

# IN THE NEWS THIS WEEK

NEWS BRIEFS FROM AROUND THE CAPITOL

JULY 14-20, 2009

July 14, 2009

## **Mo. gov. signs energy efficiency legislation**

*KMOX, AP*

Electric companies will be able to charge Missouri customers for energy-savings initiatives under legislation signed Monday by Gov. Jay Nixon. The new law treats utility programs that reduce the demand for electricity — such as the giveaway of programmable thermostats or energy-efficient light bulbs — the same as efforts that increase the supply of electricity, such as the construction of a new power plant. In both cases, utilities will be able to recoup their costs from customers.

## **Governor signs education grabbag**

*St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Virginia Young*

Without ceremony, Gov. Jay Nixon put his imprimatur today on a mammoth education bill passed by the General Assembly. The wide-ranging plan (SB291), shepherded by **Rep. Maynard Wallace**, R-Thornfield, includes:

- A controversial provision allowing teachers in the St. Louis Public Schools to receive merit-based raises in return for opting out of tenure.
- Restrictions on the use of seclusion rooms to confine students with behavioral problems.
- An option for a four-day school week.
- A requirement that high school students obtain at least 16 credits or reach the age of 17 before they can drop out.
- A flex program allowing juniors and seniors to spend only two hours a day at school and work the rest of the day in a job aligned with the student's career plan.
- Physical activity requirements of 30 minutes a day for elementary school students.
- A study on open enrollment of public school students across district boundary lines.
- Authority for the State Board of Education to add members to the three-member special administrative board that oversees St. Louis Public Schools. Also, the state board could set a date for the district to return to local governance.

## **Nixon signs 11 bills and vetoes 18 to wrap up session**

*MissouriNet, Brent Martin*

Governor Nixon has wrapped up his work on the legislative session, signing the budget bills plus 122 others, vetoing a total of 23. Nixon had until Tuesday to issue vetoes, but made public his decisions a day early. On Monday, Nixon signed 11 bills and vetoed 18. Perhaps the biggest veto was of SB 37, a measure designed to ease pressure on the overworked public defender system. In his veto message, Nixon stated that the bill's provision that allowed the Public Defender Commission to manage the caseload of public defenders merely shifted their burden to other participants in an already burdened criminal justice system. Nixon vetoed HB 544, a public funds accountability measure, because it contained a provision which would have issued keys to the Capitol Dome to every legislator. Nixon stated that security concerns were raised by the Office of Administration and Capitol police.

Technical glitches doomed some other bills. Drafting mistakes or poor wording worried the governor who said such problems couldn't go into state law. Often in his veto message, Nixon acknowledged portions of the bills he liked and gave indications of how to overcome his objections during a future session. The big disappointment for the governor, according to Holste, was the rejection by the House of a measure that would have extended health care coverage to an additional 35,000 Missourians at no cost to taxpayers. Still, Holste said the governor was pleased that the legislature increased funding for public schools, kept funding to state colleges stable and passed a jobs bill.

## **Nixon Vetoes 18 Bills**

*KY3, David Catanese*

Governor Jay Nixon vetoed 18 pieces of legislation Monday, rejecting the repeal of a bingo tax, a payment exemption for renters in drastic circumstances and proposed changes to the public defender system. Nixon also vetoed legislation that would have given lawmakers keys to the Capitol dome. House Bill 544 also included provisions to track federal stimulus money. In his veto letter, Nixon said that wasn't the reason he rejected the bill. He said the Missouri Accountability Portal was already codified by a different substitute. Nixon said he was not comfortable with approving keys to the Capitol because the provision could cause "potential harm to legislators, their constituents and our historic capitol building." But **Rep. Jason Smith**, a sponsor of the legislation, wrote on his FACEBOOK page: "GOVERNOR NIXON VETOED my HB 544 today.....I guess he is not a strong advocate in allowing Missouri Citizens to watch how their tax dollars are being spent...the house passed this bill 143 to 10 and the senate passed it 33-0.....Come on NIXON!!!"

**NOTE:** Information copied directly from media source

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July 15, 2009

## **Tour of Missouri will get state funding; Nixon reverses course on bicycle race; Kinder "delighted" by decision.**

*Springfield News-Leader*, Chad Livengood

Gov. Jay Nixon reversed course Tuesday on plans to cut off taxpayer funding of the Tour of Missouri bicycle race, saying the international sporting event will go on in September. Republican Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder seized on Nixon's decision, claiming the Democratic governor had become a race convert. "I'm delighted to welcome Gov. Nixon to the ranks of supporters of the Tour of Missouri," Kinder said on KMOX radio in St. Louis.

In a statement, Nixon gave no indication that he's really as big of a fan of the race as Kinder, who once called it "my bicycle race." Nixon said he just wants to limit the amount of tax dollars used to underwrite the race. "The race will go on this year, and Missourians deserve to know that state funds for the event are used transparently and accountably," Nixon said. "They should know precisely how money for the Tour of Missouri is being spent, and that the event is being run in a way that minimizes the cost to taxpayers."

## **Nixon vetoes bingo expansion**

*St. Joseph News-Press*, Alyson E. Raletz

Gov. Jay Nixon this week vetoed an attempt to revive struggling bingo halls with an expansion of state rules and the elimination of a two-tenths-cent tax on game cards.

"I had no inkling this was going to happen, especially with its bipartisan support," said **Rep. Mike Lair**, a Chillicothe Republican who authored the bill.

Also Tuesday, Mr. Nixon supported a rejection of national driver's licenses by signing off on legislation that prohibits the state of Missouri from participating in the Federal Real ID Act of 2005. **Rep. Jim Guest**, a King City Republican, has led a nationwide coalition of privacy advocates who for at least three years have fought Real ID requirements. "I applaud the governor for signing this legislation to protect the Missouri citizens and to uphold the Constitution," Mr. Guest wrote in a statement.

July 16, 2009

## **Bill to create federal stimulus oversight committee vetoed**

*KWMU*, Marshall Griffin

Among the bills vetoed by Governor Jay Nixon this week was one that would have created a committee to examine how Missouri is spending its federal stimulus money. **State Representative Jason Smith** (R, Salem) sponsored the bill. "There is not a committee out there that is truly watching for waste, fraud and abuse, and this was the only aspect of getting that, and it was vetoed," Smith said.

July 17, 2009

## **Nixon says nearly \$2M saved by his administration**

*KMOX*, AP

Gov. Jay Nixon's administration says it has saved nearly \$2 million through a review of statewide contracts and a reduction in travel reimbursements.

## **Still joins critics of hunger comment; Rep wants Davis to lose chair role.**

*Columbia Daily Tribune*, Janese Heavin

**Rep. Mary Still**, D-Columbia, is asking Missouri **Speaker of the House Ron Richard** to remove **Rep. Cynthia Davis**, R-O'Fallon, from her leadership role on a committee dedicated to families and children. Still points to Davis' June Capitol Report newsletter, in which she questioned whether government-funded summer lunch programs are necessary. The summer nutrition programs are funded through the same pool of money that pays for the free and reduced-price lunch program for low-income children during the school year. "To say that this would have an effect on the obesity problem, that's just cruel," Still said. "It's incorrect, wrong and cruel, and I'm not comfortable with her in a leadership position."

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July 18, 2009

## **Mo. borrows \$125M from reserve fund for cash flow**

KMOX, AP

Missouri is borrowing \$125 million from a state reserve fund to make sure it has money to pay its bills. The state's budget year began July 1. Gov. Jay Nixon's administration said Friday that this is the earliest in a budget year that the state has tapped its reserve fund since July 2005. Money borrowed from the reserve fund must be repaid within interest by mid-May of 2010.

July 20, 2009

## **NIXON'S MIDTERM GRADE: B**

KY3, David Catanese

The most basic yet vivid example of a government failing its people came to light this week in the form of murky water. The Kansas City Star's revelation that the Nixon administration's Department of Natural Resources withheld a Memorial Day report about high E.coli levels is damaging on several fronts. It's triggered an investigation into whether the Sunshine Law was broken. On this alone, by no fault of his own, Nixon lost the week. But as expected, the Governor also blinked in his stand-off with Lieutenant Gov. Peter Kinder over the Tour of Missouri. Still, by the end of the week Nixon dished his rival again by not notifying the top Republican in state government about his overseas trip until hours before he told the press.

## **Nixon makes surprise Iraq trip; Lieutenant governor not given power in absence.**

*Springfield News-Leader*, Chad Livengood

Gov. Jay Nixon visited Missouri National Guard soldiers in Iraq over the weekend as part of an unannounced Middle East tour with the governors of Illinois, Minnesota, Nevada and Texas. Speaking with reporters Sunday afternoon from Kuwait, Nixon said he met with Missouri soldiers, whom he found to be "stunningly committed" to bringing peace and democracy to the war-torn country. Nixon, a Democrat, said he has remained in close contact with his staff over the weekend and that he did not feel the need to hand over power to Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder, a Republican. That approach differs from when former Gov. Matt Blunt visited Missouri troops in Iraq in May 2006 and made Kinder acting governor in his absence.

Gary McElyea, a spokesman for Kinder, said the lieutenant governor's office wasn't notified Nixon was in the Middle East until just after 11 a.m. Sunday -- nearly two days after Nixon left the country.

## **Mo. House creates autism insurance committee**

KMOX, AP

Missouri **House Speaker Ron Richard** has created an interim committee to draft regulations for insurance coverage of autism. Legislation requiring health insurance to cover autism treatment failed to come up for a House vote before the 2009 session ended in May. Richard, a Republican from Joplin, said at the time he expected a special committee to draft a bill that could pass when the House reconvenes in January.