

LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

Published semi-monthly during the Missouri Legislative Session by the

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MISSOURI

8706 Manchester Rd. Suite 104 St. Louis, MO 63144-2724

314-961-6869 (fax 314-961-8393)

email lwvmo@yahoo.com

web www.lwvmissouri.org

Volume XXXVII Issue 5

March 14, 2008

INFORMATIVE LEGISLATIVE DAY – MARCH 13

Bright and early on March 13, an enthusiastic but small group of League members from Columbia, Mexico, Moberly, Sedalia, Springfield, and Kansas City gathered in Hearing Room 2 in the Capitol in Jefferson City. Thanks to Mary Merritt for being the “early bird” with coffee perking away, a League banner on the door, and a big bowl of her famous fudge. The always dependable and helpful Columbia crew was right after her with more pastries and other goodies. Folders with agenda, maps, updates on issues, League priority cards, and picture directories of the legislature were provided to help guide participants. Before League members even got a chance to introduce themselves to each other, visitors started arriving.

TO DO: If you are interested in seeing that issues you are concerned about continue to move, now is the time to contact legislators. The session is only half over and there are many steps on the route to successful passage of legislation, from committees, to floor debate, to the opposite chamber’s committee, floor debate, and more committees such as fiscal committees which put a price tax on the legislation or conference committees which work out compromises between houses, and then on to the governor’s office. Never assume that it is too late to advocate for something you wish to happen or try to stop something you don’t want (or modify it in a way that is less offensive).

After hearing from a number of speakers, League members fanned out to visit their legislators and observe the House session in progress—the Senate had adjourned early. Attendees then met later at Madison’s for lunch, to debrief and discuss other League issues. Make a mental note that you don’t want to miss this fun and informative day next year.

REPRESENTATIVE SARA LAMPE

Rep. Sara Lampe from Springfield spoke passionately (in spite of suffering from a bad cold) about several education and children’s issues. She was thrilled that her bill to restore funding for gifted education had passed a hurdle in committee the night before and might receive attention by the entire House. She has been working for three years to restore cuts made to gifted education that occurred when the new foundation formula was approved.

Rep. Lampe also made a good case for why the legislature should NOT approve a watered-down route to teacher certification (entitled ABCTE) in a time when more well trained teachers are needed to deal with tough educational situations. She was also adamant in advocating that legislature should protect public education and NOT allow vouchers, which divert public moneys to private schools. The attempt to accomplish this deed this year may be called “scholarship” or “tax credit” and target a deserving and growing student population with various forms of autism. But Rep. Lampe pointed out that a voucher is still a voucher no matter what you call it and that such action would actually result in fewer services for autistic children around the state and adversely impact educational services to all handicapped students.

As Rep. Lampe pointed out, remembering particular bill numbers and details is not as important in communicating with your legislator as knowing the issues you support or don't support. She noted that many times bills "morph" into something else by combining several bills together in a committee or house substitute bill or by getting attached to another bill that appears to be moving by way of amendment. She suggests when you visit with your legislator at home over spring break (they will not be in session again until March 25) to express your concerns.

Rep. Lampe's Legislative Assistant, Kelly Schultz from Columbia provided additional information about several children's issues still moving. She noted that a 5-star rating system for daycare facilities has passed the Senate and headed to the House which would help parents in the difficult choice of finding good daycare solutions for their children. A number of bills to prevent bullying in schools including "cyber bullying" are in the works, and additional work needs to be done on bills to protect students from sexual predators but not unfairly label educational employees who are falsely accused with a "scarlet letter." Mrs. Schultz had worked in Rep. Jeff Harris's office while he was Minority Leader in the House.

TAX POLICY

Elaine Blodgett, Columbia LWV President shared information on tax policy, including a flier on "Talking Taxes: How to Frame Discussion of Progressive Tax Changes." (You can obtain one by contacting Missourians for Tax Justice at 314-966-6674 or motaxjustice@charter.net). These are issues that Rep. Jeanette Oxford from St. Louis had hoped to talk to Leaguers about. She stopped by HR 2 on her way back from speaking to another group but had to cut her visit short to return to the House which was in session by then. Sen. Michael Gibbons, Kirkwood, was unable to participate but sent Brian Schmidt from the Joint Committee on Tax Policy. Mr. Schmidt spoke to the group on property tax changes in the works, particularly Sen. Gibbons **SB 711**.

Otto Fajen, lobbyist for Missouri NEA who worked for several years in Senate research previously, helped frame the tax issues for attendees as well. One might wonder why an education lobbyist is so concerned about tax issues, but Mr. Fajen pointed out that support of public education in our state depends heavily on Missouri having the tax revenue to ensure that "every Missouri child has a right to attend a great public school." He expressed concern (as did Rep. Lampe earlier) that the huge number of tax credits currently offered and proposed severely impact the ability of our state to provide basic services demanded by its citizens—including education, social services, health care for the needy, and even infrastructure. He noted that Missouri will soon be in a crisis situation in regard to roads, with funds not available to do much more than minimal maintenance while needs for improved interstates and other roads go unmet. However, he cautioned that measures proposed to "earmark" current revenue for roads (example being measures that would target 10% of general revenue growth each year) are not the answer as doing so would further cut funding available for education and health care. Although increasing taxes is not a favorite topic for most, and really avoided by legislators, dealing with how to fund transportation in our state must be addressed in the near future in a way that will not adversely impact the quality of life in Missouri.

NON-PARTISAN COURT PLAN

Katherine Berry, a lobbyist with the Missouri Bar Association, brought information for Leaguers and updated the group on attempts to change Missouri's well-respected and imitated plan for selection of judges. Her expertise in the area and comments helped attendees understand the importance of maintaining the system we have. See previous Legislative Bulletins for details on League's position.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Secretary of State Robin Carnahan was unable to attend as she was on her way back from Washington, DC, where she testified in a hearing the day before. Ron Berry from Secretary Carnahan's staff shared a wealth of information with attendees. Mr. Berry spoke about the Secretary's priority of providing sufficient paper ballots for elections to ensure confidence in the elections. League has been heavily involved in guarding against construction of hurdles to voting such as mandated voter ID's and Mr. Berry spoke to that issue as well. He also shared information about the large number of initiative petitions this year, the largest in anyone's memory. Some are still being certified, some challenged in court, and some are out on "the streets" with signature gatherers. He cautioned that those approached to sign a petition should be sure what they are signing, as much misleading information is often given. Our own Win Colwill had earlier shared information with attendees about the initiative petition for a Missouri Renewable Electricity Standard (RES), which we are supporting ([see memo on page 5](#)).

MORATORIUM ON DEATH PENALTY

News flash from Sydell Shayer. A public hearing for **HB 1870** will take place at noon on Tuesday April 1 before the Crime Prevention and Public Safety Committee in HR 6 in the basement of the Capitol. The strategy for testifying will be planned by the "Moratorium Now!" campaign but they would appreciate a large crowd in the hearing to show support.

HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, CHILDREN – LAEL VON HOLT

From Washington, we're hearing about Medicaid cuts that may devastate Missouri entitlements. Here in Missouri, we're hearing about budget surplus on one hand, budget reductions on the other. As employers drop health insurance, the number of uninsured goes up. And once again, petitions to restore all Medicaid cuts are circulating. The debate goes on.

But we need to remember some of the good news as well. On March 5, 2008, the U.S. House passed **HR1424** (Kennedy), the Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act. This has been a long time coming. In Missouri, legislators are promoting restoration of certain health benefits, increasing provider reimbursements, recognizing children's issues (mental health in schools and quality rating in child care), and recognizing the critical nature of Autism. The Insure Missouri proposal, the Governor's attempt to assist uninsured workers, is currently waiting for legislative compromise.

The League's position on Health remains, namely to support universal health care and universal health insurance. Since this scenario seems to be a long way off, MO HealthNet and Insure Missouri will dominate in health discussions. League will continue to support interim legislation that promotes equal access, protects the vulnerable, and prioritizes mental health and children's health.

- **HCS HB 1626** (Emery), public assistance benefits for illegal immigrants, on calendar for perfection, is controversial; League has no stand, pending formalization of immigration position.
- **HB 1883** (Bland) is the Missouri Universal Health Assurance Program, filed each year with little progress, assigned to Special Committee on General Laws. It represents systemic change and supportable by League positions, please keep before your legislator.
- **SB 1127** (Rupp) establishes the Office of Autism Services and supplements **SCS SB 768** (Rupp and Gibbons) which creates the Missouri Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders; outlook is promising.
- **SB 756** (Engler), **HB 1627** (Portwood), and **HB 2076** (Grisamore), renaming Division of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities to the Division of Developmental Disabilities, and changing the term of mental retardation facility to habilitation center; outlook promising.

ENERGY/CLIMATE CHANGE – WIN COLWILL

Amid the flurry of bills that address energy efficiency and climate change, the only one to come up for floor vote so far is an incentive to buy hybrid vehicles. **HCS/HB 1326** (Sater) was perfected by the House on March 10, passed fiscal review, and is on calendar for third reading. The amended bill provides a tax deduction for purchase of hybrid vehicles of \$2000 or 10% of the price, whichever is less, but only for models made in America.

Three more to watch: **HB 1666** (El-Amin) the Missouri Global Warming Solutions Act of 2008 was heard March 11 by the Special Committee on Energy and Environment; it directs the Missouri Air Conservation Commission to set greenhouse gas limits. **HB 2298** (Emory) enables utilities to recover prudent costs spent for energy efficiency programs. **HB 2250** (Sutherland) “Show-Me Tax Holiday” was heard March 6 by the Ways and Means Committee. It gives a tax exemption for “Energy Star” appliances for one week in April; similar bill is **SB 964** (Smith).

The Senate Commerce, Energy and Environment Committee heard four bills on March 6. **SB 1100** (Bray) requires new public buildings over 10,000 sq. ft. to meet green energy standards; **SB 1117** (Smith) strengthens energy standards for state buildings and provides financial incentives for construction of green buildings and energy efficient appliances; **SB 1263** (Bray) strengthens the state buildings energy code; directs DNR to offer rebates for home energy efficiency upgrades and lighting; creates minimum energy standards for appliances; **SB 1181** (Engler) reconvenes the Missouri Energy Task Force.

Please feel free to pass this on to other members of your local league. If they would like their own subscription, they may send an email to the League office with their email contact info or send \$10 with their mailing address for subscriptions delivered by mail.

The Legislative Bulletin is edited by Nancy Copenhagen, LWVMO Leg. Chair and 1st V.P. Questions regarding this or previous bulletins should be directed to her at copenhagen22@sbcglobal.net or the League office at lwvmo@yahoo.com. You may also call the League office, and your comments will be forwarded to her.

LWVMO Members:

Please note page 5, which is a “call to action” from Win Colwill, LWVMO Board Director.

**The LWVMO Supports the Initiative Petition
for a Missouri Renewable Electricity Standard (RES)**

What Does the Petition Say?

The petition would amend Missouri law (not the state Constitution). It would require Missouri's investor-owned electric utility companies to supply part of their power from renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar and biomass energy.

The requirement for renewable sources gradually increases from 2% of the company's retail electricity sales in 2011 to 15% in 2021. Two percent of each requirement will be met with solar energy. Utilities may develop their own renewable sources or purchase them from other producers. The PSC and DNR will establish rules for buying and trading renewable energy credits, limiting rate increases to 1%, recovery of prudent utility costs of compliance, and a process of certification and enforcement.

Why Does the League Support a Renewable Electricity Standard?

A Missouri RES has been a LWVMO legislative priority since 2000. 86% of Missouri's electricity is generated by coal-fired power plants. Renewable energy generation reduces greenhouse gas and other harmful emissions; health, the economy and the environment benefit. Diversifying electricity sources improves security and reliability of the electric system. RESs stimulate development of new industry and jobs, providing new income sources for farm communities and urban areas. 26 states have already adopted a mandatory renewable electricity standard.

Why Do We Need An Initiative Petition to Get a Renewable Electricity Standard?

Last year the state legislature failed to pass the mandatory RES supported by LWVMO and many other groups. Instead, a **voluntary** standard was passed and signed into law. An initiative petition is the only way Missouri will get a meaningful RES anytime soon. A statewide coalition coordinated by **Renew Missouri** (www.renewmo.org) has organized the petition campaign. 130,000 signatures are needed to put the RES on the November 2008 ballot.

LWVMO Encourages Local Leagues & Individual Members to Collect Signatures

RES Petitions and Instructions are available at the following locations:

St. Louis

Missouri Coalition for the Environment Office
6267 Delmar Blvd, St. Louis MO 63130
Contact: Brian DeSmit, 314-727-0600

Columbia

Maude Vintage
810 East Broadway, Columbia, 65201
Contact: Jeff Owens, 314-324-5250
Email: Jeff@RenewMO.org

Kansas City

'Bridging the Gap' Office
435 Westport Rd. #223
Kansas City, MO 64111
Contact: Jessica Gonzalez, 816-561-1087

Springfield

Law Offices of Brian Hamburg
21 E. Sunshine St. Suite 102
Springfield, MO 65804
Contact: Erica Hertzog, 415-412-1243
Email: Erica@RenewMO.org