



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



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Week of Nov. 26, 2007

Beginning the Budget Process

This summer, I was appointed as the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. I have served on the committee since I was elected to the Senate in 2002, and I became vice-chairman in 2004 under then-chairman Sen. Chuck Gross, who recently retired from the Senate. This is a daunting responsibility, but I will do everything in my power to make sure that your hard-earned tax dollars are not wasted but invested wisely and carefully. My committee will do everything that it can to meet Missouri's most pressing needs within the constraints of fiscal responsibility.

Every year, we are constitutionally required to craft the state's spending plan, and the budget process begins before the previous legislative session even ends. During the 2007 session and the interim that began in May, we were already looking at priorities and legislation that will affect state spending for Fiscal Year 2009 (beginning in July 1, 2008). We also keep a close eye on Missouri's economy, making sure that our revenue estimates are matching up with the amount of money collected.

Next week, we will begin a series of public hearings in order to hear testimony on the state's finances. These hearings will be taking place earlier than in previous years in order to allow plenty of time for the information to impact our planning. This is the time set aside for citizens to raise issues or concerns they have with the way state programs are funded, and I am looking forward to hearing this valuable information from a broad cross section of Missouri citizens throughout our state. During this period, my colleagues and I will listen closely to the voice of the people while beginning to think about the best way to craft the budget in a fiscally responsible manner. The hearings provide a better perspective on state funding and insight from the viewpoints of the people who use the very programs the budget funds.

The hearings will take place on December 3rd and 4th. During this time, we commonly hear from parents whose children utilize health or mental health services, veterans who make use of services provided by the Missouri Veterans Commission, and teachers providing perspective on

education in the state. Business owners will also have the opportunity to give their views on programs meant to improve the economy of the state along with any other citizen who wants to comment on state funding. This testimony can have an impact on the establishment of the priorities funded by this state budget, so it is appropriate that some of the input comes straight from the citizens that we have been elected to serve.

On January 9th, we will officially begin what hopefully will be another successful legislative session. The budget process begins when the governor sends his budget requests to the House Budget Committee. The House Budget Committee will then develop a proposal to send to the Senate. The Senate Appropriations Committee will be independently reviewing the governor's requests as the budget bills work their way through the House. When the House budget bills arrive in the Senate at around the time of Spring Recess, the Senate Appropriations Committee and staff will have already examined in considerable detail, every area of our state budget. The Senate Appropriations Committee will then amend the budget bills in a way that reflects the best and most current information available to the committee at that time. Once approved by the Senate, differences are ironed out through the conference committee process. When the House and Senate agree on a final plan, it is sent to the governor. The General Assembly's constitutional deadline for completion of the state operating budget is one week before the end of the legislative session.

I will continue to keep you up to date on the progress we are making to create a well thought-out spending plan for our state. It is my goal for the budget to reflect the goals of the taxpayer—making sure state programs are meeting the most critical needs of our citizens while providing a fiscally responsible spending plan. Over the next six months, there will be extensive deliberations, debate, and reflection about how the state should spend funds. Our goal is always to improve our state and the lives of its citizens.

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