



MASW



Legislative Update 2009

March 5, 2009

MASW Priority: Quality Healthcare Expanding Coverage for Children Rejected

Yesterday the [Missouri House](#) voted along party lines to reject [Governor Jay Nixon's attempts](#) to expand access to healthcare to more than 2,000 children between now and July 1, and then another 19,000 in the next year, whose families currently earn too much to qualify under current Missouri standards for Medicaid, but do not earn enough to afford private insurance.



[Rep. Hughes](#)

Representatives [Chris Kelly](#) and [Jonas Hughes](#) each offered an amendment to move money from other areas of the supplemental budget (for the rest of Fiscal Year 2009, which ends June 30) to free up the \$7 million or so in additional state money for the State Children's Health Insurance Program ([S-CHIP](#)). Federal funds would provide matching money at rates up to five to one.



[Rep. LeVota](#)

These amendments were voted down on party lines. [Rep. Paul LeVota](#) noted that those speaking against the amendments stated that their opposition was based on not wanting to make the cuts from other parts of the budget to free up the money for Medicaid. So he offered a motion to designate the money for helping the children get medical care, and then they could figure out the best places to move the funds from elsewhere in the budget.

That amendment was also voted down along party lines.

[Rep. Mike Talboy](#) was among those seeking to find money to expand Medicaid for more children to get the healthcare they need. "You would rather make this ideological stand by spouting off that these parents should pay their premiums whether kids are being harmed or not," he said to those opposing the amendments.

House Budget Chair [Allen Icet](#) fought against expanding coverage for these Missouri children. He stated that low income children could be on S-CHIP now except that their parents "refuse to pay" the required premiums, and that the amendments would have the "nanny state provide for these kids. I will not expand the number of people on welfare."

[Other Items in This Update](#)

[Bills of Interest to MASW](#)

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MASW Priority: Decent Housing

Hearing: Increase for Housing Trust Fund

[Sen. Jason Crowell](#) destroyed the only argument presented against an increase in the fee that provides revenue for the [Missouri Housing Trust Fund](#) during the hearing for [SB 268](#) before the [Senate Committee on Progress and Development](#).



After bill sponsor [Sen. Jolie Justus](#) had made the [case for increasing the \\$3 fee](#), and witnesses in favor such as [AARP](#), the Missouri Foreclosure Prevention Coalition, [Catholic Charities of St. Louis](#), MASW, [Paraquad](#) and others, there came the parade of perennial opponents: the [Title Insurance](#) industry, the [Mortgage Bankers Association](#), and the [Realtors Association](#).

As they do each year, these interest groups bemoaned the “unfairness” of the Housing Trust Fund getting its revenue from a fee on real estate transactions filed with the county recorder, and that any increase in the fee is an unjust and undue burden on their industries.

Sen. Crowell exposed their argument for the sham it has always been with this question: “Did you testify against the \$3 fee increase on transactions filed with the county recorders in [SB 7?](#)” (an otherwise unrelated bill currently pending in the Senate).

No, they did not.

So, continued Sen. Crowell’s questioning, these industries do not really oppose such fees, they just oppose the one for the Housing Trust Fund. While these witnesses attempted to put a different spin on their answers, Sen. Crowell laid bare that some principled opposition to any kind of additional fee on these transactions is NOT the reason for their opposition.

[Children’s Health Rejected](#) (p. 1)
[Housing Trust Fund Hearing](#) (p. 2)
[Death Penalty – Partial Victory](#) (p. 3)
[Human Rights Commission](#) (p. 3)
[Making It Easier to Vote](#) (p. 3)
[Governor Against CWIP Bill](#) (p. 4)
[Tax Justice – Not](#) (p. 4)
[TANF Drug Testing](#) (p. 5)
[State Workers: No Pay Raise](#) (p. 5)

One of the witnesses actually hinted at the real reason these groups continue to block our efforts to increase the fee for the Housing Trust Fund. Powerful special interests in the State Capitol almost always are able to kill legislation to which they are opposed. Enactment of the Housing Trust Fund in 1993 – after many years of advocacy by a coalition led by MASW, and through the shrewd legislative skills of the late Sen. Phil Curles and with full support of the late Gov. Mel Carnahan – was one of the few times something actively opposed by powerful special interests made it into law anyway.

And those powerful special interests are still upset by the fact that the fee was established despite their opposition, and that seems to fuel their opposition to efforts to increase the fee.

MASW Priority: Fair Treatment

Death Penalty Moratorium – Partial Victory



The Moratorium Now! coalition, of which MASW is a member, gained a partial victory yesterday when the [Senate Committee on Progress and Development](#) unanimously voted for a revised version of [SB 321](#).

[Sen. Rita Days'](#) original bill would have put a three-year moratorium on executions in Missouri while a blue ribbon panel studied our capital punishment system. The new version – the Senate Committee Substitute (SCS) – does not include a moratorium, but it does create the blue ribbon panel to study the capital punishment system.

Human Rights Commission Again Targeted

The [House Committee on Workforce Development & Workplace Safety](#) heard [HB 799](#) yesterday, and it is in many ways similar to [HB 227](#) heard by the same committee [last month](#). Both bills would, if enacted, diminish the ability of the [Missouri Commission on Human Rights](#) (MCHR) to enforce laws against discrimination, make it harder for victims of discrimination to prove their claims, and possibly put the Commission's federal funding in jeopardy.

MASW appeared in opposition to HB 799, citing the same concerns as when we testified against HB 227.

Early Voting

The [House Committee on Elections](#) heard [HB 59](#) this week. Sponsored by [Rep. Mike Corcoran](#), the bill would allow voters to cast ballots starting three weeks before election day, and counties with populations of 50,000 or more would have more than one location for voting (in most counties, the county courthouse would be the location for early voting).

MASW testified in favor of the bill. People with unpredictable work schedules – which could be of about any income but is not uncommon for low-wage jobs – people with disabilities or chronic medical conditions, young children or other relatives in need of care; all of these people would have greater capacity to participate in their government if voting were not confined to a single day.



The Election Committee is expected to act next week (Tuesday, March 10) on [HJR 9](#), the proposed constitutional amendment to require Missourians to have a government-approved, government-issued photo I.D. in order to vote. If you believe the state should not deny the right to vote to over 200,000 Missourians who are disabled, elderly, impoverished or otherwise not in possession of a driver's license, contact members of the committee, especially if you live in their district.

MASW Priority: Economic Justice

Gov. Nixon Opposes CWIP

Late last week, [Gov. Jay Nixon stated his opposition](#) to repealing the current No-CWIP law that protects customers of for-profit, monopoly electric utilities from being forced to pay higher rates to fund construction projects that are not actually producing any electricity. Utilities [want the law repealed](#), so they can charge their customers for Construction Work In Progress (CWIP).

However, it is important to note that the Governor's opposition at this time is predicated, at least in part, on the fact that AmerenUE has not even decided to build a new plant. "This is a two-step process that involves both procuring a license and then deciding whether to build. It is premature at this time to saddle ratepayers with potential construction costs before regulators have awarded a permit and Ameren has made the decision to build," Nixon said.



You can contact the Governor's office by [linking here](#). In addition to thanking him for taking this stand, you might consider making these two points.

1. Repealing the No-CWIP law takes the costs and the risks of building a new power plant away from the owners, who will get the profits from the new plant, and puts those costs and those risks on homeowners, renters and businesspeople who have no viable choice but to pay the higher electric rates this new law would impose.
2. People with few economic resources – with low wage jobs, with disabilities, with chronic medical conditions – pay a disproportionate share of their household income for utilities; any “across-the-board” increase hits them the hardest.

Tax Justice - Not

The [House Committee on Tax Policy](#) this week heard two bills which, if enacted, would place before the voters a plan to eliminate all state taxes on corporate and individual income. The revenue for state services lost as a result would be replaced by a higher statewide sales tax, which in addition to being a higher rate would also be levied against a broader base, with no exemptions for any goods or services – that is to say, all goods and services would be subject to the sales tax.



[Rep. Emery](#)

In perhaps the oddest of odd-couple pairings of this (or any) legislative session, one of these bills, [HB 814](#), is sponsored by arch-conservative [Rep. Ed Emery](#), while the other, [HB 318](#), is sponsored by [Rep. Chris Kelly](#), who is generally regarded as one of the dozen (or so) most liberal members of the House.

Continued on page 5...



[Rep. Kelly](#)

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Rep. Emery calls his proposal [The Fair Tax](#), and there is a national network of advocates espousing similar bills in other states and in the U.S. Congress.

Rep. Kelly stated flatly that there is nothing fair about the proposal, that if fairness was our objective in the tax code we would adopt something like [Rep. Jeanette Mott Oxford](#) proposed in [HB 567](#) – a progressive income tax that requires the well-off to pay a higher percentage of their incomes, and those less well-off to pay a lesser percentage.

No, Rep. Kelly is sponsoring his bill because he has come to the conclusion that, while replacing the state income tax with a higher, broader sales tax is not a fair system, it has the advantages of being easier to administer and understand, and is generally more popular.

Both bills' sponsors believe the regressive nature of the sales tax will be offset by the “pre-bate” provisions of their legislation. All Missourians would receive money from the state each month; the amount would be the estimation of the amount of sales tax that would be paid by a person whose income was exactly at the federal poverty level.

MASW was joined in testifying against the bills by Missourians for Tax Justice ([MTJ](#)) and the Missouri National Education Association ([MNEA](#)).

TANF Drug Testing

[Sen. Bill Stouffer](#) is sponsoring [SB 73](#) which, if enacted, would require drug testing for TANF recipients when a case worker has reasonable suspicion that the recipient engages in illegal use of controlled substances. The [Senate Committee on Progress and Development](#) heard the bill last month but has taken no action as of this writing.

The Columbia *Tribune* published an article this week ([click here to read it](#)) on the bill that notes MASW as among those advocates for TANF recipients questioning the legislation.

No Pay Raise

One of the many measures by which Missouri ranks 50th among the 50 states is the average pay for state workers. Taken as a group, no state workers are paid less, on average, than right here in Missouri.

And they will get no cost-of-living raises in the coming year. Now, the Fiscal Year 2010 budget will not be finally enacted and sent to the Governor until May, but as it stands at this point in the process, there will be no across-the-board increases for state employees.

House Budget Chair [Allen Icet](#) told Jefferson City-based [KRCG-TV](#) that state employees should be glad they have a job at all, “Be glad you're not Illinois or California where they're being furloughed...”

As I asked in our February 6 Update, was it a deliberate goal of the economic policies of those running our government this last decade to deliberately drive our economy over a cliff to create a fearful, docile, union-averse workforce? So grateful to have a job they won't ask for a raise?

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