



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



Room 423 - State Capitol Bldg. - Jefferson City, MO 65101 – Contact Barbara Mustoe Phone: (573) 751-2306

Week of February 9, 2009

Remaining Focused on Our Work for the People

I was recently in the Senate chamber while the body was not in session, and I took a moment to notice the beauty of the room. The Senate chamber is a wonderful place to work, and it is truly an artistic and architectural jewel for our state. Each of the 34 senators who work in this chamber each legislative session should be thankful to serve in such an amazing place. Truly though, the most important part of the Senate is not where we are, but what we are doing. This is why I recently played an instrumental role in defeating a measure that I believe would have presented serious problems for the regular business of the Missouri Senate.

The proposal brought forth by some of my Senate colleagues would have allowed laptops on the Senate floor. This is an issue that has come up several times since I began serving, and each time, I have raised several concerns that I have with making this change to the rules of the Senate. This is because I believe the move would put the Senate's ability to do the work of the people in jeopardy.

In my view, the Senate is a deliberative body, similar in nature to a jury in a courtroom. Jurors are not permitted to use laptops in a courtroom because their sole purpose is to listen to the evidence presented in court. Similarly, our purpose in the Senate chamber is to be engaged in debate or be attentive to the debate others are engaged in. Those are the only two purposes for which you are in the Senate chamber and neither of those duties involves a computer. The distractions that could exist if there were 34 laptops in the Senate chamber would not help us focus on our job—passing legislation to help our state.

Allowing laptops in the Senate chamber also brings up an important ethical issue. If there are senators sitting at their desks in the chamber with laptops, they then have the ability to work on private business on Senate time. This proposal would have facilitated legislators engaging in personal work at the public's expense. Why would we want to increase that temptation with this rule change? I could not support an invitation to ethical lapses.

Whether it was because of worries about distractions from our duties or concerns over ethics, my colleagues in the Senate joined me in helping to block this resolution. It is important that the Senate remains focused on doing the work of the people, and I will continue to remain resistant to any rule changes that might threaten that sole task.

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