



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



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Week of April 16, 2007

A Victory for Higher Education

This week, my colleagues and I in the Senate made great strides for higher education with the first round approval of Senate Bill 389, a bill I sponsored. This Omnibus Higher Education Bill creates more scholarships for students, improves Missouri’s campuses, and heightens the accountability of higher education facilities. This bipartisan bill contains pages upon pages of amendments proposed by Democrats and reflects wishes of senators from both sides of the aisle.

This bill allows more students in Missouri to have access to higher education through increases in scholarship opportunities and limits on tuition increases. Need-based scholarships will increase with the creation of Access Missouri. This program will provide annual scholarships for community college students, public university students, and private university students. In addition, the bill will expand the “Bright Flight” program so that more students will be able to reap the benefits of their hard work during high school. In the past, tuition increases have become worrisome for families planning for their children’s higher education. SB 389 restrains tuition increases linking them to the consumer price index, allowing Missouri families to be better able to budget for continuing education.

As we expand students’ access to higher education, we are also improving the colleges and universities in our state. One way that we are doing this is by partially selling the out of state assets of the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority (MOHELA) resulting in \$350 million to renovate, expand, and construct facilities on campuses throughout the state. Under the legislation, the authority of the Department of Higher Education’s coordinating board will be strengthened and schools will be held to performance standards. Competency tests for entry level courses will be established throughout the state, resulting in smoother transitions and transfers between school. The bill also increases information accessibility to students, keeping

them up to date on their education. Schools will be required to keep students aware of which professors are teaching their classes.

Legislation as thorough and involved as this takes the effort of many from both inside and outside the Capitol. The higher education package has received strong support from Gov. Matt Blunt, who has been both patient and flexible with the General Assembly as we have made suggestions and changes to the legislation. Our fellow lawmakers in the House have also put a great deal of effort into this bill, and I especially appreciate the work of Rep. Carl Bearden and Rep. Gayle Kingery. This bill has also been hailed as the most significant higher education package in two decades by Dr. Elson Floyd, president Emeritus of the University of Missouri; Dr. Barbara Dixon, president of the Missouri Council on Public Higher Education; Dr. Robert Stein, Commissioner of the Department of Higher Education.

As an elected official, I am charged with the responsibility of representing the cares and concerns of my constituents, and I work hard for the people of this state. Senate Bill 389 is a bill that will improve the future of Missouri by allowing more students to access a top quality education. I am pleased that this legislation has received first-round approval and I look forward to moving the bill onto the governor's desk.

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