

IN THE NEWS THIS WEEK

NEWS BRIEFS FROM AROUND THE CAPITOL

JUNE 9-15, 2009

June 9, 2009

NOTE: Information copied directly from media source

Biden and Mo GOP on same page: Stimulus not meant for state tax cuts, refunds

St. Louis Beacon, Jo Mannies

Vice President Joe Biden poured cold water today on the actions of various states, including Missouri, to use federal stimulus money to keep the flow of state services -- or state money -- to their residents. Speaking in general, Biden told regional reporters in a conference call today that the federal stimulus help to the states "was not designed for the purpose of them doing nothing to hire more people," or to "cut their tax rates."

"This (stimulus aid) is designed to keep people from being hurt" further by the recession, Biden continued.

State can't afford new program to train health-care professionals, say GOP lawmakers

St. Louis Beacon, Robert Joiner

Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder and **House Budget Chairman Allen Icet**, R-Wildwood, told reporters in a conference call that while lawmakers had set aside \$40 million for the Caring for Missourians program, the money isn't likely to be available to sustain it in future years. Icet said the \$40 million was a one-time allocation, and Kinder said he believed Nixon was "forcing" schools to set up the program but stressed that he had no proof that was happening. Nixon's spokesperson, Scott Holste, denied the governor had put pressure on the schools to participate. Holste said, "Gov. Nixon has been meeting and working with public colleges and universities since January to craft this measure. What the governor and the universities recognize is that we have to address the critical shortage of health-care providers, and we have to create jobs. The Caring for Missouri initiative goes after both goals. The schools have all committed to using the money in FY 2010 budget for this initiative. We'll continue to work with them on this program."

June 10, 2009

MIAC Returneth

KY3, David Catanese

A trio of local conservatives sound off on what they hope Wednesday's MIAC hearings at the State Capitol will achieve and if the recent killing of a Kansas abortion doctor will alter the debate about who law enforcement needs to track. Nixa **State Rep. Ray Weter** said the goal of the Missouri Information Analysis Center hearings should be to differentiate between what's a legitimate approach to targeting and what's an overreaction. He said the report didn't offend him personally, but that his constituents reacted intensely to certain labels used. Rep. Weter called the suspect who is charged with the killing of a Kansas abortion doctor "an outlier," and not a problem Missourians had to worry about.

Live Forever

Capitol Calling, Jason Rosenbaum

State Rep. Chris Kelly said today that there may be enough political support to extend funding for the Caring for Missourians program next year. That seems to take the edge off of **House Budget Chairman Allen Icet's** declaration that funding for the program was meant as a one-time expenditure and that higher education institutions shouldn't expect additional money. Both Icet, R-Wildwood, and Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder arranged a conference call yesterday raising alarm about the implementation of the program.

"The votes were there and I think that the votes will be there next year too," Kelly said. "I like Allen and I don't like to disagree with him. But you know, I believe there's widespread support from both sides of the aisle for that program. And I believe it will get funded again next year."

MIAC's the word at Capitol hearing on Wednesday

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Tony Messenger

Rep. Bob Dixon better have his dancing shoes on tomorrow. The Springfield Republican — who is running for state senate — is chairing a committee that has the stated purpose of getting to the bottom of the controversy over the political profiling done in Missouri's "fusion center" known as MIAC.

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Controversial MIAC profiling reports likely a thing of the past

Missouri Net, Steve Walsh

There is a good probability we will not see too many more documents similar to the controversial Missouri Information Analysis Center (MIAC) report that suggested certain individuals or group members might be likely to engage in unlawful activities. That's the word from Missouri State Highway Patrol Lieutenant Dave Hall, the Director of MIAC, in comments made to a Missouri House committee that held its first meeting Wednesday at the State Capitol.

"The strategic-type reports as you're referring to," Hall told the committee. "They are no longer being produced by the Missouri Information Analysis Center. We are not currently working on strategic reports and we are not going to be working on strategic reports."

"I don't know if we will ever get back in the business of producing strategic reports, to be very honest with you," Keathley told the panel. "This report created us a lot of harm, a lot of problems. I'm not going to stand here and say anything other than that."

Militia flap temporarily halts MIAC reports

Springfield News-Leader, Chad Livengood

The intelligence-gathering wing of the Missouri Highway Patrol will stop issuing strategic reports for the foreseeable future following a controversial report on the modern militia movement, according to the agency's superintendent. ... But when pressed by lawmakers, Keathley later clarified his comments, saying some sort of new intelligence reports could be issued, though MIAC is not currently working on anything.

"I just want to make sure we're not changing names and titles," **Rep. Shane Schoeller**, R-Willard, told Keathley.

House committee convenes to review MIAC; Center will not issue further reports

Kansas City Star, Jason Noble

The Missouri Information Analysis Center will no longer perform its own analyses of crime trends, at least for awhile. The agency, a "fusion center" intended to link local, state and federal law enforcement groups, was the subject of a political firestorm earlier this year when some conservatives claimed one of its reports tarred them as domestic terrorists.

"How do you assess the difference between someone who is truly deranged and is going to commit a crime and the person who is out there expressing their beliefs?" **Rep. Shane Schoeller**, a Willard Republican, asked.

Gov. Nixon: Don't Judge MIAC on A Few Lines

KY3, David Catanese

Gov. Jay Nixon said he hoped that a special committee looking into the Missouri Information Analysis Center (MIAC) would not base its evaluation of the intelligence program on a "few sentences" in a single report. "I only hope that the legislators that are looking into it, look at it from the beginning of the process to the end of the process and not focus on just a couple of statements that are in there," Nixon said, referring to the "Modern Militia" report that leaked to the public in February. "I'm hopeful that the legislature, in their review . . . will be thoughtful, calm and apolitical," he added.

"It's my hope that another branch of government doesn't attempt to baffle or lessen the clear safety that can come from legitimate intelligence analysis," the Governor concluded.

Lawmakers' effort for rabbi worthy

Springfield News-Leader, Cliff Rawley- op-ed

I want to thank **Rep. Sara Lampe**, D-138th of Springfield and **Rep. Bob Dixon**, R-140th of Springfield for their legislative work to rename part of the West Bypass the "Rabbi Abraham Heschel Memorial Highway." This is the part of the highway adopted by a neo-Nazi group to gain publicity for the National Socialist Movement. This group promoting allegiance to the teachings of Hitler has a street sign thanking them for keeping the roadway clean of litter.

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Militia report fallout lingers as legislators review agency MIAC defends its crime services at House panel probe.

Springfield News-Leader, Chad Livengood

A special House committee formed to investigate the workings of a little-known state intelligence agency isn't supposed to delve into what brought about a controversial report about militia members. But some committee members found that hard to accomplish without referencing the now infamous -- and retracted -- militia report.

"These strategic reports are very disturbing," **Rep. Jim Guest**, a King City Republican and vice chair of the panel, told two state Highway Patrol officials.

Rep. Bob Dixon, who is chairing the panel, made it clear at the beginning of Wednesday's hearing that committee members were to refrain from rehashing details of the Missouri Information Analysis Center's Feb. 9 modern militia report.

"I think that there's been sufficient examination of the content of the report," Dixon, R-Springfield, said. **Rep. Jim Viebrock**, R-Republic, said the state militia report's warnings that radical right-wing groups may become violent mirrored the message of a U.S. Department of Homeland Security released in April. That report indicated the militia movement may be resurging in light of the economic recession and the nation electing its first black president, Barack Obama.

Rep. Anne Zerr, a St. Charles Republican, noted the militia report's "sophomoric" research and sweeping generalizations about people who oppose abortion and illegal immigration and refuse to pay taxes.

"I did not see much reference to facts (in the report)," Zerr said.

Report gives Mo. average marks for higher ed

KMOX, Chris Blank, AP

Missouri ranks near the bottom nationally in providing funding for public colleges and universities but is a national leader in issuing graduate degrees, according to a report released Thursday by the state's higher education board. Overall, Missouri ranks in the middle for most of the educational categories, according to the Missouri Department of Higher Education, which compared how the state's public colleges and universities stacked up against those in other states during the 2007-2008 school year.

State rep considering next career move

Hannibal Courier-Post, Danny Henley

State Rep. Rachel Bringer, D-Palmyra, was brightly attired during a state bill signing ceremony at Hannibal City Hall Thursday. But in the future, Bringer could be found dressed in black as she considers seeking a judgeship when her career in the Missouri House concludes. "If nothing dramatic changes between now and 2012 I plan to run for circuit judge. It will be an open race so I'm very excited about that opportunity," she said. "I've wanted to be a judge for a very, very long time."

June 13, 2009

Jay Nixon poised to cut more than \$100 million from Missouri state budget

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Tony Messenger

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon is preparing to use his signing pen as a budget ax, cutting more than \$100 million — and as much as \$371 million — out of the 2010 budget passed by lawmakers in May. Revenue in Missouri hasn't kept up with predictions, and Nixon's budget director believes the 2010 fiscal year budget could be as much as \$371 million out of balance. "Obviously, we've got a big problem here," Linda Luebbering said Friday. "The governor's goal is to think of this as a multiyear budget," Luebbering said. "The actions he's taking are to keep the budget in balance in the long run."

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Based on current economic indicators, Luebbering's office estimates that the state will bring in \$7.4 billion in 2010, about \$370 million less than previously estimated by lawmakers and the governor's office. The budget situation likely means portions of the omnibus economic stimulus bill passed by lawmakers will face cuts. Two St. Louis area projects — money for Metro transit and Bellefontaine Habilitation Center — are safe, Luebbering said. **House budget chairman Rep. Allen Icet**, R-Wildwood, said he would have preferred to have some notice from Nixon that such drastic cuts would be necessary in the budget, but he supports the governor's decision to cut rather than fill the gap with federal dollars. "I'd rather take a little pain next year and the year after that than face the fiscal disaster we'd see in 2012 if we don't cut now," said Icet.

Nixon preparing big budget cuts

Office mum on specifics; falling tax revenue blamed.

Springfield News-Leader, Chad Livengood

Gov. Jay Nixon is preparing to make at least \$100 million in budget cuts to the 2010 budget before the next fiscal year begins July 1. "We're going to have to trim a fair amount ... at least nine figures," Nixon told reporters Thursday at a news conference in St. Louis, according to a report in the St. Louis Beacon. Every 1 percent drop in tax revenue amounts to \$75 million less in money for state programs, said **House Budget Chairman Allen Icet**, R-Wildwood. Icet said Nixon has been delaying making tough budget decisions for weeks, and possibly months. "His office knew or has known for a number of weeks, definitely in May and maybe prior to that," Icet said of the budget shortfall.

"It would have seemed to be more prudent to take action then. In two and a half weeks, you just can't do a whole lot." But Nixon is planning to cut the 2010 budget, which Icet and lawmakers crafted and could have reduced before sending to the governor. For cash flow purposes, Icet said the governor could tap into the state's \$500 million-plus budget reserve fund in July once the new fiscal year begins.

"We have a cash flow problem and given the direction we're going it's not going to solve itself, it's just going to get worse," Icet said. "It's like a snow ball: it just gets bigger and bigger and bigger."

Governor extends unemployment benefits up to 20 weeks

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Adam Jadhav

Gov. Jay Nixon signed legislation Friday giving laid-off Missourians access to up to 20 more weeks of unemployment benefits. Advocacy groups estimate the measure could affect thousands of people who can't find work but already have used up the 59 weeks currently guaranteed by the state and federal unemployment insurance program. The Missouri Department of Labor will send letters to eligible people, and individuals may file claims beginning Monday at 8 a.m. by calling a Division of Employment Security claim regional center.

Lawmakers debate plan to replace income taxes

Independence Examiner, Adrienne DeWeese

Though the Missouri General Assembly's 2009 session ended nearly a month ago, **state Rep. Gary Dusenberg** was traveling Friday afternoon to attend a rally and gain more information about a vote he made this session. Dusenberg, a Blue Springs Republican who represents the 54th District, was one of four Eastern Jackson County Missouri House representatives who voted in favor of the Missouri fair tax proposal.

"I think it's something we need to look at because I don't think the current tax system is fair, and I think it's something that is more of a consumers' tax," he said. "I'm pretty conservative, and I've always been against more taxes, and this might be an avenue to have fewer taxes." Other area legislators who voted in favor include **Curt Dougherty**, **Bryan Pratt** and **Brian Yates**. **State Rep. Paul LeVota**, D-Independence, said he voted against the legislation because of the Kansas City area competing constantly with Kansas on lower sales taxes. State Democratic representatives **Tom McDonald** and **Ray Salva** also voted against the legislation.

"There's no doubt that there needs to be a fundamental reform on our tax system, but when you're only going to change the Missouri tax system and not the federal tax system, it's just fundamentally unfair," LeVota said.

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NIXON'S WEEK 22 GRADE: A –

KY3, David Catanese

Last Monday's conference call held by Lieutenant Governor Peter Kinder provided the latest evidence that Missouri Republicans are still uncertain how to paint a contrast with Gov. Jay Nixon. Kinder summoned reporters to suggest that some Missouri universities felt bullied into taking one-time state money to fund the Governor's health education plan. But state government's top elected Republican had no evidence to back up his claims. This past week, Nixon continued his tour of the state touting his economic package. Small business tax cuts were the focus. And even though the targeted cuts are small, anytime a Democrat can claim a tax cut, it's good politics. The Associated Press' David Lieb notes that the Governor continues to stress Missouri's high (but outdated) unemployment rate in order to be able to claim improvement closer to his next election date. Maybe by then Republicans will have figured out how to strategically and cohesively position themselves against a Governor who, for now, is politically sailing over their heads.

PrideFest brings out rainbow of opinions

Springfield News-Leader, Cory De Vera

The Gay and Lesbian Community Center of the Ozarks has organized the annual Pridefest event for several years for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community, but this year's event had a higher profile because of demonstrators, said organizer Michael Siepel. **State Rep. Jeanette Mott Oxford**, who said she will be celebrating her 25th anniversary with her partner, said one of the most telling signs of progress is that gay and lesbian people don't have to feel invisible anymore, pointing to openly lesbian television personality Ellen DeGeneres and Cher's daughter, Chastity Bono, who has announced that she will undergo a gender change. "Overall, visibility is a good thing," said Oxford, who represents a portion of the city of St. Louis. "Because when people feel invisible it leads to a lot of fear, a lot of shame and a lot of negative behaviors to hurt yourself."