



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



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Week of March 10, 2008

Honoring the Service of Our Veterans

One of the committees I serve on is the Pensions, Veterans Affairs and General Laws Committee. As the name indicates, this committee works with legislation meant to honor, aid, and show appreciation to our state's veterans — the men and women who have courageously defended our country.

Last year, in the Senate Appropriations Committee, I worked to increase funding to fully staff the veterans' homes in our state. These long-term skilled nursing care facilities have the capability to provide up to 1,350 beds to veterans in need of care. However, prior to the fiscal year 2008 increase, 14 percent of the beds in these homes remained unavailable due to the lack of funding for nurses and nurses' aids to care properly for additional veterans. Having the right staff-to-patient ratio is a matter of safety for the veterans living in these homes, and the only solution was to give the Veteran's Commission the funding they needed. By fully staffing Missouri's veterans' homes, we sent a clear message that we are dedicated to providing veterans in Missouri with the care they need, deserve, and have earned.

This year, we are working on several pieces of legislation that would support Missouri's veterans. [Senate Bill 830](#), also known as the Missouri Returning Heroes' Education Act, has been approved by the Senate and is currently being considered by the House. The bill caps tuition at state-funded universities to \$50 a credit hour for veterans that have served after September 11, 2001. Veterans would have 10 years after their honorable discharge to enroll in the program and would need to maintain a 2.5 or higher grade-point average while taking classes. Many returning veterans utilize the GI Bill to pay for their higher education, but the federal program only provides a flat monthly rate for veterans. This leaves many unable to afford their tuition, room, and board without taking on a second job or living in low income housing.

In supporting our soldiers and veterans, we remember those brave men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice — those who have lost their lives while defending our nation. [Senate Bill 806](#) would require all government buildings to fly the U.S. and Missouri flag at half staff for one full day whenever a Missouri resident is killed in combat. It is the least we can do as a legislative body to honor those who laid down their life. The bill received approval from the Senate and is currently in the House.

Protecting the rights and meeting the needs of my fellow veterans is a priority of mine. I will keep you posted as to the progress of these bills. There are more than half a million veterans living in Missouri, and I will work to make sure that these dedicated individuals' interests are represented, their needs addressed, and their service duly honored.

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