



MASW

Legislative Update 2009



April 3, 2009

MASW Priority: Quality Healthcare

Preliminary Senate Approval for Variation on Nixon Plan

After considerable debate and several amendments, Senators approved a lengthy health access bill late Wednesday on a voice vote. [SB 306](#), sponsored by [Sen. Tom Dempsey](#), is similar to a plan set forward last month by [Governor Jay Nixon](#) in that it would partially restore Medicaid benefits to 35,000 adults who lost coverage due to the 2005 cuts.

Dempsey's approach is also similar to Nixon's in that this partial Medicaid restoration would be funded by over \$50 million paid in a special fee by hospitals that would draw over \$90 million in federal matching funds – no state tax dollars would be involved. [Nixon's plan was endorsed this week](#) by the [Associated Industries of Missouri](#), a group that lobbies state government on behalf of the what we would usually call "big business"; it is significant for AIM to endorse a plan to partially restore publicly subsidized health care for the less-well-off.



[HSen. Dempsey](#)

Several aspects of SB 306 are less than helpful. Among them is the requirement that participants pay into a "health savings account." This is one of those financial schemes in which if you guess right you come out fine, but if you guess wrong it really costs you. And such requirements make no sense for people who already are short of the cash they need for basic necessities such as food, housing and transportation.

The bill must receive at least 18 "yes" votes in a roll call, perhaps as early as next week, before it can be sent to the House for consideration there.

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Salus Populi Suprema Lex Esto

MASW Priority: Economic Justice

Greater Public Awareness = Less Support for CWIP Bill

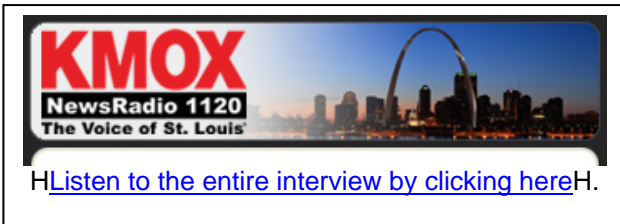
Citizens of Missouri, irate that their elected lawmakers are considering a bill that would raise electric rates by as much as 40% to finance a nuclear power plant that might not even be built, having been calling, writing and emailing the Capitol to make their voices heard. And several Senators have indicated that they are indeed hearing the message.

Support and opposition on the CWIP proposal do not follow traditional party lines; when the latest version ([SCS SB 228](#)) was voted “Do Pass” with 6 “yes” and 4 “no” votes, the 4 “no” were 2 Republicans – [Luann Ridgeway](#) and [Jim Lembke](#) – and 2 Democrats – [Joan Bray](#) and [Jolie Justus](#).



The news media have begun to pay more attention to this important issue. Leading news radio station KMOX in St. Louis has done several interviews with key players on the CWIP bill. In my interview this week, I emphasized the impact electric rate increases have on low income households. “They are working two low-wage jobs to try to make ends meet and put food on the table for their kids, and buy their prescription medications and everything else they’ve got to do; and to hit them with a potentially 40% increase in their electric bills – you know, they’re just in a position to do that.”

The new version of the bill is said to be a compromise, but it appears at least on first analysis to



merely be a less-harmful iteration of the same fundamentally flawed concept. Or, as I said on KMOX, “The original deal was, ‘We are going to take your house and your car and your job and your dog.’ And now, in the compromise, you get to keep your dog.”

The public is also responding to the kinds of television spots more typically associated with election campaigns. The first, as we reported in last week’s Update, was aired by the [Fair Electricity Rate Fund](#), which urged viewers to call their State Senators in opposition to the CWIP bill.

Now AmerenUE is responding with [two ads of its own](#), both featuring former St. Louis-area TV news anchor Karen Foss, who is employed by the utility in its public information division. Ironically, one of the spots calls out the Fair Electricity Rate Fund for being financed by big businesses instead of the residential ratepayers (like the ones on whose behalf MASW is speaking).

So, I guess if the large employers who comprise the Fair Electricity Rate Fund would pay for TV spots featuring MASW’s message, that would be okay with Ameren.

You can [link here to contact your Senator](#) and let him or her know if you would like to have your electric rates – and the rates paid by low-income households, the elderly, people with disabilities and/or chronic medical conditions – to be increased so that the owners of the for-profit utility do not have to finance the new power plant with their own money.

MASW Priority: State Funding of Social Services

Senate Committee Begins Fixing Holes in House Budget

This week, Senate budget writers, led by Senate Appropriations Chair [Gary Nodler](#), made clear that they will not force our most vulnerable fellow Missourians to suffer when federal funds have been provided specifically to bolster vital state services during this terrible economic downturn.



HSen. Nodler

Sen. Nodler has stated his intention to use at least \$900 million of the federal stimulus money to plug holes left in the state budget by recession-induced shortfalls in state revenue. That is hundreds of millions more in federal money than the House included in its version of the budget.

House Budget Chair [Allen Icet](#) adhered to the ideology that, because the federal money is “one-time,” it cannot be used for ongoing expenses. Nodler (Icet’s Senate counterpart) seems to have an approach more attuned to the emergency nature of the federal help; he will use some of it for ongoing programs, but noted (as he was [quoted in the Jefferson City News-Tribune](#)), “for these things to be funded in the future, the state’s general revenue stream needs to grow - or there won’t be dollars to support them.”

Much work remains to be done on the budget, and the legislature could still end up adopting something that does real harm to thousands of real people. But, for now, we can reflect on what was a much better week (than last) for those who care about the welfare of the people.

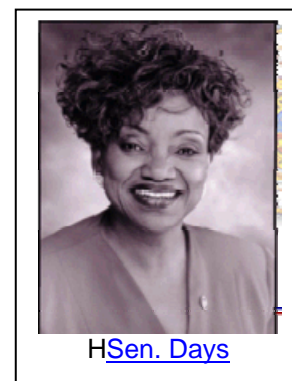
MASW Priority: Fair Treatment

Death Penalty Debate on Senate Floor

[Sen. Rita Days](#) had the opportunity to bring [SCS SB 321](#) up for debate in the Senate this week. This bill started out as a 3-year moratorium on executions in Missouri while a blue-ribbon panel would study the death penalty and all its aspects. This committee substitute version of the bill does not have a moratorium, just the blue-ribbon panel study.

Sen. Days drew favorable comments from [Senate Floor Leader Kevin Engler](#). While he favors the death penalty, “death row” is literally in his legislative district, and he would welcome a comprehensive study, if for no other reason than peace of mind for his corrections employees.

[Sen. Jim Lembke](#) also spoke in support of the bill, from the perspective of the greater cost to taxpayers of litigation a capital murder case all the way through an execution, as opposed to life in prison.



HSen. Days

However, the bill was “laid over” after significant opposition was voiced by [Sen. Kurt Schaeffer](#), who called on his own background as an attorney involved in capital cases, and by [Senate President Pro-Tem Charlie Shields](#), who called the bill a back-door attempt by death penalty opponents to eventually outlaw the practice. The bill is now on the informal calendar, and could be called up for debate again.

MASW Priority: Fair Treatment/Hunger

Ask Senate Committee to Hear Food Stamp Bill

[SB 34](#), sponsored by [Sen. Yvonne Wilson](#), would lift Missouri's lifetime ban for Food Stamp eligibility for Missourians who have a drug felony on their record. As we've noted in past Updates, no other felony carried a lifetime ban on Food Stamps – not rape, not armed robbery, not even murder. Only a drug felony merits a lifetime ban for Food Stamps.

[Link here](#) to learn more about the bill and how to help ensure it gets a hearing in the Senate.

MASW Priority: Decent Housing

Housing Trust Fund Bills Need a Boost

[HB 1020](#), introduced by Representatives [Scott Lipke](#) and [Ryan Silvey](#) to increase revenue for the [Missouri Housing Trust Fund](#) (MHTF), has not yet been assigned to committee. You can contact the sponsors directly and ask if they would find it helpful for you to contact the Speaker's office to request a committee assignment.

[SB 268](#), introduced by [Sen. Jolie Justus](#) for that same purpose, was heard in committee but has not yet been voted on. You can contact the Senator's office to see if she would find it helpful for you to contact the chair of the committee to request a vote on the bill.