



2010

masw

legislative update



April 16, 2010

Omnes relinquitte spes, o vos intrantes

Disenfranchising Voters Passes House

The House approved on Wednesday [HB 1966](#), sponsored by [Rep. John Diehl](#), that would create a “no excuse” early voting period and require photo identification to vote.

By all accounts the bill isn’t really about early voting – it is about requiring voters to present photo identification in order to vote. The bill would require the state to provide, at no cost, at least one form of personal identification required to vote.

This issue is nothing new for Missouri legislators. For years partisan battles in the Missouri Legislature have dealt with the issue of voter identification. Republicans want voters to have to present a photo ID — such as a driver’s license — when voting. Democrats say the change would disenfranchise voters.

MASW opposes requiring voters to jump through any more hoops than they already do in order to cast a ballot. HB 1966 as passed by the house calls to amend the state constitution to add a requirement of showing a state drivers’ license, or other government-issued photo I.D. card, in order to exercise your right to vote.

The other portion of the bill, providing for a period of “early voting” prior to election day, makes it easier for people to exercise their right to vote, which MASW supports. In fact, the House voted to approve this part of the bill 153 – 5.

However, the intrusive photo ID section of the bill was adopted on a vote of 80 – 70. For final passage of a bill, 82 votes are required, but amendments and other votes generally only require more “yes” than “no” votes to be approved. The “perfection” vote of 85 – 68 sent the bill to the [Fiscal Review Committee](#) where the cost of the measure must be approved before it can come back to the House floor for the vote that would send it to the Senate.

As Missouri’s voice for social justice, MASW has a very different agenda than the current culture in the state legislature.

MASW sees the injustice in the fact that Missouri voters who do not have a drivers’ license usually lack one because of economic or physical constraints. HB 1966 would require people whose lives are already hard enough to endure more hardship in order to vote!

The House of Representatives website has a feature that allows you to [hear speeches for and against HB 1966](#) that were made on the House floor during debate on the bill.

Special thanks to MASW public policy intern [Haleigh Harrold](#), who helped prepare this week’s Update.

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State Budget: Senate Completes Its Version

With a constitutional deadline nearly three weeks away, the fiscal year 2011 budget drafted by the [Senate Appropriations Committee](#) was approved this week.

The Senate's version of the 13 budget bills make up an approximately \$23.1 billion operating budget for the upcoming 2011 fiscal year. This came after [cuts of half a billion dollars](#) from the already woefully inadequate proposal submitted just three and half months ago by [Gov. Jay Nixon](#).

The budget axe fell especially hard on health, mental health, and education. Lawmakers voted to drastically cut medical services, mental health services, education, and other basic needs to our fellow Missourians who are most in need.



Sen. Rob Mayer

Under the leadership of new [Appropriations Chair Rob Mayer](#), the Senate cut about 35 to 40 health department employees who oversee community and public health programs. The Department of Health and Senior Services would lose employees who coordinate investigations of communicable diseases such as salmonella and whooping cough, and inspectors who check for health violations at hotels.

Additionally, the Senate budget calls for the close of a center for the developmentally disabled in Nevada, transferring residents to group homes or other facilities.

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Drug Testing Bill in Committee

[HB 1377](#) has made its way to the Senate. Having already passed the House, the bill was heard in the Senate's [Health, Mental Health, Seniors and Families Committee](#) this week. If passed the bill would subject Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients to drug testing if they look or act suspiciously. In a bizarre move, likely to show they are not "picking on the poor," House members voted to include elected state officials in the drug-testing requirement.

This is one of those bills with which those in charge in our State Capitol send an unmistakable message to people living in poverty:

"Things are bad for you now, but remember, we can always make it worse!"

Although the bill was heard in Senate committee, no further action has been taken. You can [contact your Senator](#), especially if they serve on the committee, to ask for a NO vote on HB 1377.

[Senate Passes Budget, Continued from previous column...](#)

The Senate's budget plan also calls for a 10 percent reduction in aid to support outpatient psychiatric treatment, drug counseling, and crisis services for families with developmentally disabled children. Twenty-one Centers for Independent Living would have \$682,000 cut from their \$3.2 million budget.

The version of the budget adopted by the full Senate makes some changes from the bills as they emerged from the Appropriations Committee. For example, the committee eliminated the Career Ladder program, a \$37.5 million item.

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Senate Budget, continued...

However, the full Senate approved using \$37.5 million in federal stimulus funding for this K-12 teacher pay supplement plan, if the federal money is available.

Total funding for K-12 education in 2011 would remain at the same level as was appropriated for 2010, about \$3.4 billion.

One of the more controversial decisions in the committee's draft of the budget was the \$65 million cut in operating funds for higher education. This decision would have abrogated the commitment Gov. Nixon made with public colleges and universities, that they would freeze tuition in return for a state funding level no worse than \$50 million below current year funding.

But when the higher education budget came for a final vote in the full Senate, funding was indeed reduced by the agreed upon \$50 million in order to keep in-state undergraduate tuition rates the same.

The Senates approval of deep cuts to needed services are a prime example of our state's elected officials' blind preference to cut services to people who need them most rather than choosing the more just alternative: submitting to the voters a tax increase.

Fiscal Year 2011 begins July 1, 2010. The legislature must complete work on the budget for FY2011 by 6:00 p.m. Friday, May 7. The next step is appointment of conference committees to reconcile the Senate budget with a version already approved by the House that is about \$200 million smaller than Nixon's plan and \$300 million larger than the Senate's plan.

Newspaper Calls For Action on Payday Loan Reform Bill

The St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* this week used its editorial page to call out leaders in the State Capitol for failing to act on [Rep. Mary Still's HB 2116](#), reform of the payday loan industry.

In his State of the State Address earlier this year, Gov. Jay Nixon called this industry a "voracious predator," but the *Post* concludes that he has not used the power of his office to push for legislative action on the issue.

The editorial aims most of its fire at [House Speaker Ron Richard](#), who in 2009 did not even assign Rep. Still's reform legislation to committee until the last day of session, assuring it would not even have a hearing, let alone become law.

This year, Rep. Richard assigned the bill to a committee whose Vice Chair owns and operates a payday loan outlet. That committee has not had a public hearing on the bill, but instead had a special presentation by lobbyists for the payday loan industry to tout the "benefits" of being less regulated in Missouri than in any other state.

[You can read the editorial by using this link.](#)