



LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MISSOURI

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The 94th Legislative Session of the Missouri General Assembly opened January 4, 2007. Numerous bills have been filed and as of now many have been second read and are awaiting committee assignment.

LWVMO has designated 6 priorities for this 2007 legislative session.

1. *Access to quality health care including mental health) at an affordable cost for all Missouri residents.*

2. *Ensure the safety and well-being of Missouri's children.*

3. *An electoral process that is fair, accurate, efficient, accessible, accountable and uniform.*

4. *Equal access to good public education for all Missouri's children.*

5. *A broad-based, consumer-friendly, renewable energy policy*

6. *Fairness in Missouri taxes*

Our priorities are the basis for LWVMO's selection of bills to support or oppose throughout each legislative session. Volunteer state board members, who through the Advocacy Committee agree on bills to support or oppose, study these bills and report to you action we need to take as an organization. We also follow other legislation as we have members who are willing to assume the responsibility of a director in charge of that need. Do volunteer if you have time and interest.

The purpose of the Legislative Bulletin is to inform you as members on the progress of these bills and alert you as to how you can help in League's attempt to urge passage of legislation that will best serve all Missourians. Local Leagues also have priorities based on League positions which they pursue each session.

Health and Mental Health—Lael Von Holt

The state's faltering mental health system took center stage in 2006 with troubling reports of client abuse and neglect. The governor's Mental Health Task Force investigated the reports, reached out for public comment and provided long term recommendations for legislative consideration.

LWVMO expects to take legislative action on both Medicaid reform and mental health reform in the 2007 session and will collaborate with a community coalition to promote mutual health care priorities. Restructuring Medicaid will be crucial. Of interest to LWVMO are two important bills that advance access to both health and mental health care, including:

HB39 (Portwood) regarding medical assistance for the working disabled. This bill has an emergency clause and has received a second reading in the House as of 1-4-07. You may remember an earlier reference in a similar bill in 2006 as the MAWD bill.

SB3 (Gibbons) modifies provisions of mental health reform with particular reference to abuse and neglect prevention and investigation. This bill has been second read in the Senate.

Another repeat bill is SB122 (Bray) establishing Universal Health Assurance Program. First read 1-3-07. League will follow and report any progress such as committee assignment.

Children- Laura Pitts

These bills have been second read in the Senate and await committee assignment. All are issues we have supported in the past. We will continue to monitor and narrow down the number or add as warranted.

SB1 (Gibbons) requires criminal background checks for anyone hired with "substantial contact with children". It places more accountability on employers and employment agencies that hire or place convicted abusers.

SB84 (Champion) modifies provisions of criminal background checks for emergency placement of a child outside the family. It removes the exception for checks on family members. Complies with FBI regulations.

SB5 (Loudon) modifies laws on child pornography to allow a child victim to recover damages through civil courts.

SB16 (Scott) Requires all children in kindergarten or first grade to have a comprehensive vision test.

SB25 (Champion) Prohibits closing a child abuse investigation prior to the completion of the investigation in the event of the child's death.

SB 161 (Shields) Creates a quality rating system for child care facilities beyond licensing requirements.

Elementary, Secondary and Higher Education- Laura Worstell

These bills have been second read and need to be assigned to committee. As we follow these bills, you will be kept informed of the need for action to support or oppose each of them.

HB228 (Thomson) Broadens reporting of acts of violence to include all teachers at an attendance center in addition to the present requirement of school district employers with a need to know. Schools will include an annual drill and staff must receive sufficient training in crisis management for details to remain familiar through out the year.

HB 110 (Flook) Imposes a surcharge on moving traffic violations and creates the School Bus Safety Assistance Fund to assist schools in obtaining buses with seat belts.

SB6 (Loudon) Establishes the “Safe Schools Fund” which allows schools to use these funds available on a per pupil basis to implement their safety related procedures.

SB228 (Graham) Grants MOHELA the ability to sell or liquidate any asset of the Authority.

HB48 (Harris) Authorizes an income tax deduction for tuition paid for Missouri public institutions of higher education.

SB149 (Nodler) Extends to any private vocational or private technical school A+ reimbursements provided the institution is a member of the North Central Association and accredited by the higher learning commission

Elections, Ethics and Campaign Finance Reform- Nancy Copenhaver

It is too early in the session to pinpoint particular bills to watch by number as many will eventually be combined, modified, dropped, or buried in committee. Instead, I'll focus on themes to watch for, with specifics to follow later.

Additional requirements to vote, probably similar to the **picture ID** to vote bills of 2006 will surface again. There are many legislators (and beleaguered voters) striving to eliminate “**robo**” **calls**, those recorded messages everyone hates, but are cheap to use. Declaring who pays for such messages (as well as for “polls” and “push polls”) will be included.

Campaign finance issues include challenges to the new law passed in 2006 (already put on hold until March by the judge), will there be limits or not, will fund raising be prohibited during session or not, and implications of forcing all reporting to be electronic will be topics.

There is a proposal to increase filing fees for office and another to have all **election costs** paid by the State rather than counties, municipalities, or other jurisdictions. **Advanced voting** will again be proposed (to encourage more voting) as well as moves to **reduce ballot size** by not voting in non-contested races (many implications but basically reducing voter choice). Watch for a future feature on the pros/cons of these two issues vital to Leaguers.

Elections, Ethics and Campaign Finance Reform (continued)

Several restrictions are proposed on **lobbying** by elected officials or elected officials hiring other elected officials as consultants (both targeted at specific office holders) are proposed but are not likely to be heard. Likewise, there is an “**ethics** cleanup bill” to fire things up a bit.

Compensation of elected officials will have to be dealt with, with many favoring raises for judges that lag behind, but many not willing to boost their own pay and risk facing the wrath of voters—stay tuned. There will be bills to reduce the size of the legislature and **amend the Constitution** to require a super majority (60% or other) to amend it in the future (partly in response to the trend of putting stuff in the Constitution as an end run around the legislature or to keep the legislature from changing such laws.) Another issue, restricting **redistricting** to the traditional--every 10 years after the census--may get some attention (remember Texas?).

As always, our position is “an electoral process that is fair, accurate, efficient, accessible, accountable and uniform.”

Taxes and Fiscal Policy Issues- Elaine Blodgett

Current debate in the General Assembly centers on whether there is nearly a \$300 million surplus this year or not really. Then could be returned to tax payers or used to restore previous cuts such as Medicare or will mandatory increases in current expenses will take care of that money.

Tax credits, cuts or refunds: includes such areas as: income tax deduction for medical expenses, tax credit for modifying a home for a disabled person, expanding the sales tax exemption for common carriers, tax credit for qualified equity investments, income tax deduction for higher education expenses, tax credit for the use of idle reduction technology, exempts Social Security benefits, annuities, pensions, and retirement allowances from state income tax, income tax credit for storm shelter construction. Some exceptions are might be good, but others are more questionable. The problem is, if all of the tax exceptions were added up, how much income would Missouri have to work with? LWVMO will watch.

SB 32, Joan Bray - This act enables senior citizens, sixty-two years or older, to delay paying property taxes on their residences. The taxes plus interest must be paid when the owner dies or sells the property, moves, or the property changes ownership. The income limit to qualify for the deferral is thirty-two thousand dollars. Beyond that amount, the amount the owner can defer is phased out at a rate of fifty cents per dollar made over thirty-two thousand dollars, until their income reaches twice the limit. LWVMO WATCH with interest.

HB 184, Carl Bearden, Establishes the Children's Services Protection Act which prohibits any sales tax revenue levied to provide services for children in need to be diverted to any tax increment financing plan or project HB184 -- (LR# 0384L.02I) Read second time. Watch with interest.

Energy-Win Colwill

Two renewable energy bills have been introduced in the Senate this session:

SB 154 (Graham) Renewable Energy Standard – This bill requires all electric utilities to supply a minimum percentage of their electricity from renewable energy sources. The required percentage gradually increases from 1% of retail sales by 2008 to 10% by 2022. The bill includes a system of tradable credits and penalties for non-compliance. (Similar to SB 815 (2006) which was heard but was not reported out of committee.)

SB 54 (Koster) Green Energy Initiative – This bill asks electric utilities regulated by the MO Public Service Commission to make a “good-faith effort” to meet the following renewable energy targets: 3% of total electric sales by 2012; 7% by 2015; 10% by 2020. Biannually, utility companies report to the PSC on progress made toward meeting the targets and the PSC provides a report and recommendations to the legislature. (A similar bill (SCS/SB915) died in the last session.

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