



## 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](mailto:lwvmo@yahoo.com)

web [www.lwvmissouri.org](http://www.lwvmissouri.org)

Volume XXXVII Issue 7

April 18, 2008

### GOOD NEWS FOR THE MISSOURI COURT PLAN

**HJR 49** was defeated early on April 17 on third reading! The success in defeating this measure, which would have destroyed Missouri's judicial nominating system, is being given to the tremendous grassroots effort waged to defeat the bill. LWVMO has been part of the ProtectJustice.org Team encouraging members to voice their support for the Missouri Plan. This does NOT mean that our courts are "home free." New threats will no doubt emerge (see the following) and we will keep you posted. Today, however, we celebrate a victory. You can access the Missouri House website, click on the House Journal for April 17 to see how your representative voted.

One minute ads, very cleverly designed to appeal to the "little guy" to get those "greedy lawyers" out of choosing judges and running our court system, are on the airwaves now in mid-Missouri. The ad uses the words "secret, behind closed doors, letting the wolves guard the chicken coop, and answerable to no one" to stir up support for their drastic changes to this long-acclaimed non-partisan plan. They encourage listeners to contact their legislators to support changes which would actually increase the influence of politics on our non-partisan court plan.

### ENERGY/GLOBAL WARMING – Win Colwill

The Show Me Green Sales Tax Holiday Act is currently attracting a lot of attention. This week the Governor praised the House for preliminary approval of **HCS HB 2250** (Sutherland) authorizing a sales tax exemption on the first \$1500 paid for "Energy Star" qualified appliances during one week in November. The bill also provides a sales tax exemption for any product costing \$600 or less purchased within a three day period, beginning June 27, 2008. It is projected to cost the state more than \$265,000 in 2009, less in following years, is on the House Third Reading Calendar, close to final passage.

And another Show Me Green Sales Tax Holiday bill, **SCS SB 1117** (Jeff Smith) was voted Do Pass on April 10 by the Senate Commerce, Energy & Environment Committee. It creates a sales tax holiday for one week in April. **SB 1117** was originally a more comprehensive energy efficiency bill.

Four energy efficiency bills were given new life on April 10 when the Senate Commerce Committee combined them and voted Do Pass on **SCS/SB 1118, 1100, 1262 and 1263**. Among its many provisions, the substitute bill strengthens the energy code for state buildings, requires 10% of electricity used by state government to come from renewable sources by 2016, creates minimum energy standards for certain new appliances and products sold in Missouri, and names DNR's Energy Center as central coordinator for energy sustainability activities in the state. On April 17 the bill was placed on the Senate's Perfection Calendar. The status of other energy bills followed in the Bulletin has not changed.

## **LOWERING STANDARDS FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS PASSES**

After a long battle against the measure by many education groups and legislators supportive of quality education, **SB 1066** passed the House on Wednesday with no amendments or real debate allowed. It had previously passed the Senate with agreements to make changes in the House, but this was not done. Since the bill was approved without changes, it will be sent to the Governor for his signature.

This bill would grant a full professional certificate to a teacher who: has a bachelor's degree, pays a minimal fee, completes an on-line course, and takes a multiple-choice test. It would be better if the certificate were on a renewable basis in an employing district if they maintain successful teaching evaluations until they received a professional certificate after passing the Praxis test and demonstrating teaching competencies. Luckily, elementary and special education teachers are exceptions to this new, back door method of certifying teachers. In a time when many employers and colleges are worried about the "dumbing down" of K-12 education, we will be certifying new teachers who haven't been specifically trained to deal with the difficult task of educating today's youth.

## **HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, AND CHILDREN – Lael Von Holt**

The end of this legislative session is in sight, but legislators still struggle in their debate over significant bills League is following. Some bills appear to be languishing in committee; others are advancing and still active.

**SS SCS SB 768** (Rupp) is one of the advancing bills. It creates the Missouri Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders and the Office of Autism Services, has passed the Senate, and is assigned to committee in the House (League supports).

Two other bills that focus on children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other special needs children include **SB 993** (Crowell) and **HB 2304** (Lampe). **SCS SBs 993 & 770** is the Missouri Special Needs Scholarship Tax Credit Program. League has a long-standing history of opposition to such tax credits that may weaken the public school system. It is on the Senate Informal Calendar of Senate Bills for Perfection. **HB 2304** is similarly focused on the needs of these special children, but does so within the public school system—League's preference. It has been referred to committee but time is short.

Another active bill is **SS SCS SBs 858** et al (Rupp) that modifies the law relating to illegal immigrants. The Public Benefits section of **SB 858** reiterates federal immigration law, supports legal entry and legal presence to qualify for public benefits, and promotes the path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants. Temporary benefits would be available under certain circumstances. League similarly supports the path to citizenship; provides for federal enforcement of immigration laws, and provides for full due process rights. League does not support deportation. **SB 858** is in the House Special Committee on Immigration, after having passed the Senate. This is a comprehensive bill with numerous sections besides Public Benefits, and will continue to be studied within the context of our recently adopted national position on immigration.

The Insure Missouri Plan, established in **HB 2398** (Schaaf), intends to accommodate the health insurance needs of the low income, uninsured worker. This bill is in the Special Committee on Healthcare Transformation and was heard on April 3, now replaced by a substitute, **HCS HB 2323, 2355, 2394, & 2398** with no hearing scheduled.

## **TAXES – Elaine Blodgett**

**SB 711** (Gibbons) mandates tax rate rollbacks by all political subdivisions in reassessment years. The manner in which voter-approved tax increases are applied to assessed values is modified. The act modifies eligibility and award provisions of the property tax credit and the timeline for assessment and appeal of property taxes. NOTE: The act repeals the requirement that the state tax commission notify each school district of the equivalent sales ratio for the previous year which was adopted to determine the equalized assessed valuation of the property and the equalized operating levy of the school district for distributions under the old school funding formula. This bill is now **HCS SS SCS SB 711**, has been voted do pass from the House Rules Committee and will be heading to the House floor. *(Editor's note: In legislative shorthand, this means that the original Senate Bill was rewritten by a Senate Committee (SCS-Senate Committee Substitute), then rewritten by the entire Senate (SS-Senate Substitute) then went to the House committee which rewrote it again (HCS-House Committee Substitute). Eventually, all these changes will have to be ironed out in a Conference Committee (made up of 5 Representatives and 5 Senators, appointed by leadership in each house) if it is eventually passed in the House.)*

Please note that assessment of property value in Missouri is “mixed” at best. Urban counties, such as St. Louis County, must report all property sales to the assessor’s office, which is not so in rural counties. Those assessors are kept in the dark as far as property sales go, thus making assessment trickier.

Of interest: With the arrival of the tax-filing deadline, April 15, Gov. Matt Blunt is urging the legislature to send another tax cut package to his desk. Gov. Blunt has asked the General Assembly to send him legislation cutting taxes for veterans and creating a sales tax holiday for the purchase of energy efficient appliances. Last year, the governor signed legislation that cut taxes for seniors, manufacturing jobs, and healthcare.

What a mixed bag we have with the budget passed by the Senate this week! The Senate version of the \$22.6 billion state budget was passed only after turning down several efforts to expand it further. Senators defeated an effort to set aside \$120 million for potential tax credits to lure a Canadian airplane maker to Kansas City. They also defeated an attempt to insert nearly \$4.5 million in back pay for probation and parole workers in compliance with a court ruling. Also defeated was an attempt to fund dental and vision benefits for adult Medicaid recipients. The Senate version differs from the House version of the budget in numerous spending amounts. That will give negotiators leeway to craft a final budget during the next three weeks (it must be complete on May 9).

## **ELECTIONS/CAMPAIGN FINANCE – Nancy Copenhaver**

**HB 1317** (Davis) was heard in committee and voted out do pass with a substitute. Many of the new provisions will put more obstacles in the way of voters. It requires Missouri voters to prove citizenship by providing one of a list of documents (like a birth certificate) and would require a Missouri Driver or Non-Driver License to show if the Missouri resident has proved to be a U. S. Citizen. So far, the bill has not appeared on the House calendar. League is opposed to unneeded restrictions being placed on voting.

Unfortunately, **SB 1028** (Shields), already passed by the Senate, has now passed the House Elections Committee. The bill repeals the campaign finance limits allowing individuals to contribute as much as they would like to a political campaign. Individuals and committees required to file campaign disclosure reports would be required to electronically file contributions exceeding \$5,000 within 48 hours of receiving the contribution. Of course, this is in opposition to previous votes by the citizens of Missouri who have overwhelmingly supported campaign finance limits.

## **OUCH—IS IT A VOUCHER?**

Last week the House signaled what many hope was the “death” of voucher legislation, allowing use of state funds for private or religious schools. The House had debated **HCS HBs 2040 and 2430** (Jett) on April 9. The special education tax credit voucher was removed from the bill and it was laid over late in the evening. It is unclear whether this “omnibus” bill will be taken up again for perfection or whether the bill is dead. However, this week a House committee voted out **HB 2458** (Jones). **HB 2458** is a tax credit style voucher bill targeting low-income students in urban school districts. League continues to oppose any bill weakening support for public schools by redirecting state funding to private or religious schools.

## **IS IT TABOR-ESQUE?**

League continues to oppose constitutional restrictions on appropriations. **HJR 70** (Icet), which has become **HCS HJR 70**, has been referred to the Government Accountability and Fiscal Oversight Committee in the Senate. This proposes a constitutional amendment prohibiting appropriations in any fiscal year from exceeding certain limits. Such legislation decreases tax revenue, resulting in an inability to provide expanding governmental services. League continues to oppose such measures that remove the legislature’s ability to react to changes in financial situations in the state or tie their hands when the public expresses a need or desire for action requiring appropriations.

**The Legislative Bulletin is edited by Nancy Copenhaver, LWVMO Leg. Chair and 1<sup>st</sup> V.P. Questions regarding this or previous bulletins should be directed to her at the League office at [lwvmo@yahoo.com](mailto:lwvmo@yahoo.com) You may also call the League office, and your comments will be forwarded to her.**