

# IN THE NEWS THIS WEEK

NEWS BRIEFS FROM AROUND THE CAPITOL SEPTEMBER 1-8, 2009

September 1, 2009

## **Missourians first to receive federal biomass money** *KMOX, AP*

Some Missouri farmers are the first to receive money under a new U.S. Agriculture Department program for biomass facilities. The federal program lets agricultural producers who sell materials to biomass conversion facilities receive federal payments equal to the amount received from the facility. U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack says the Missouri-based Show Me Energy Cooperative was the first facility to qualify under the new federal Biomass Crop Assistance Program.

## **State Supreme Court upholds school funding formula** *MissouriNet, Brent Martin*

Missouri's school funding formula has been upheld by the State Supreme Court. In a near unanimous decision, the court turned back a legal challenge mounted by more than 200 school districts which claimed that the formula for funding local schools was inadequate and inequitable. The court, though, ruled that the legislature met its constitutional requirements in approving a new school funding formula in 2005.

## **Shields predicts no veto overrides, praises Storch for state Senate** *St. Louis Beacon, Jo Mannies*

State Senate President Pro Tem Charlie Shields, R-St. Joseph, doesn't expect much out of the legislative veto session that comes up in a couple weeks. In a telephone interview Tuesday, Shields acknowledged that there has been a bit of controversy surrounding Gov. Jay Nixon's vetoes of various stimulus-spending projects, a measure providing more money for public defenders and a bill eliminating Missouri's requirement that motorcyclists wear helmets. Even so, Shields says he "would be really surprised" if there's enough support in the GOP-controlled state House and Senate to override any of the Democratic governor's vetoes.

September 3, 2009

## **Survey USA: Nixon's approval rating falls from 60% to 50%** *KY3, David Catanese*

SurveyUSA polling shows Governor Jay Nixon has lost 10 points in his job approval rating over the last month, dropping to 50% -- a typical benchmark for political trouble.

While the polling does not specifically indicate the reasons for the drop, some Democrats, speaking on the condition of anonymity to The Notebook to talk freely, said they believe the E-Coligate scandal as well as the Governor's cuts to tourism are direct causes of Nixon's polling erosion.

## **Unemployment benefits prompt state borrowing** *St. Louis Post-Dispatch, David A. Lieb, AP*

Missouri may have to borrow more than \$2.7 billion from the federal government to pay unemployment benefits over the next five years, according to projections from the state labor department.

The debt estimates confirmed Wednesday by the Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations are more than three times as large as what the agency had projected at the start of 2009. Since then, unemployment has continued to rise, making additional borrowing likely.

September 4, 2009

## **Mo. gets \$3.4M for rural crimes task force** *KMOX, AP*

The Missouri State Highway Patrol will be getting \$3.4 million from the federal stimulus act to create a rural crimes task force. The competitive grant was announced Thursday.

The funds will support 10 criminal investigators, two criminal analysts, a part-time administrator and overtime for local police agencies that work with the patrol to fight rural crimes.

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

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## **Mo. revenues down 5.6 percent through August**

*KMOX, AP*

Missouri revenues were down 5.6 percent through the first two months of the fiscal year that began July 1. The Office of Administration reported Thursday that sales tax collections through August were down 4.9 percent from the same period last year. Individual income tax collections declined 5.2 percent.

September 5, 2009

## **National unemployment up --- Missouri's jobless fund down**

*KMOX, Kevin Killeen*

The national unemployment rate rose half a point in August to stand at 9.7 percent., the worst since 1983. Meanwhile, in Missouri the unemployment insurance fund is growing deeper in debt. Missouri's unemployment insurance fund is 2.6 billion dollars in debt, as over 76,000 more people lost their jobs in the state over the past year. "The problem is the money is flowing out and there's not an end in sight yet," said Dan Mehan, President of the Missouri Chamber of Commerce. "A lot of people think the unemployment rates are going to keep climbing. So, it's something that we can't pay forever." For now, the state is borrowing the money from the feds to keep benefits flowing to Missouri's unemployed. But Mehan worries the state legislature may try to raise taxes on Missouri businesses to build the fund back up.

## **State rep: Quality Jobs Program, stable taxes key to stimulating job growth**

*Southeast Missourian, Brian Blackwell*

Balancing a budget is the most pressing issue in the Missouri Legislature, **state Rep. Steve Tilley** said Friday. "We have a responsibility to pass a balanced budget," Tilley told businessmen and women during the monthly Cape Girardeau Chamber of Commerce's First Coffee. "We expect each and every family to live within their means and we expect the legislature to do the same." Tilley and state Sen. Kevin Engler discussed a variety of issues facing the state legislature during the chamber's annual legislative update. In addition to the budget, Tilley and Engler said that economic development will be a key to stimulating growth within the state. Missouri's July unemployment rate stands at 9.3 percent, an increase from 6.4 percent in July 2008.

## **State legislators hope for 'gangbuster economy'**

*The Lebanon Daily Record, Delevan Ogle*

Big government spending and its future ramifications for Missouri was the main contention for State Sen. Chuck Purgason, R-Caulfield, and **state Rep. Darrell Pollock**, R-Lebanon, who were both present as the keynote speakers this morning at the Lebanon Area Chamber of Commerce's Eggs and Issues breakfast at the Kenneth E. Cowan Civic Center. Sometimes money given to states from Washington is "like the carrot-and-stick scenario — you grab the carrot and get hit with the stick," state Representative Darrell Pollock said.

"The federal government did not like our language concerning how the 133 million dollars they were trying to give us would be used," Pollock said, "so we rejected it." Pollock stated that the employer would be "on the hook" for questionable actions done by people who move out-of-state or work part time, according to the regulations attached to the federal unemployment aid. Pollock was pleased to say that Missouri, unlike many other states, had enough in its budget last year to help fund education, state Medicare and, with the help of some federal stimulus, revamp veteran facilities and fund for Hospice.

"Our higher-(education) funding was kept at the 2009 levels, which is the reason that we reached an agreement with colleges and universities where tuition for 2010 will stay at 2009 levels." Pollock raised some alarm, however, concerning this year's current budget. "We are about two months into this year's budget, which began in July, and we are down around 5 to 7 percent below our original anticipation," he said. More specifically concerning the budget, Pollock said that the state legislators at the upcoming session will consider a tax proposal based off of consumption rather than merely property.

September 7, 2009

## **Missouri launches 2010 Census Web site**

*The Maneater, Rachel Krause*

As part of Gov. Jay Nixon's mission to count all Missourians in the upcoming census, a new state Web site was launched to raise awareness about the issue, but some say the English-only Web site fails to reach the state's non-English speaking communities.

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The 2010 census is important for Missouri because projections show the state might lose a Congressional seat due to stunted population growth. State demographer Matt Hesser, who is responsible for reporting Missouri's census information to the U.S. Bureau, said in a report for each person not counted during the census, the state loses roughly \$1,000 annually. The Missouri Office of Administration organized the Web site, spokeswoman Lori Simms said, with the goal of increasing awareness about the Missouri Complete Count Committee. She said the CCC, which is made of 26 community leaders, is trying to get their message out.

## **NIXON'S WEEK 34 GRADE: C –**

*KY3, David Catanese*

The significant drop in Gov. Jay Nixon's job approval rating this month can be attributed to a series of tough stories on E.Coli-gate and cuts to the popular tourism division, according to political observers on both sides of the aisle. Some Democrats quietly whisper that Nixon may need a staff shake-up before year's end to avoid a track similar to former Govs. Matt Blunt and Bob Holden, who both ran into early political trouble. Despite those who poo-poo the SurveyUSA poll, a 10 point loss should at least serve as some type of warning signal to the Nixon administration. If nothing else, it's a reminder that at a time when trust of government is running dangerously low, transparency is paramount for any politician who wants support for his or her agenda. The bright side for Nixon is that his low point comes in the summer, when most voters concerns are elsewhere. But looking at the gloomy revenue picture, Nixon will need to restore his political capital in order to manage a budget that will likely require more tough cuts next year.

## **September 8, 2009**

### **Veto overrides not likely this year**

*KWMU, Marshall Griffin*

Missouri lawmakers return to the State Capitol next week for their annual veto session. Governor Jay Nixon vetoed several bills this year, most notably one that would have allowed motorcyclists age 21 and older to ride without helmets, except on interstates. Tony Sheppard is with the group ABATE for Missouri, which wants the helmet law eliminated. But he is not asking lawmakers to override Nixon's veto. He said an override would be politically imprudent. "Governor Nixon's got a real good pull on the legislation, and if we go in there and try to override the veto, good luck getting any other motorcycle safety or any other bills passed through this next session," Sheppard said. The bill would have lifted the helmet requirement for just five years, not permanently. Senate President Pro-tem Charlie Shields said overrides are a rarity. "They tend to be around issues, particularly Second Amendment rights or abortion issues, things of that sort," he said.