



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



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Week of January 14, 2008

A Balanced, Responsible Budget *Governor Announces 2009 Budget Proposals*

On Tuesday night, the governor delivered the traditional State of the State Address. The speech gives the governor the opportunity to address lawmakers, reflect on accomplishments of the past, and clarify his legislative priorities. The address is also the time when the governor announces his budget recommendations for fiscal year 2009. Following the speech, the Senate Appropriations Committee, which I chair, met to discuss the governor's proposals and reflect on how we can make these initiatives a reality.

Over the past several years, the Senate Appropriations Committee, House Budget Committee, and Office of Administration have worked together to create budget estimates that are as accurate as possible. This year, we will again focus on creating a spending plan based on the most recent and accurate numbers available. I commend the governor for building a balanced budget that accounts for Missouri's most pressing needs. Now that the governor has proposed his budget, the House Budget Committee will create the budget bills. These bills will be debated before the full House before being sent to us in the Senate Appropriations Committee. However, we have already begun to work independently on a spending plan.

I was particularly pleased to see that the governor is committed to meeting the constitutionally required obligation the state has to fully fund elementary and secondary education. With previous administrations, education funding was used as a battering chip. However, in recent years we have worked to repair the damage that sort of practice had on our education system. Increased funding for elementary and secondary education (the governor's

proposal suggests an increase of \$121 million) is one of the smartest investments we can make in Missouri's future.

The governor's budget proposals also included an increase in scholarships for Missouri students. Last year, I sponsored Senate Bill 389 and worked hard to get the legislation passed. One provision of the bill created the Access Missouri Scholarship Program, a needs-based program that ensures that the state's neediest students receive aid to pursue a higher education. So far this year, with Access Missouri, more than 36,000 students have received help to go to college. We want to continue supporting this important program, and these increases would help more students.

The goal of the Senate Appropriations Committee is to make sure that the state invests tax dollars wisely. In order to do this, we must focus on Missouri's needs, use up-to-date and accurate estimates, and meet our obligations to the people of this state. I feel that the plan the governor laid out during the State of the State address will give us a great start as we work to create a responsible and balanced spending plan.

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