

IN THE NEWS THIS WEEK

NEWS BRIEFS FROM AROUND THE CAPITOL JULY 28-AUGUST 3, 2009

July 28, 2009

NOTE: Information copied directly from media source

Local lawmakers respond to public defender bill veto

Columbia Business Times, Jason Rosenbaum

As I noted in last week's blog post, Gov. Jay Nixon vetoed legislation that would allow the state's Public Defender Commission to establish limits on their caseload.

But the story doesn't necessarily end there. Lawmakers could choose to override Nixon during next month's veto session. Sen. Jack Goodman – a Mount Vernon Republican who sponsored the legislation – said last week he was unsure about whether he would seek an override.

While **state Rep. Mary Still**, D-Columbia, expressed reservations about Goodman's bill when it was being debated, she still voted in favor of the legislation. Asked today whether the objections of local officials would prompt her to switch her vote, Still said "I would have to look at that very closely."

"I did have misgivings about that bill," Still said. "And my concern was that criminals could be left out on the street or innocent people could still be in jail if they just shut down the system. So, I would like to see... the bill restructured to address those issues. And I appreciated the governor's commitment for more money. I mean, that's the bottom line. That's what this whole bill is dancing around the fact."

Nixon announces grant for cyber crimes unit

Columbia Missourian, Andrew Denney

A local law enforcement agency will receive a large chunk of stimulus funds to help fight cyber crimes across the state. Gov. Jay Nixon announced the grant Monday in Columbia. The Mid-Missouri Internet Crimes Task Force will receive \$194,479, an amount making up about 13 percent of the \$1.5 million American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Justice Assistance grant being dispersed among 13 internet crime units across the state. The federal money replaces state funding for the units that was slashed from the budget during the 2009 legislative session.

Newt's on The Phone for GOP Lawmakers

KY3, David Catanese

Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich will compliment Missouri lawmakers Tuesday for passing a new law that's meant to increase transparency in the state's Medicaid program. Gingrich will hold a Tuesday afternoon press conference in St. Louis and follow that with a statewide conference call. **Rep. Brian Yates** and State Sens. Scott Rupp and Eric Schmitt are expected to join Gingrich.

July 29, 2009

Missouri to get \$19.6 million to hire more police

St. Louis Beacon, Jo Mannies

Vice President Joe Biden's office announced this morning that Missouri law enforcement agencies will receive "more than \$19,697,636 in grants to fund the hiring and rehiring of 118 law enforcement officers in Missouri."

The money is part of \$1 billion in law enforcement grants, funded by federal stimulus money, that Biden and Attorney General Eric Holder made public today.

Physician Legislator Doubts Public Option Will Pass

KY3, David Catanese

Doctor and **State Rep. Robert Wayne Cooper** tells KY3 News he doubts a public option will be a part of any healthcare bill that clears Congress. Cooper, who runs a free clinic in Camdenton for those who make less than 200% of the poverty level, said he thinks President Obama will have a "hard time passing his initial plan."

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Former US House Speaker honors three state lawmakers fighting Medicaid fraud

MissouriNet, Steve Walsh

State Representative Brian Yates of Lee's Summit was joined by Senators Scott Rupp of St. Charles and Eric Schmitt of Glendale and they were applauded for making Missouri the first state in the nation to make it possible for anyone to find - online - what a provider charged for any health care service covered by Missouri's Medicaid program - MO HealthNet. Yates and Rupp sponsored HB 577 ... while Schmitt added language creating the MO HealthNet Data Transparency program. Speaker Newt had a lot of praise for the legislation, calling it a pioneering bill. He went on to express hope that the General Assembly comes back next year and builds on this achievement ... which he calls important for the country.

Nixon unblocks funds for state's 7 veterans homes

Action related to rise in federal reimbursement to state for running sites.

Springfield News-Leader, Chris Blank, AP

Jay Nixon said Tuesday that he will allow \$16.1 million to be spent for renovations -- previously stalled by his administration -- at Missouri's seven veterans homes. Missouri lawmakers included money for the construction projects in the state budget that took effect July 1. But Nixon, a Democrat, blocked the ability to spend it out of concern that it could bankrupt a state fund that helps pay for the facilities. Nixon's office said Tuesday that it now is allowing the money to be spent because the federal government has increased the reimbursement that is paid to states for running the facilities.

July 30, 2009

Nixon says he had no meeting with DNR over E.coli

KY3, David Catanese

Dogged by questions from the media following a *Springfield News-Leader* report, Governor Jay Nixon repeatedly denied knowing anything about a withheld E.coli report until just a few days before it was released to the public. Nixon also said he never had a meeting with a Department of Natural Resources official about the report that outlined dangerous levels of E.Coli in Lake of the Ozarks.

Amid protests from state workers, Nixon to soon make more budget cuts

St. Louis Beacon, Jo Mannies

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon, along with state budget director Linda Luebbering, is expected to soon make a decision about the \$60 million in proposed budget cuts offered up by his various department heads. Nixon has already cut \$425 million from the fiscal year budget that began July 1. He also had to cut more than \$100 million in June from the last fiscal year's budget, when the final revenue numbers reflected Luebbering's dire predictions.

Income for the last fiscal year, which ended June 30, was down about 7 percent, compared to the previous fiscal year. Nixon press secretary Scott Holste said he'll be announcing his next round of cuts "within the next few weeks." The governor's decisions, he added, will reflect his commitment to "live within our means, but still provide core government services."

July 31, 2009

Missouri Rep. Cynthia Davis is now armed and dangerous

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Tony Messenger

State Rep. Cynthia Davis, R-O'Fallon, is out with another of her increasingly popular monthly newsletters, and this time she has a surprise for her neighbors and constituents: She's packing heat. This is sure to get her back on the national attention circuit.

Davis tells her constituents that she now has a concealed weapons permit. Nothing unusual about a Republican state lawmaker in Missouri (or Democrat, for that matter) being a fan of conceal and carry.

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August 1, 2009

Mountain high: Storch, Koster get Aspen Institute fellowship

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Jake Wagman

Two Missouri Democrats have been selected for a fellowship program by the Aspen Institute, which offers leadership training to emerging political officials from both sides of the aisle. State Attorney General Chris Koster and **State Rep. Rachel Storch** have been tapped to join 22 other state and local officeholders around the U.S. for the two year program, which includes seminars at the institute's cozy mountain retreat in Aspen, Colo.

August 3, 2009

NIXON'S WEEK 29 GRADE: D

KY3, David Catanese

The Springfield News-Leader's report on the E.Coli controversy drove the coverage of Gov. Jay Nixon last week. And while there was no "smoking gun" connecting Nixon to having direct knowledge of the withheld Department of Natural Resources report, Chad Livengood's reporting raised more questions about how close the information got to the Governor's office. At a press conference in Springfield the day the story broke, Nixon repeated that he had no knowledge of the report until July. But he was visibly perturbed by the repeated questions on the topic. For a moment, the old anger-prone Nixon seemed to rear his head just slightly. The Governor doesn't fake it well; he wears his emotions on his face. If Matt Bunt is remembered for his statuesque smile, Nixon will be known for his scowl. And as silly as this may sound, a more conciliatory statement from Nixon could have helped blunt (pun intended) the backlash and frankly, the coverage. Instead, the Governor's message was: I've let them know it was handled poorly, next question. In addition, Nixon's appointment of the DNR staffer at the center of E.Coli-gate to the Administrative Hearing Commission will now gain added and warranted scrutiny. A Senate committee probing the incident almost guarantees the story legs. Will a committee or a journalist be able to clarify the unanswered questions, such as: Did not anyone at the top of Nixon's staff have any knowledge of this troubling report before late June or July? And if not, why not? Are we to believe that Joe Bindbeutel, a loyal Nixonite, didn't share information with anyone in the upper echelon of power? And should anyone inside DNR be fired over this? Lingering questions will just generate more Sunshine requests from journalists and/or citizens who still feel left in the dark. By week's end the St. Louis Post-Dispatch's Tony Messenger had tied E.Coli-gate to Scott Eckersley in the same column. That's not a comparison any administration wants.