



# 2010

## masw

# legislative update



March 25, 2010

*For Legislators, Low Taxes, Not the Welfare of the People, is the Supreme Law*

## Death Before Taxes!

### How Big is Budget Hole?

The Missouri House of Representatives voted on the [dozen or so bills](#) that comprise the state's budget for Fiscal Year 2011 this week. As adopted, the House version of the budget provides \$224 million less for state services than the already inadequate proposed budget of [Governor Jay Nixon](#).

Most of these "savings" will come by picking the pockets of state employees, shortchanging our school children, and denying medical services to our most-in-need Missourians.

Of course, in the world view of those in charge of our State Capitol, it is preferable to have overworked, underpaid workers serving poorly educated children and people suffering and dying from treatable (but untreated) medical conditions, than to require those of us still making a good living despite the horrible recession to pay somewhat higher taxes.

But even these draconian cuts may not be sufficient to balance the state budget. Both the Governor and the House rely on \$300 million in emergency federal assistance that has not yet been appropriated by the U.S. Congress.

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### masw now on facebook



Missouri's voice for social justice is now connected to activists across the state on the most viewed social networking site: facebook

Become a fan of MASW. [Use this link](#) if you are already logged onto your own facebook account. If you are not a member, the link will take you to a page that gives you the opportunity to join.

On MASW's facebook "wall" you can post notices about legislative hearings on bills of interest, on chapter forums, task force meetings, events MASW is co-sponsoring, and other notices or ideas you want to share with your fellow social justice activists.

### OTHER ISSUES...

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## Universal Design: A Good Thing House Committee Hears Bill

[HB 1737](#), sponsored by [Rep. Rachel Storch](#), would require the use of “universal design” in the construction or rehabilitation of affordable housing.



Rep. Storch

This measure would further the cause of social justice in relation to two of MASW’s four policy priorities: Decent Housing and Fair Treatment.

Here is the testimony of Don Love, who chairs MASW’s [Human Rights Task Force](#) and appeared before the [House Committee on Senior Citizen Advocacy](#) this week.

*We have made significant advances in designing buildings so that people with disabilities are not excluded from the opportunity to lead full, productive lives. Universal Design continues this human rights effort with an interesting twist.*

*Usually, human rights efforts are directed at an identifiable minority, but Universal Design is likely to benefit all of us at some point in our lives, regardless of race, gender, religion and so on.*

*Traditional thinking about accessibility has led to the strategy of building some housing units so that they look like institutions. Universal Design, on the other hand, aims at building all homes so they look like homes, but can be easily adapted to meet the needs of anyone – or can meet the changing needs of residents as they age or suffer impairments due to accidents or illness.*

*My favorite example of Universal Design is the construction of bathrooms with a layer of plywood under the sheetrock. The bathroom does not have an institution look, but if a resident ever needs a grab bar, one can be installed anywhere, with simple tools, in minutes.*

*Other Universal Design strategies involve initial planning so that ramps will never be necessary, or involve installation of wiring during construction that will minimize the expense of adding a stairway elevator or an automatic door if they are ever needed.*

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## An Amendment to Prevent State Revenue From Growing Too Big? Are You Kidding Me?

If you were the leader of a group of starving people, you likely would have as your highest priority finding additional sources of food. If so, you would never make it as a leader in the current state legislature.

However, if you see as the top priority of the leader of a group of starving people making a call to one of those well-advertised weight loss programs – now you’re thinking like a leader in Jefferson City.

In the midst of the largest one-year decline in state tax collections ever recorded, the Missouri House of Representatives took time this week to pass a proposed constitutional amendment ([HJR 87](#)) designed to ensure that our state revenue collections cannot grow too large.

[Seriously, they did.](#)

Next up, one supposes, is to replace the aphorism chiseled above the east entrance to the Capitol – “Be Just, And Fear Not” – with the now more appropriate “Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here.”

## Budget Hole

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While state budget makers remain hopeful the federal aid will come, it is by no means certain that Congress will have acted by the first week in May, at which time the State Legislature is required to have the 2011 budget decided upon.

One strategy would be to build the \$300 million of hoped-for federal funds into the state budget, but clearly delineate what items will not be funded if the federal money does not come (or is less than \$300 million).

## Senate Finds It Cannot Reorganize State Government in One Day

Missouri Senators took a break from their regular meeting schedule on Tuesday (3/23) and broke into [eight small groups](#) to examine how to reorganize state government.

No reasonable person with substantial knowledge of Missouri government doubts that a major overhaul is overdue – the last reorganization took place when our soon-to-retire [U.S. Senator Kit Bond](#) was our Governor (the nation’s youngest at that time), and yours truly (MASW Executive Director [Bob Quinn](#)) was a high school senior: [1974](#).

However, if you are in the midst of the fire that is destroying your house, that might not be the most conducive time and place to plan how your next house will be more fire resistant.

Give due credit to Senate [President Pro-Tem Charlie Shields](#) for consistently thinking – and not only thinking, but acting – outside the box. He brought about this unusual day of long-range thinking, of looking at a picture that is much bigger than the current amendment being debated.



Sen. Shields

One hesitates to look into the mind of another, but it would seem that one reasonable explanation of Sen. Shields’ conduct is that, as one of the last three members of the General Assembly to have served continuously since the era before term limits, he knows first-hand that the party in power is not necessarily always going to be the party in power – and that failing to address major issues, leaving them for future legislatures, is not only bad public policy, but bad manners.

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The eight Senate work groups were: Agriculture/Outdoors/Department of Natural Resources; Courts/Legal/Department of Public Safety; Education; General Government/Office of Administration; Retirement; Social Programs; Tax Structure; and Transportation.

During the day they met, they reviewed hundreds of suggestions submitted via the Senate’s online “Rebooting Government” form.

It turns out that nobody can fulfill the false promise politicians of both major parties have been making for decades – that government can provide all the vital services for public safety, education, health and so on, without anybody having to pay more taxes than they feel like paying.

This is to say, no magic solutions emerged. Government needs to be reorganized, but it also needs to be sufficiently funded – and the latter need is much more pressing.

### Universal Design

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*A nifty provision calls for two closets to be located one above the other; the initial extra cost is nothing but the design provides the possibility of adding an elevator at minimum expense if the residents ever need one.*

*These strategies should all be everyday best practices when it comes to building. When I explained the plywood-under-sheetrock trick to a fellow baby boomer the other day, he said he wished someone had told him that before he remodeled his bathroom.*

*In time, Universal Design will be incorporated into all residential construction because it makes economic and practical sense. For now, we should at least have the benefit of the flexibility it affords in all government-supported low-income housing. Please support House Bill 1737.*

No action was taken on the bill.

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