



Gary Nodler
32nd Senate District
Capitol Building, Room 423
Jefferson City, MO 65101

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

For Immediate Release:
October 8, 2009
Contact: (573) 751-2306

Sen. Gary Nodler Focuses on Future of Career Ladder *Urges Governor to Review Revenue Estimates, Propose Supplemental Budget to Ensure Funding*

JEFFERSON CITY — Sen. Gary Nodler (R-Joplin) today held a press conference to discuss the state's Career Ladder Program and called on the governor to review official revenue estimates when they are released in December to see if there is a way to fund the program for the current year.

Career Ladder provides additional pay to teachers who take on extra duties. The state pays approximately 45 percent of Career Ladder funding, with individual school districts paying the remaining 55 percent.

Career Ladder funding recently came under scrutiny because the funding for the program is appropriated retroactively, meaning the funding for the 2009-10 school year will be decided during the upcoming 2010 legislative session. Sen. Nodler said this practice is inappropriate because one legislature can not bind a future legislature on appropriation matters. Teachers are therefore unsure of whether they will receive pay for the work they completed in the previous year.

“Since 1992, Career Ladder has been funded in a way that is contradictory to the budget process in our state, and this is the reason why the program's funding is so unsure during this difficult budget year,” said Sen. Nodler. “We have the opportunity to put the funding for the program back on schedule, consistent with our constitutional appropriation process.”

State statute says that funding for the Career Ladder Program is to be placed in a “Career Ladder Forward Funding Fund,” so that teachers can receive compensation for their work. The fund was created in 1995 to try and end the practice of funding the program retroactively, but no action has been taken by any legislature to follow through with proactive funding.

Sen. Nodler said that legislators and budget analysts will have a better idea of available funding after a Consensus Revenue Estimate (CRE) is released in December. The annual CRE is a bipartisan figure established by state budget experts and outside consultants that provides one of the basic assumptions the governor and legislative leaders use to build Missouri's budget.

Sen. Nodler today recommended that the best way to fix the practice of retroactive Career Ladder funding would be for the governor to ask for funding in his supplemental budget, which is traditionally proposed towards the beginning of each legislative session to address budget issues that were not passed or were not funded to the level of being sufficient for the whole year. “I am asking Governor Nixon to make clear to teachers and school districts in the supplemental budget process whether or not it is his intention to fund the current year's Career Ladder Program in whole or in part,” said Sen. Nodler.

“Career Ladder funding for the current school year depends on several important questions: Do we have the money to fund the program, and, if we do, then how do we do it?” said Sen. Nodler. “If the governor believes there is enough revenue available to pay for some or all of this year's Career Ladder expenditures and will request a supplemental appropriation, then I will support it, and I will vote for it.”

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