



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



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Week of February 12, 2007

Steadfast Intentions

The Push for A Stronger System of Higher Education Continues

Three weeks ago I introduced a bill to bring accessibility, affordability and accountability to Missouri's system of higher education. Among its many provisions, the omnibus measure establishes a new scholarship program and sets new standards for the accountability practices of universities.

Two sections of Senate Bill 389 have been thoroughly debated in committee, and their specific language, though not their intentions, have evolved as expected. One of the sections pertains to the governor's plan to sell student loan assets to allow for construction projects on the campuses of public universities and colleges in Missouri. The legislation authorizes the allocation of \$350 million from the sale of the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority's student loan assets to more than 20 building projects on the campuses of Missouri colleges and universities. This transfer is necessary so that our system of higher education can remain competitive with those in other states and nations. This section of the bill embraces the vision of Governor Blunt's Lewis and Clark Discovery Initiative.

Another significant portion of this bill is specific language to stabilize tuition rates at public colleges and universities. A well-educated workforce is invaluable, but because the cost of a getting a college diploma has risen faster than inflation, the state Legislature needs to step in so that more Missourians can afford to continue their education beyond high school.

SB 389 establishes the principle that tuition increases should be held to the rate of inflation. If an institution wishes to increase tuition above the rate of inflation, then any additional increase would require the Coordinating Board of Higher Education's approval. If an institution raised tuition above the rate without the board's approval, the board could fine the institution up to 5 percent of its state funding.

This bill will again be taken up by the full Senate next week, and I expect various provisions to be thoroughly debated. It is my hope that my colleagues can come together to pass this bill so we can fulfill the measure's mission — to move Missouri's system of higher education forward.

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