



2010

masw

legislative update



APRIL 3, 2010

Thank Goodness, Legislature Protects Special Interests

How Could They Ever Be Expected to Protect Themselves?

In a move so nakedly designed to protect a special interest that, even in the Missouri State Capitol, it drew negative attention to itself, [Rep. Don Wells](#), Vice Chair of the [House Financial Institutions Committee](#), held a special meeting of that panel for the sole purpose of allowing the Payday Loan Industry to make a one-sided presentation. As veteran statehouse correspondent Terry Ganey put it in his report in the [Columbia Daily Tribune](#), "The special treatment given the payday loan industry provided another example of its power in the Missouri General Assembly, whose members received \$383,050 in campaign contributions from payday loan companies over the past three years."



Rep. Don Wells

Rep. Wells owns a payday loan business in his home town.

The timing of this unusual meeting is especially odd in that [Speaker Ron Richard](#), after waiting weeks and weeks to do so, finally assigned [HB 1508](#), [Rep. Mary Still's](#) Payday Loan Reform bill, to the very same Financial Institutions Committee on Monday (3/29).

Rather than hold a hearing on Rep. Still's legislation, the committee opted to give the industry a platform from which to boast of their self-proclaimed benefits to the people of Missouri.

MASW members may want to contact the committee's chair, [Rep. Michael Cunningham](#), and ask when Rep. Still's reform legislation will be heard. If you have contributed \$383,050 to legislative campaigns, be sure to mention that.



Rep. Mary Stills

As Missouri's voice for social justice, MASW does not really see protecting special interest groups as the highest priority for our government.

"The welfare of the people shall be the supreme law" is an English translation of our state's official motto, and for 110 years, MASW has been pointing this out to our elected officials.

Two of our Policy Priorities for 2010 lead us to support Rep. Still's Payday Reform bills.

*Our **Decent Housing** plank says, in part, "Priorities should include ending predatory lending..." The other reads:*

***Shared Prosperity.** All people in Missouri should share in the prosperity of our society and pay their fair share of the cost of maintaining and enhancing the physical and human infrastructure that makes prosperity possible. Public policy should enable people, including those living in poverty, to acquire a quality education, to accumulate assets, and to earn their way to greater prosperity.*

Filing Has Closed

For many people, this time of year is the convergence of The Final Four (NCAA basketball championships for men's and women's teams), Opening Day (the start of the 162-game major league baseball season) and Easter.

For state lawmakers, this week also was the [Close of Candidate Filing](#). Legislators seeking re-election this year now know for certain if they will face one or more opponents in the campaign.

This knowledge often affects the behavior of legislators in the remaining weeks of the session. Not because most Missourians pay close attention to the daily activities of their state government and then vote accordingly.

No, it is precisely because most potential voters have no idea what transpires in their State Capitol that legislators are exceptionally mindful of any opponents, or lack thereof, for the coming election.

Sad to say, many legislators live in fear that an opponent will twist the meaning of some vote on some bill, thereby making more difficult their quest for re-election.

This is one of the reasons it is difficult to get our lawmakers to even seriously discuss increasing state revenue (rather than continuing to cut our already woefully inadequate state services).

It takes effort, time and intellect to explain why a legislator would vote to raise a tax or fee and the good use to which the money would be put. But it just takes few seconds to say, "In this terrible economy, he/she voted to raise your taxes!"

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Fairer Policy for Collecting On-Line Purchases Sales Tax

The Missouri Senate spent some time this week debating [SS SCS SB 905](#), sponsored by [Sen. Joan Bray](#). Called the "streamlined sales tax," it would better capture sales tax owed on items purchased via the internet.

According to Amy Blouin, Executive Director of the [Missouri Budget Project](#), "This is not a tax increase but rather a tax that should already be coming to Missouri. Missouri is expected to lose \$187 million in state and local revenue in 2011 as a result of failure to collect sales tax on internet purchasing. As a result, the issue has bipartisan support."

SB 905 "provides the mechanism for online retailers to collect and remit sales taxes to states and localities on products that are already subject to tax in Missouri. It levels the playing field between online retailers and Missouri's corner shops."

"23 states including Missouri's neighbors, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Tennessee have already passed similar legislation." SB 905 would fill about 1/3 of the half-billion dollar hole in our state budget.

MASW works closely with Blouin and MBP; she helped brief participants in our Student Advocacy Day last month.

She suggests two Senators, who currently opposed SB 905, need to hear from people who live in their districts about the reasons to vote in favor of the bill:

[Sen. Jason Crowell](#) of Cape Girardeau (573-751-2459) and [Sen. Eric Schmitt](#) of Glendale (573-751-2853). When you link to their webpage, you will see a link to a map of the district, to see if you live there.