



Missouri Association for Social Welfare



Legislative Update 2008

MARCH 17, 2008



MASW Priority: Human Rights Several Legislators Denounce Anti-Immigrant Hysteria

Just in time for St. Patrick's Day, the Missouri House of Representatives voted for yet another in its series of anti-immigrant bills, this one – [HB 1463](#) – to require all our public colleges and universities to certify each year that they have not enrolled any “illegal aliens.”

House Minority Floor Leader Paul LeVota spoke against the bill, noting that there is no evidence that Missouri has any problems at all associated with the presence of undocumented foreign nationals enrolled in our colleges. However, he noted, there is evidence that unscrupulous employers exploit the vulnerable position of undocumented workers to pay substandard wages and undercut the wages of workers who are citizens or have proper documentation – yet there is no legislation brought to the House floor to address this.



[Rep. LeVota](#)

Other Topics in This Update...

- [Honor Roll of NO Votes](#)
- [Just The Facts On Food Stamp Bill](#)
- [More Nonsense Aimed At “Activist” Judges](#)
- [Join Us](#)

Several other legislators also denounced the anti-immigrant hysteria that HB 1463 embodies. Rep. Jeanette Mott Oxford called enactment of the bill “shameful.” Rep. Jake Zimmerman recounted the story of a student at one Missouri college who was denied assistance because his legal status was questioned, despite the fact he is a naturalized citizen and had a valid U.S. passport! This reinforced the point made by several legislators that the current atmosphere of “cracking down on illegal aliens” creates suspicion against people with foreign accents, or who “look foreign” but actually have the required legal paperwork (or, in many cases, actually are citizens). Representatives Mike Talboy, Beth Low and Maria Chappelle-Nadal were among the other speakers against the bill. Chappelle-Nadal in particular

called attention to the racial and ethnic prejudice that often hides behind the facade of “enforcing the law” or “protecting the taxpayers.”

When some proponents of the bill claimed, “my ancestors came here legally, that’s all we’re asking these new immigrants to do,” opponents noted that much of the historic immigration to this country took place when no prior permission of the U.S. government was required to come here; new immigrants just had to pass through a point of entry and fill out some paperwork. Unless they had a particular disease or criminal record, they came into the country and became citizens. It is a false argument to compare that system to the labyrinth of paperwork and waiting lists and quotas that are in place today.

Salus Populi Suprema Lex Esto

Of course, when the roll was called, the bill passed overwhelmingly. But 39 had the courage to stand against the hysteria and vote NO – Representatives Judy Baker, Craig Bland, Michael Brown, John Burnett, Maria Chappelle-Nadal, Michael Corcoran, KiKi Curls, Bruce Darrough, Mike Daus, Curt Dougherty, T.D. El-Amin, Tony George, Jeff Harris, Esther Haywood, Jason Holsman, Ted Hoskins, Rodney Hubbard, Leonard Hughes, Connie Johnson, Paul LeVota, Beth Low, Jenee Lowe, Rebecca McClanahan, Kate Meiners, Jamilah Nasheed, Jeanette Mott Oxford, Jeff Roorda, Sue Schoemehl, Michael Spreng, Rachel Storch, Tom Villa, Michael Vogt, Gina Walsh, Juanita Walton, Ed Wildberger, Robin Wright-Jones, Pat Yaeger, Terry Young, and Jake Zimmerman. [They deserve our thanks.](#)

Two voted “present” – Rep’s Sara Lampe and Charlie Norr – and eight were absent. Rep. Mike Talboy was on the floor to speak against the bill when debate opened but had a commitment in his Kansas City district he had to travel to and was gone by the time the vote was taken; he would have been the 40th “no” vote. The others who missed the vote were Bob Dixon, Margaret Donnelly, Tim Meadows, Paul Quinn, David Sater, Jim Viebrock, and Clint Zweifel.

MASW Priorities: Criminal Justice & Hunger Task Force Chair Sets The Record Straight

In the aftermath of the distorted attacks by opponents of [SB 764](#), Sr. Carleen Reck, who chairs the MASW [Criminal Justice Task Force](#), wrote a letter to the editor that was published March 14 in the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#) to present the real facts regarding the bill.

Increase food stamp eligibility to benefit clean ex-cons, state

Why would anyone deny food to Missouri citizens, especially if the result would be an economic gain for the state? Few people know that some Missouri residents have a lifetime ban on receiving food stamps, regardless of their poverty level. In 1996, the federal government created a law that denied food stamps to anyone convicted of a drug-related felony for the rest of his life. The federal government allowed state legislatures to opt out of this ban and thus allow ex-drug felons to qualify. At this point, 36 states have modified or opted out of this ban. Not Missouri.

Missouri Senate Bill 764 would allow these people to receive food stamps as long as they pass substance abuse tests and meet poverty requirements. Opponents have stated that lifting the ban would cost Missouri more than \$600,000. That's half true. The other half of the truth is that the state, because of the increased income, would experience a net benefit of millions of dollars.

This lifetime ban is a remnant of the failed war on drugs and unfairly targets people who are not among the worst lawbreakers. Legislators need to hear from voters who believe that food purchased with food stamps would be a positive and humane way to help people who have a record of drug abuse but who now test clean.

Carleen Reck / St. Louis

Director of Criminal Justice Ministry, Society of St. Vincent DePaul

MASW Priority: Economic Justice

“Blame The Judges” Measure Held Until After Break

[HJR 41](#), which proponents claim would prevent state judges from imposing new or increased taxes, was brought up for a final House vote Thursday (3/13) but then pulled back without a vote being taken. Since the state constitution already provides that taxes can only be levied by the legislature or a public vote, there would not seem to be any hurry on this measure – yet another in a long line of bills to prohibit something that is already prohibited.

In this case, the sponsors’ real ambition to prevent an independent judiciary from doing its job of holding the legislature accountable for what the constitution requires of the legislature – like providing adequate resources to our public schools, for example. The kicker on this legislation is that the sponsors, backed by the Governor, say – apparently with a straight face – that judges might be willing to violate our current constitution and order tax increases, so the only way to stop them is... that’s right, to put something in the constitution that says they cannot do it.

If this sounds familiar, it is exactly the same farce that played last year – see our [Feb. 23, 2007](#) Legislative Update.

MASW Priority: Your Participation

If you are not a member of MASW, [join us](#). Share your passion for social justice, and take advantage of our statewide presence and involvement in state policymaking.

Contribute to our on-going advocacy for our state’s motto, that the welfare of the people shall be the supreme law.