

IN THE NEWS THIS WEEK

NEWS BRIEFS FROM AROUND THE CAPITOL AUGUST 4-10, 2009

August 6, 2009

NOTE: Information copied directly from media source

Terrorism fear cited in capitol police denial of Sunshine Law request for video

Springfield News-Leader, Chad Livengood

Missouri Capitol Police have cited a post-Sept. 11, 2001, terrorism exemption in the state's open records law in denying the News-Leader access to surveillance tape footage of the entrances of the governor's office. Under a Sunshine Law request for public records, the newspaper sought to inspect archived video footage during various dates in June from cameras aimed at two public entrances in the governor's second floor office in the state Capitol in Jefferson City. The News-Leader is seeking access to the video as part of its ongoing investigation into what role -- if any -- Nixon's office played in the Department of Natural Resources withholding a report for four weeks in June showing dangerously high levels of E. coli in Lake of the Ozarks.

Speaker Richard hesitant to appoint ag task force

MissouriNet, Brent Martin

House Speaker Ron Richard wants the legal issues clouding a grain fraud case to clear away a bit before he appoints a task force to study the issue further. Rural members of the House, alarmed by both the fraud case emerging in east-central Missouri and the grain elevator bankruptcy in northwest Missouri, quickly put together legislation to address the issue (HB915). A bill increasing the bond required of grain dealers and elevators and making it a misdemeanor for a licensed grain dealer to act outside the scope of his license passed the House, but failed to move in the Senate.

Speaker Richard, a Republican from Joplin, tells the MissouriNet the cases raised questions he believes need to be addressed. "We want accountability to make sure that if people are selling or buying grain they are insured, bonded," Richard says. Richard expects to gather rural legislators together during the Veto Session in September to discuss whether a task force should be formed. "I'll probably wait until Veto Session and have a meeting with all the ag guys and say, 'Where do we go from here?'" says Richard.

August 7, 2009

Gov. Jay Nixon continues to push autism insurance bill

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Tony Messenger

A month ago, Gov. Jay Nixon said he would use all the power of the governor's office to pass mandatory autism insurance coverage legislation when the General Assembly reconvenes in January. Today he took his bully pulpit on the road, urging lawmakers to pass a bill similar to one that passed the Senate 29-2 last session with clear, bipartisan support. That bill never came up for a vote in the House, a point Nixon made again this morning at the Thompson Center for Autism in Columbia.

Various lawmakers in both parties have blamed **House Speaker Ron Richard**, R-Joplin for standing in the way of the bill last session. Richard, who earlier this summer appointed an interim committee to study autism insurance legislation, said through a spokeswoman that he could not yet offer support or criticism of Nixon's proposal because he didn't have enough information.

The spokeswoman criticized Nixon for not giving the speaker's office enough information about the governor's proposal.

August 10, 2009

NIXON'S WEEK 30 GRADE: C +

KY3, David Catanese

Governor Nixon attempted to steer his administration out of the "Dog Days" of summer '09 by looking ahead to the 2010 legislative session last week. At multiple stops around the state, the Governor said he'd make mandating insurance coverage for autistic children a top priority next year. Picking a fight with insurance companies seems timely and devoid of risk. Who wants to stand up and be the voice for the "downtrodden" (sarcasm) insurance industry? A similar Senate bill didn't clear the House this year, and Nixon doesn't seem to mind pinning the blame for its failure squarely on Republican **Speaker Ron Richard**. "This should've been voted on," Nixon said, in response to



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a Richard spokesperson withholding judgment on the Governor's plan due to "lack of detail." Richard later wrote an op-ed urging Nixon to "leave politics out of this sensitive issue." Still, this ultimately seems to be a fight that favors the Governor, whose administration has been tarred in recent weeks due to E.Coli-gate. The News-Leader's rejected request for video from the Governor's office to see what officials were walking out of the office on certain days in June is a clear signal that the E.Coli story has not seen its last headline. But transparency would seem to be the rule Nixon's team should follow to put this story to bed. The 2012 ad script on the E.Coli scandal has already been written (and likely taken out of context) by Nixon's GOP opponents. But a potential long-running legal feud with a newspaper about open records and transparency seems to be a potentially unnecessary pitfall they would have learned to avoid from the previous administration.