

# IN THE NEWS THIS WEEK

NEWS BRIEFS FROM AROUND THE CAPITOL AUGUST 11-17, 2009

August 11, 2009

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

## **Nixon: Missouri economy getting stimulated**

*KMOX, Brett Blume*

So far, Missouri has received more than three-quarters of a billion dollars in stimulus money. Governor Jay Nixon says the money will help in a number of areas, including transportation. "We're working very closely with Illinois officials," Nixon responded when asked by KMOX about stimulus spending. "My representatives were in Chicago...for the Midwest rail hub meeting. We're pushing very, very hard to get the first high-speed rail to be the project between Chicago and St. Louis."

## **Mo. retirement system pays \$160,000 in incentives**

*St. Louis Post-Dispatch, David A. Lieb, AP*

Missouri's retirement system on Monday paid \$159,537 of staff incentives that had been on hold because of public criticism about providing bonuses during financial losses. The Missouri State Employees' Retirement System said its personnel policy legally requires it provide the incentives to its 57-person operational staff. The payments originally had been scheduled for June but were delayed because of concerns they would be portrayed poorly.

August 12, 2009

## **State economy shows ups and downs, says Federal Reserve**

*MissouriNet, Jessica Machetta*

An economist with the Federal Reserve in Kansas City says our state economy is stabilizing amid a high unemployment rate. Allison Felix is an economist with the Federal Reserve. She says there are positive and negative indicators when looking at the state's economy as a whole. Felix says Missouri's unemployment rate is nearly in sync with the nation, with Missouri's numbers at 9.3 and the country's at 9.5.

Felix says unemployment does tend to be a lagging indicator, meaning as the economy starts to recover, the unemployment rate will continue to go up. She says it should start to level out and then go down the first or second quarter of next year, which will constrain some consumer spending patterns. Felix says she expects the state unemployment rate to continue to follow the same patterns as the national average. On the upside, Felix says Missouri's real estate market didn't take as hard a hit as coastal regions or in more industrial states. She says it appears the housing market has hit bottom and is on the rebound and the last couple month's data has been coming in positive.

August 13, 2009

## **Stimulus could fund broadband upgrades**

### **Partnership will bring access to 91.5 percent of residents, Nixon says.**

*Springfield News-Leader, Chad Livengood*

Gov. Jay Nixon unveiled an ambitious initiative Wednesday to deliver high-speed Internet access to rural Missourians. The Democratic governor announced a public-private partnership with Sho-Me Power to get \$142.3 million in federal stimulus money to lay 2,500 miles of fiber-optic cable and build 200 new towers to improve rural broadband Internet connections.

## **Nixon, legislators in another push for autism coverage**

*St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Tony Messenger*

The debate is breaking down along similar lines as the national health care discussion. On one side are those who want mandated insurance coverage — in this case for autism. On the other side are the insurance companies and their advocates who argue that mandates increase the cost of coverage for everybody.

But the difference in Missouri, as compared to the national debate, is that there isn't a partisan divide. During the session, the loudest voices pushing autism coverage came from the Republican side of the aisle. Now it's Democrat Nixon leading the charge. Standing by his side in Columbia last week were Sen. Kurt Schaefer, a Republican from Columbia who has criticized the governor on other issues, and two freshman Democrats from the House, **Webber** and **Mary Still**.

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Butler said he expects there will be a lot of talk about compromise to get a bill passed in the upcoming session. Two men at the center of that debate will be the key Republican leaders who control whether a bill makes its way to the House floor for debate: **House Speaker Ron Richard**, R-Joplin, and **Majority Floor Leader Steve Tilley**, R-Perryville. The speaker of the House said he's working "tirelessly" on the issue, and he blames Nixon for politicizing it. Richard said last year's bill lacked "consensus," and that's why it didn't come to the House floor. Tilley pointed out that he voted for the bill in committee. He said he supports it and if the speaker puts it on the calendar, it will come up for debate and likely pass.

August 14, 2009

## **Delayed data on E. coli at lake was wrong, not illegal, Koster says**

*Kansas City Star*, Karen Dillon and Chad Day

A Missouri agency made a mistake but broke no laws when it didn't release Lake of the Ozarks water quality data for weeks, according to an investigation released Thursday. Attorney General Chris Koster said Missouri Department of Natural Resources employees did not violate the state's Sunshine Law when they failed to release data that showed dangerously high levels of E. coli, a bacteria, earlier this summer. That's because the requests for the data during June could not be "reasonably interpreted" by DNR officials as Sunshine Law requests.

## **Shall we gather at the river? Ray Salva hopes so**

*Kansas City Star*, Mike Hendricks

**Ray Salva** is part river rat. As a kid, he and his buddies would jump off the Missouri 291 bridge, plunge into the inky depths of the Missouri River and bob to the surface like chunks of driftwood.

...But otherwise the water was calm and virtually deserted as the Missouri state representative from Sugar Creek and four other Missouri lawmakers got ready to set off on a two-day excursion. Their mission, other than to catch some rays and drink a few cold ones: Figure out what it would take to get you and me out on a river that most of us pay little attention to, other than when the traffic stacks up on the bridge approaches.

The trip is set to conclude this afternoon when Salva and his fellow Democrats — **Kate Meiners** from Kansas City, **Ed Wildberger** of St. Joe, and **Sue Schoemehl** and **Michele Kratky**, both of St. Louis — come ashore in Jeff City.

August 17, 2009

## **NIXON'S WEEK 31 GRADE: B +**

*KY3*, David Catanese

Gov. Jay Nixon's pursuit of stimulus funds that could wire thousands of miles of rural Missouri with broadband internet is truly a longterm visionary project that could transform the state's economy and culture. If his team is successful in landing the money (we'll know by year's end), "broadband for all" will be a key accomplishment the Governor will be able to point when he's looking to shore up support in the more conservative areas of the state. The message: That this Democratic Governor is tapped into rural Missouri. Sometimes good policy and smart politics do go hand in hand. Despite a basketball injury that benched him for a day, the Governor is probably resting a bit easier than previous weeks. The Attorney General's report that showed no Sunshine Laws were broken in E.Coli-gate won't dissuade critics from continuing to raise "who knew what questions, but the headline could've been much worse. Meanwhile, July's SurveyUSA polling showed the Governor still riding high, with a 60% approval rating. The poll was taken between July 17th and 19th. Thursday, July 16th was the day the Kansas City Star broke the E.Coli-gate story. That means we can assume some of those polled could've been aware of the controversy, but August numbers will be the real test to see if Nixon's image took any political hit.