



MASW

Legislative Update 2009



February 20, 2009

MASW Priority: Economic Justice Progressive Tax Reform Heard in House Cmt.

More than one billion dollars in new state revenue needed to fund the vital social services for which MASW faithfully advocates, provided via a more fair and progressive tax structure that is historically a priority for our [Economic Justice Task Force](#) and our tax justice allies, would result from enactment of [HB 567](#). Sponsor [Rep. Jeanette Mott Oxford](#) presented the bill to the House [Committee on Tax Reform](#) this week (2/18). The hearing itself was remarkably civil. It was clear that a majority of the committee members have a very different world view, indeed, than those of us who support the bill, but the questions were respectful.



[Rep. Oxford](#)

Kelly Davis, Midwest Director for the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy ([ITEP](#)) provided the committee with pertinent details of the bill. You can see her [testimony](#) and [slide show](#) by clicking on the links. Other witnesses in favor were MASW, Missourians for Tax Justice ([MTJ](#)), [Missouri IMPACT](#) (an inter-faith organization), the Long Spoons Coalition and the Missouri National Education Association ([MNEA](#)).

Association Industries of Missouri ([AIM](#)) testified against the bill, apparently on the premise that low taxes attract businesses; of course, if that were true, businesses would abandon Massachusetts and California to move to Missouri and Mississippi. Very funny. In fact, MNEA had pointed out in their testimony in favor of the bill that states like Minnesota are attracting the very businesses Missouri believes it should be getting; Minnesota has higher taxes, but they invest that in education and as a result 36% of their adult residents have a college degree, compared to 25% in Missouri – where would you locate your high tech business?

Also testifying against the bill was a lobbyist for several “economic think tanks” which, in their own words, do not believe the government has a general obligation to provide for the common good. More background on the bill can be found in our [Feb. 6 Update](#).

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Salus Populi Suprema Lex Esto

CWIP Hearing in House Committee

[HB 554](#), if passed, would likely result in a 40% increase in your electric rates – according to those IN FAVOR OF THE BILL!!!



[Rep. Emery](#)

The bill is essentially the same as [SB 228](#), which MASW testified against in a Senate committee last week. You and read the [background](#) on the issue by clicking on the link.

In my testimony against HB 554 in the [House Utilities Committee](#) this week (2/17) I suggested, among other things, that any repeal of the No-CWIP law adopted by voters in 1976 should be submitted to the voters; the people might repeal their own previous enactment, but legislators should not. The suggestion seems so obvious that I have been surprised that the news media has not mentioned it – other than an article in the [Columbia Tribune](#) you can read by linking.

[Rep. Ed Emery](#), who is the bill sponsor and also chairs the committee, must be given due credit, along with committee [Vice Chair Will Kraus](#), for conducting a fair hearing, in which those of us in opposition actually had time to present our testimony. Credit also goes to Representatives [Jake Zimmerman](#) and [Trent Skaggs](#),

who each grilled those in favor of the bill, especially executives from AmerenUE, regarding the fairness of their plan and the certainty, if any, that the promised benefits would be realized.



[Rep. Zimmerman](#)



[Rep. Kraus](#)



[Rep. Skaggs](#)

MY BAD

Was your July electric bill \$25,000? Well, most likely, it was not – it was probably closer to \$250. Despite changes in regulatory law our legislators have made in the last few years, and the resulting 13% increase in electric rates (at least in the AmerenUE area), residential bills are not yet in the tens of thousands of dollars per month.

I note this because, if you use the figures in last week's Update, from my testimony to the Committee on the CWIP bill, I have stated the electric rates as dollars per kilowatt-hour (kWh), when they are in fact cents per kWh. Seeing 8.63 per kWh leads the brain to write "\$8.63" when it is really "8.63 cents."

This typographical error does not affect the bottom line – electric rates have risen 13% in the last two years, and this is before CWIP is enacted. And the burden is hardest for low income households.

[**Link to Bills of Interest**](#)

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MASW Priority: Fair Treatment

Death Penalty Moratorium Rally & Hearing

Wednesday this week (2/18) was an especially good day for those who know there is something wrong with Missouri's Death Penalty.

People and organizations in the Moratorium Now! coalition (which includes MASW) rallied in the Capitol in support of [HB 484](#) and [SB 321](#). The bills would place a two-year moratorium on the death penalty in Missouri while a blue-ribbon panel studied it for fairness, accuracy, cost effectiveness and other factors.

The Senate [Progress & Development Committee](#) held a hearing on SB 321, sponsored by [Sen. Rita Days](#), so activists in Jefferson City for the rally were able to be part of it.

And a front-page article in the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#) revealed that Joshua Kezer, imprisoned for murder at the maximum security facility here in Jefferson City, was being released because a court review determined he was actually innocent. Use the link to read the story. Now, Mr. Kezer was not on death row, but it shows that our criminal justice system is not error free.

MASW Priority: End Hunger

Food Stamp Supplement for Seniors

MASW Hunger Coordinator Christine Woody submitted testimony in favor of a proposal to provide a state supplement to seniors who receive the minimum federal food stamp allotment. We have supported this legislation for the last several years. This year it is [HB 156](#) and sponsored by [Rep. Bob Nance](#). MASW's testimony follows.

On behalf of the Hunger Task Force of the Missouri Association for Social Welfare, comprised of food pantries, food banks, anti-hunger advocates and concerned citizens, I am submitting this testimony in favor of House Bill 156: Supplemental Food Stamps for Seniors. It is the Task Force's hope that the Senior Citizen Advocacy Committee will pass this bill as quickly as possible in a time where Missouri's low-income senior citizens have great need for help with their nutrition needs.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which is known as the Food Stamp Program in Missouri, is a federally funded nutrition assistance program that helps low-income individuals and families afford food each month, thus allowing them to use more of their income for rent, utilities, or medical expenses. Approximately 342,000 households receive Food Stamp nutrition assistance benefits in Missouri.

It is estimated that 5,341 elderly one-person households and 400 elderly two-person households received the minimum benefit in Fiscal Year 2005. The minimum Food Stamp nutrition assistance benefit of \$10 was set in 1974 and then just this past year the minimum was raised to \$14 through the 2008 Farm Bill. Today, \$25 of Food

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Stamp nutrition assistance benefits would purchase the amount of food that \$10 would have bought in 1974. Thus, even with the recent increase, the minimum Food Stamp benefit is woefully inadequate for many elderly Food Stamp recipients who often live on a fixed income, such as Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) benefits or retirement benefits. If House Bill 156 were to pass, it would create a state funded nutrition assistance program for Missouri senior citizens that would increase the minimum benefit levels to \$30 a month for a one person elderly household and \$60 a month for a two person elderly household.

Increasing senior citizens' monthly food stamp allowance benefits low-income seniors as well as the entire State of Missouri. First, low-income seniors live on a small fixed income and having more Food Stamp nutrition assistance benefits allows them to have more purchasing power. With more purchasing power, they can buy healthier food in greater quantities each month which is beneficial because elderly individuals often have special dietary and health needs due to medical conditions associated with the aging process. By increasing the minimum amount of Food Stamp nutrition assistance benefits for low-income elderly Missourians, House Bill 156 would provide a positive boost to low-income elderly individuals who need help with purchasing food.

Secondly, by increasing the amount of Food Stamp nutrition assistance benefits senior Missourians receive, more seniors would be likely to participate in the Food Stamp Program, which would bring more federal dollars into the State. Seniors are the lowest participating demographic group nationwide. One reason for the low participation rate is because many seniors do not think \$10 a month is worth the hassle of making a trip to the Food Stamp office to apply for the program. By increasing the minimum benefit, more seniors would be likely to apply and take part in the federally funded nutrition assistance program. These additional participants and subsequent federal dollars would increase economic activity across the State. This benefits Missouri's state and local economies by putting more money in the hands of local grocers and Missouri farmers.

In conclusion, passing House Bill 156 benefits not only the senior citizens in Missouri who would be receiving the increased nutrition assistance, but it also helps increase economic activity across the state and puts more money into the pockets of struggling farmers and businesses. The Hunger Task Force hopes that this committee will see the benefit of this bill and pass it onto the floor of the House.

MASW members can contact their Representatives, especially if they serve on the [Senior Citizen Advocacy Committee](#), by using the link, to urge support for HB 156.

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