

IN THE NEWS THIS WEEK

NEWS BRIEFS FROM AROUND THE CAPITOL JUNE 30 - JULY 7, 2009

June 30, 2009

Stimulus committee looks to help Missouri grab federal cash

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Tony Messenger

Missouri lawmakers are looking to help businesses and other elected officials in the state grab the second round of cash that might be available in the stimulus bill passed by Congress. An interim committee led by Sen. Scott Rupp, R-Wentzville, and **Rep. Allen Icet**, R-Wildwood, met downtown today to start planning how lawmakers will help Missouri grab a larger piece of the federal pie. **Rep. Chris Kelly**, D-Columbia, referred to this round of stimulus money as the "little pot" of cash, compared to the "big pot" that lawmakers divvied out during the legislative session.

NOTE: Information copied directly from media source

July 1, 2009

Ron Richard changes tune on Missouri bonding initiative

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Tony Messenger

When Gov. Jay Nixon first sent a letter to lawmakers urging them to get behind a capital building proposal that would involve floating at least \$700 million in bonds, **Speaker of the House Ron Richard** was supportive. The House had approved such a proposal easily during the session, and Richard had voted for it.

But today, after Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder signaled his disapproval of the idea, Richard changed his tune. Now he says it's a bad idea. "The Governor's bonding plan is nothing more than a big spending debt plan," Richard said in a news release. "The money he wants to use to pay for yet another new government program will bury our state under a mountain of debt for the next two decades. The House will remain committed to fiscal discipline and one-time spending projects that will create jobs and boost Missouri's economy."

During the early debate over Metro funding, Nixon was largely silent. And early on, Richard was decidedly negative toward the idea, suggesting St. Louis voters had already made up their minds on that issue. Then Kinder got out front and started making hay in St. Louis about pushing for the Metro funding. Shortly thereafter, Richard said he, too, was in favor of the funding, and he took a shot at Nixon for his silence.

July 2, 2009

Missouri Republicans continue to question Obama citizenship

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Tony Messenger

Two Missouri state representatives today attended meetings conducted by Orly Taitz in which the California dentist questioned the validity of the presidency of Barack Obama. **Rep. Cynthia Davis**, R-O'Fallon, who has gotten a bit of national attention lately, was at the event in St. Charles, though she said she was just seeking information, according to a Jo Mannies blog post. Not so for **Rep. Ed Emery**, R-Lamar. Emery said he questions Obama's citizenship and he believes his alleged lack of a legitimate birth certificate ignores the Constitution.

"We're thumbing our nose at the Constitution," Emery said. He and Taitz allege that Obama's certificate of live birth isn't the same as a birth certificate. "Whoever is satisfied is satisfied," he said. "Whoever is not, is not."

Emery and Davis both chair committees in the Missouri House of Representatives. And they aren't the only Missouri Republicans to go along with Taitz' theory. **State Rep. Tim Jones**, R-Eureka, a lawyer, signed on to Taitz lawsuit about the birth certificate issue, a point Taitz made at her meetings.

At the Jefferson City meeting, she also mentioned **Rep. Casey Guernsey**, R-Bethany, as a supporter.

Richard clarifies comments opposing Nixon bond proposal

Kansas City Star, Jason Noble

Following up on a statement that seemed to contradict his voting record on a new state bond, **House Speaker Ron Richard** called Prime Buzz this morning to clarify his position. In short: Richard isn't wholly opposed to a new bond, but he's concerned about increasing the state's debt and wants to move cautiously given the recession.

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So, the question for Mr. Speaker this morning: how do you reconcile an April vote in support of bonding with dire warnings in June about out-of-control debt? The answer: It all depends on the size of the bond. The proposal passed in the House was capped at \$700 million. Richard said Nixon indicated to him a figure significantly higher than that -- perhaps exceeding \$1 billion for higher education, highway and other projects.

"If it was still in the range of \$600 million to \$700 million, that might be negotiable," Richard said. "I'm just nervous and I want to see more details."

Publicly, all Nixon has called for is a dialogue between his office and the legislature. Lawmakers would have the ultimate say in crafting the size and focus of a bond, and any proposal would have to be approved by voters.

The paramount issues for Richard are preserving the state's favorable bond rating, avoiding tax increases and keeping the state's options open in the sour economy.

"I wouldn't be doing my job if I wasn't showing fiscal constraint and caution," he said.

July 3, 2009

Mo. revenues down 6.9 percent in 2009 fiscal year

KMOX, Associated Press

Missouri revenues declined by nearly 7 percent in the 2009 fiscal year.

The state Office of Administration said Thursday that both income taxes and sales taxes declined while tax refunds rose during the fiscal year that ended Tuesday.

Missouri's budget assumed a 3.4 percent growth in general revenues. Final figures show a 6.9 percent decline compared to 2008.

State budget director Linda Luebbering attributed the sharp revenue decline to the national recession. The missed revenue projections have caused Gov. Jay Nixon to cut expenditures to keep the budget in balance.

For the year, sales tax collections fell 5.8 percent; individual income tax collections dropped 2.9 percent; and corporate tax collections fell 13.9 percent.

Tax refunds rose by 14.5 percent.

Jay Nixon vetoes bill that would have allowed motorcyclists to leave helmets at home

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Tony Messenger

Safety advocates cheered Gov. Jay Nixon on Thursday for vetoing a bill that would have repealed Missouri's helmet requirement law for motorcyclists.

"In terms of lives and of dollars, the cost of repealing Missouri's helmet law simply would have been too high," Nixon said. "By keeping Missouri's helmet law intact, we will save numerous lives, while also saving Missouri taxpayers millions of dollars in increased health care costs."

This year marked the second time Missouri motorcycle enthusiasts were successful in passing such a repeal through the Legislature, only to be stymied by the veto of a Democratic governor. In 1993, then-Gov. Mel Carnahan vetoed a similar bill.

Nixon vetoes bill to repeal motorcycle helmet law

MissouriNet, Brent Martin

Gov. Nixon has vetoed one of the most controversial bills approved this legislative session: the repeal of the motorcycle helmet law.

A spokesman for the governor, Scott Holste, says the governor carefully considered SB 202 before deciding against allowing it go into law. The bill would have lifted the requirement that adult motorcycle riders wear helmets. Riders under 21 would still be required to wear a helmet.

For motorcyclists, Nixon veto means helmets still a must

Kansas City Star, Jason Noble

Coming as close as they've been in a decade, Missouri bikers still won't be feeling the wind in their hair any time soon.

Gov. Jay Nixon on Thursday vetoed a bill that would have let adult motorcyclists ride without helmets.

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The decision came after weeks in which the Democrat avoided comment on the bill and appeared genuinely conflicted over whether to sign it into law.

He called his veto "the safe and cost-effective choice," referring to concerns for bikers and those bearing the price of treating additional and more severe head injuries.

"In terms of lives and of dollars, the cost of repealing Missouri's helmet law simply would have been too high," he said in a statement.

Governor backs state helmet law, Nixon vetoes repeal attempt.

Columbia Tribune, Terry Ganey

When Col. T.E. Lawrence, also known as Lawrence of Arabia, died from a head injury caused by a motorcycle accident in 1935, one of the doctors who attended to him concluded that Lawrence might have been saved had he been wearing a helmet.

The neurosurgeon, Hugh Cairns, conducted further research that eventually led to legislation requiring protective headgear for motorcyclists.

A sign that Cairns' work endures was demonstrated yesterday when Gov. Jay Nixon vetoed a bill that would have relaxed Missouri's requirement that motorcyclists wear helmets.

"In terms of lives and of dollars, the cost of repealing Missouri's helmet law simply would have been too high," Nixon said after vetoing a bill that had been sponsored by Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia. "By keeping Missouri's helmet law intact, we will save numerous lives, while also saving Missouri taxpayers millions of dollars in increased health care costs. Keeping our helmet law in place was the safe and cost-effective choice for Missouri."

The bill Nixon vetoed would have allowed motorcycle riders 21 years and older to ride without a helmet, except on interstate highways. Under existing law, all motorcycle riders must wear helmets.

Nixon vetoes easing of motorcycle helmet law, citing safety

Southeast Missourian, Rudi Keller

Unlike their counterparts in Illinois, Kentucky and Arkansas, Missouri motorcyclists won't be allowed to feel the wind in their hair anytime soon.

Gov. Jay Nixon on Thursday vetoed a bill that would have allowed motorcycle riders older than 21 to ride without a helmet on all roads except interstates. It was the second time the measure has reached the governor's desk in the 24-year effort to repeal the requirement and the second time it has been vetoed.

"I think that the bottom line is that we need to have safety out there on the roads," Nixon said. "It is a very difficult decision on safety and also the costs."

Nixon spoke about his decision during a stop in Cape Girardeau at the Missouri Veterans Home. The bill, which would have repealed a requirement in place since 1967, was passed with strong Senate support but with substantial opposition in the Missouri House.

Nixon Vetoes Helmet Repeal

KY3, David Catanese

Gov. Jay Nixon today vetoed legislation that would have repealed Missouri's helmet law for motorcycle riders.

In a statement, the Governor cited two primary concerns: the significantly increased health care costs that could have resulted from the repeal, and the safety of Missouri's motorcycle riders.

"In terms of lives and of dollars, the cost of repealing Missouri's helmet law simply would have been too high," Gov. Nixon said. "By keeping Missouri's helmet law intact, we will save numerous lives, while also saving Missouri taxpayers millions of dollars in increased health care costs. Keeping our helmet law in place was the safe and cost-effective choice for Missouri."

Nixon vetoes motorcycle helmet repeal

KMOX, Associated Press

Gov. Jay Nixon has vetoed legislation that would have relaxed a Missouri's mandatory helmet law for motorcycle riders.

Nixon said Thursday that he rejected the bill because keeping the helmet requirement was the "safe and cost-effective choice for Missouri."

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The legislation would have allowed people 21 and older to ride without helmets on all roads except interstate highways.

After the measure was approved by lawmakers, it became the focus of an intense lobbying campaign.

The governor's office received more than 1,000 letters and e-mails, many urging Nixon to sign the bill. The Missouri Department of Transportation commissioned a poll in an effort to persuade Nixon to veto it.

Nixon vetoes helmet bill to save lives, costs- Health, law enforcement officials argued change would increase fatalities.

Springfield News-Leader, Dirk Vanderhardt

Gov. Jay Nixon on Thursday dashed the hopes of many Missouri motorcycle riders by taking the veto pen to legislation that would have relaxed the state's helmet laws.

Nixon cited rider safety and the specter of soaring health care costs as reasons for his veto of Senate Bill 202.

Trumpeted by many as a boon to personal liberty, the legislation would have lifted the helmet requirement for riders 21 and older when they weren't travelling on interstate highways.

"In terms of lives and of dollars, the cost of repealing Missouri's helmet law simply would have been too high," Nixon said in a written statement. "By keeping Missouri's helmet law intact, we will save numerous lives, while also saving Missouri taxpayers millions of dollars in increased health care costs. Keeping our helmet law in place was the safe and cost-effective choice for Missouri."

... News of the veto came as a disappointment to **State Rep. Eric Burlison**, a Springfield Republican.

Burlison considered the bill's passage in April one of the highlights of his first legislative session, because support for the measure was largely grass roots.

"It was basically citizens up there trying to get the law changed," Burlison said. "To me, the passage of that bill was the antithesis of what was the norm."

Similar motorcycle helmet bills have been debated in previous years, but they had never cleared the legislature. This year's measure moved through relatively easily, but it encountered resistance after Nixon began deciding whether to endorse it.

To Burlison, the manner in which the bill passed was less important than his qualms with the philosophy behind the helmet law.

"It's not the job of government to legislate the safety of individuals," Burlison said. "Our job is to protect and defend the constitution, which includes upholding people's individual liberties."

Nixon vetoes helmet repeal, Governor cites lives, cost in explaining decision

St. Joseph News Press, Marshall White

Gov. Jay Nixon vetoed a measure to repeal portions of Missouri's mandatory motorcycle helmet law Thursday.

"In terms of lives and of dollars, the cost of repealing Missouri's helmet law simply would have been too high," Mr. Nixon said in a news release. "Keeping our helmet law in place was the safe and cost-effective choice for Missouri."

The governor vetoed legislation that would have allowed people 21 and older to ride without helmets on all roads except interstate highways.

Nixon revisits bond proposal to fund university projects

Southeast Missourian, Alaina Busch

Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon said higher education is not a limiting factor for the statewide bond initiative he has revisited in recent weeks.

"We certainly shouldn't limit something of this type, that would need to go in front of voters," Nixon said Thursday in Cape Girardeau.

He said he is continuing discussions with state legislators on the issue, which he resumed in a letter to members of the assembly last month. There would have to be bipartisan support to initiate a special session, he said.

"We're not going to do this unless we have significant buy in from Democrats and Republicans and folks willing to put this together," he said.

Nixon wants to develop a bond proposal that would use financing methods enacted by Congress called the Build America bond program. To qualify, the bonds need to be issued by Jan. 1, 2011. Nixon said they would replace the cost of state building bonds issued in the early 1980s.

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Nixon gives Mo. veterans tax break, free parking

KMOX, Associated Press

Gov. Jay Nixon signed several veterans-related bills Thursday that include a tax break on state income taxes.

Nixon, a Democrat, held a signing ceremony for the bills at the state veterans home in Cape Girardeau. He said he was proud to sign legislation designed to help military veterans.

The measures also set up memorial highways to honor service members killed in combat; allow those who earn military medals to park for free in cities that agree to participate; and permit veterans' service organizations to bury unclaimed, cremated remains of veterans.

Another measure establishes May 1 as "Silver Star Families of America Day" to recognize wounded and ill military members and an organization that helps them.

"While we cannot thank our veterans enough for their selflessness, for their service or for their sacrifice, we can at very least honor them with a special recognition, specific benefits and by ensuring that their remains are laid to rest properly," Nixon said in a written statement.

The tax break would allow people to claim a deduction of military pensions from state income taxes. Those collecting military retirement benefits could deduct 15 percent of the pension starting in 2010. The deduction would reach 100 percent in 2016.

GOP braces for state Senate battle

St. Joseph News Press, Alyson E. Raletz

The Republican primary for a local state Senate seat already is turning into a contentious race, more than a year before the 2010 election. A St. Joseph doctor and an Iraq war veteran from Platte City are actively fundraising and campaigning for the spot.

Senate President Pro Tem Charlie Shields, a St. Joseph Republican, vacates the 34th Senatorial District seat at the end of 2010 and he is "extremely interested" in his replacement — so much so that he has endorsed **Rep. Jason Brown** of Platte City.

The slight over **Rep. Dr. Rob Schaaf** perhaps underlines the long-standing differences between the senator, Heartland Health's chief marketing/communications officer, and the hometown politician, who has tried to reform hospital competition rules.

Hillhouse Won't Seek State Senate Opening

Washington Missourian, Evin Fritschle

The list of possible candidates to fill the state's 26th District in 2010 got narrower this week as Presiding Commissioner Ed Hillhouse said he would not pursue the office.

Hillhouse announced in May he would look into running at the urging of friends and local constituents but told *The Missourian* Thursday that he felt he could do more for Franklin County by remaining on the commission.

Currently the field only has two known candidates, 98th District **Rep. Brian Nieves**, R-Washington, and Jack Jackson, R-Wildwood, the 89th District representative.

The two Republicans have worked side by side since 2002 when both were elected to their first terms in office.

State Rep. Allen Icet of Wildwood, a St. Louis County community that falls in the 26th Senate District, announced his candidacy for state auditor in mid-June.

July 4, 2009

Lamar lawmaker, House leader from Joplin at odds on matter

Joplin Globe, Wally Kennedy

Is President Barack Obama's citizenship still in question?

State Rep. Ed Emery, a Lamar Republican who plans to run for the state Senate, thinks so, and says for that reason that he this week attended an event on behalf of his constituents.

His attendance Wednesday at an event at which Orly Taitz, a California dentist and lawyer, continued to challenge Obama's citizenship has Emery at opposites with **House Speaker Ron Richard**, a Joplin Republican, on the matter.

"I don't think it's an issue," said Richard, who is known for blunt reactions. "I'm not concerned about that. We have no jurisdiction to look at something like that, and I wasn't consulted about this meeting."

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Even though concerns over Obama's citizenship have been widely debunked by state officials in Hawaii, and even though the U.S. Supreme Court has declined to even give the notion a thought, Emery says he remains unconvinced.

Emery said he was at the event Wednesday at a Jefferson City hotel to listen to Taitz's arguments and hear her evidence. He was the only recognized legislator at that meeting.

Later that day, Taitz spoke at St. Louis. In attendance there were **state Rep. Cynthia Davis**, R-O'Fallon, and a representative of state Rep. Jim Lembke, R-Lemay. They, too, said they attended to hear Taitz's position.

Some motorcyclists voice opposition of helmet-law veto

Joplin Globe, Dustin Shipman and Anne Hershewe

A low rumble emerged this week as some motorcyclists across the state began to react to Gov. Jay Nixon's veto of Senate Bill 202, which would have relaxed Missouri's helmet-requirement law.

The current law requires all motorcyclists to wear a helmet while riding. The measure that was endorsed by the Legislature would have given riders older than 21, in most situations, the option of not wearing a helmet.

Nixon had seemed to be in favor of the bill last month, and some area motorcycle riders are confused and angered by his veto.

Republicans back away from bonds for projects - Former support wanes as Nixon conveys interest.

Columbia Daily Tribune, Terry Ganey

Some Republicans who willingly marched to the idea of asking voters to approve hundreds of millions of state construction bonds are getting cold feet.

House Speaker Ron Richard, who voted for the bonding plan when it sailed through the House in April, said yesterday he had become "nervous" about the state's economy.

"Our income side is still retreating," said Richard, a Republican from Joplin. "We want to look at it again but be cautious about expanding it. Let's see where the economy is. That's where I'm at."

During the legislative session, **state Rep. Chris Kelly**, D-Columbia, co-sponsored a resolution to ask voters to approve \$700 million in bonds for university construction projects. His argument was that the time was ripe because the buildings were needed, contractors were hungry and interest rates were low.

The bonded indebtedness could be covered for the most part with a revenue stream that has been used to pay off existing bonds. That previous bond issue will be paid off in two years.

The Republican-controlled House passed the measure 131-28 with no debate. The Senate Appropriations Committee approved the plan 7-4 after Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, increased the amount to \$800 million to provide funds for "state buildings, facilities and projects other than higher education."

University City mayor joins 14th District state Senate race

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Phil Sutin

After serving more than 33 years as a council member and mayor of University City, Joe Adams is moving to a new political arena.

Adams, the city's mayor since 1996, is running for state senator in the 14th District. He is one of what for now is a three-candidate race in the Democratic primary next August.

Joining Adams in organizing state Senate campaign committees are **State Rep. Theodore "Ted" Hoskins**, D-Berkeley, and former State Rep. Esther Haywood, D-Bellerive. Filing of the Aug. 3, 2010 election opens on Feb. 23 and closes March 30. The three candidates are trying to succeed State Sen. Rita Days, D-Bel-Nor, who cannot run for reelection because of term limits.

The district in north central St. Louis County generally runs from University City north of Delmar Boulevard northwestward to Interstate 270. It includes the Normandy area and parts of Bridgeton and Hazelwood.

State Rep. Maria Chappelle-Nadal, D-University City, has been mentioned as candidate for the state Senate seat. On Friday she said she is considering running for it. But now "my effort is focused on the 72nd District," she said. That district which she represents covers northern University City, Wellston and Pagedale.

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July 6, 2009

Mo. boosting payments to sheltered workshops

KMOX, Associated Press

Missouri's sheltered workshops are getting a pay raise from the state.

Under a 2007 law, the state's reimbursement rate to sheltered workshops rose by \$5 this past week to \$90 per worker each week. The rate is scheduled to go up again next summer as the final part of a four-year increase.

About 5,600 mentally disabled Missourians are employed in dozens of sheltered workshops around the state. They're paid below minimum wage to perform basic tasks such as shredding documents or packaging products for other companies.

The state's higher reimbursement rate is paid to the workshop owners. It does not necessarily mean workers will receive a similarly sized pay raise.

July 7, 2009

Missouri lawmaker explores the farthest frontiers of science

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Editorial Board

The courts finally have spoken: In Kansas, it's no longer legal to harass a person by blasting him with secret electromagnetic energy weapons.

At least it's no longer legal to do that to James Walbert of Wichita.

Mr. Walbert, a self-described inventor, asked for a legal order of protection against a former business partner whom he claimed had "stalked myself and family members with electronic and microwave devices."

Thanks in part to a letter of support written by Missouri **state Rep. Jim Guest**, R-King City, on his official stationery — and in part to the former business partner's absence from a hearing on the allegation — Mr. Walbert got his order of protection on Dec. 30.

Now we all can breathe a little easier. Or at least we could if we weren't worried about microchips.