officials to work together to improve higher education in Missouri and offers tuition grants to Missourians who have served in the Iraq war.

Together, these provisions would make needed improvements to Missouri's system of higher education. Of course, good policy can sometimes take a backseat to political stunts. By the final day of the 2006 session, SB 590 had been approved by the House and Senate, and a conference committee report had been drafted by members of both legislative chambers. All that was left was final approval of the committee report. As I've already stated, this minor formality was hijacked by a lone senator, who chose to filibuster the motion because of partisan politics.

This unfortunate act, which will only hurt the state of higher education in Missouri, was compounded with the announcement this week that Commissioner of Higher Education Greg Fitch has resigned his position. Dr. Fitch, who had worked hard to get this bill passed, is an outstanding public servant and advocate for higher education. His experience with and passion for higher education in Missouri will be sorely missed. I would like to lend Dr. Fitch my gratitude, deep respect and best wishes in all his future endeavors.

However, Dr. Fitch's resignation only fuels my determination to pass this legislation in 2007. I will work hard to ensure political trickery does not get in the way of improving education for Missouri students.

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