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Bill would allow Western, other schools to make deals when Legislature is not in session

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The Legislature gave final approval last week for Missouri Western State University and other schools to enter into long-term land leases whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Usually, universities have to get specific permission from the state to lease a certain piece of land. But the bill, if signed by the governor, would allow the schools to make deals when the Legislature isn't in session, bypassing months of delay.

Missouri Western is working to increase its position as a life-sciences hub, and state Sen. Charlie Shields, R-St. Joseph, the bill's sponsor, said the deal is aimed at such an endeavor. However, Beth Wheeler, Missouri Western's director of external relations, said there's no specific proposals on the table.

Senate confirms Daffron

In a related note, the Senate last week confirmed Dr. Jeanne Daffron of St. Joseph for a reappointment to the Missouri Life Sciences Research Committee. Dr. Daffron, the assistant vice president for student and academic affairs at Missouri Western State University, was appointed to the job last year. The committee solicits and reviews biotechnology proposals and distributes grants for life-science research.

Johnson visits Capitol

Buchanan County Collector Sidney Johnson revisited his old stomping grounds last week. Mr. Johnson, who served as Buchanan County's Democratic state senator from 1990 to 2002, attended a prayer breakfast at the Capitol on Wednesday morning, along with a number of other former Missouri senators.

Mr. Johnson received a warm welcome from Mr. Shields, his successor, during a visit to the Senate chamber. It was one of the few times he had been there since leaving office. Asked if he planned to show any of these upstart senators how it was done, he laughed and said the Legislature these days is a "new ball game."