



Prestige+Powers

Strategic Government Relations

The Powers Report

A Weekly Summary of Activities in Jefferson City

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More talk about ethics

Another heavy-hitter stepped up to the plate this week to talk about changes to the ethics laws governing legislators and lobbyists. House Majority Floor Leader Steve Tilley (R-Perryville) told reporters, “I’m not afraid to use the power of my position to get this done.”

As we write this, the Tilley bill has not yet been filed. But here’s a general breakdown of what Tilley says he wants to get done:

- Put a stop to gifts and meals from lobbyists, unless those gifts or meals are provided to the entire General Assembly
- No more political consulting while serving in the legislature
- A 180-day “cooling off period” before a former legislator can serve as a lobbyist
- Public disclosure by legislators, spouses, and staff of any outside political employment
- Restrict campaign contributions from appointees of the governor
- Prohibiting the appointment of a legislator to an executive branch position until at least 180 days after leaving office
- No campaign contributions to the governor from any entity that has an issue pending before any executive agency

The ban on meals from lobbyists has already generated some grumbling. “Prohibiting lawmakers from accepting a plate of chicken wings or a slice of pizza from a lobbyist is admirable,” noted Minority Floor Leader Paul LeVota (D-Independence), “but it does little to negate the perception of a legislature for sale if lobbyists and other wealthy donors can still give massive amounts of money to candidates for elective office.”

Rep. Jim Viebrock (R-Republic) doesn’t like giving up on the practice of eating catered lunches provided by lobbyists while committees meet during the day. “We’re going to lose a large part of our working day by not being able to work through lunch when we break from noon to 2,” he said.

Earlier in the week, Rep. Tim Flook (R-Liberty) and Rep. Jason Kander (D-Kansas City) met with the media to outline a bi-partisan ethics effort. To date, their bill has also not been filed. In general, they say their bill will:

- Create a state felony for laundering campaign contributions
- Make it a felony to obstruct a Missouri Ethics Commission investigation
- Outlaw the practice of using one political action committee to donate to another political action committee

We’ll do complete breakdowns on these bills when they are actually filed. Late in the week, Rep. Paul Quinn (D-Monroe City) filed a bill (HB 1390) outlawing the practice of

political consulting while serving in the General Assembly. The full text of the bill was not available at press time.

Nixon looks to “reinvest” in biotech

We’ve arrived at the time of the year when the governor starts to preview his state-of-the-state address. It’s instructive to note that Gov. Jay Nixon’s first efforts are focused on jobs and economic development.

This week, Gov. Nixon unveiled something called the “Missouri Science and Innovation Reinvestment Act.” His plan is to capture some of the tax revenue generated by the growing technology sector and reinvest that money into initiatives designed to attract more technology-related economic development. The heavy emphasis will be on biotechnology and the life sciences.

He wants to:

- Attract top science talent to Missouri
- Commercialize scientific research
- Recruit and build strategic science infrastructure

It’ll take legislation to get it done; the bill hasn’t been filed.

Job training money for community colleges

Gov. Nixon also touted his “Training for Tomorrow” initiative, a \$12 million grant program for community colleges to train Missourians with new job skills. The money comes from federal disaster recovery funds.

“When the money runs out,” Nixon said, “a lot of people will be trained and a lot of people will be working.”

Some dark budget clouds

We’ve been consulting with one of the state’s most respected budget experts. He noted that the last round of budget cuts announced by the governor assumed an overall drop in general revenue for FY10 to be a negative four percent. Our expert says there is “zero chance” of hitting a negative four percent. He says it’ll be worse than that, probably on the order of minus seven or maybe even minus eight percent. And – gulp – it could get worse than that!

He expects the additional shortfall will be filled with about \$1.3 billion in federal stabilization money. Looking ahead to FY12, our expert sees “financial Armageddon, a complete meltdown.”

California, New York, and Illinois are looking financial insolvency directly in the eye this July, absent another federal bailout.

...and that makes this news about as welcome as a toothache

It was fairly recently that the *New York Times* ran a story touting Missouri as a shining example of making sure those eligible for food stamps are enrolled in the program. According to the feds, Missouri had 98% of those eligible enrolled in the program.

Being thorough and everything, the *Times* reporter requested a bunch of data to figure out how Missouri was so good at this kind of thing.

Oops. It turns out a computer glitch was counting incorrectly. Instead of 98%, the actual number is closer to 70%.

Doh!

And it's not a laughing matter, either. Missouri has been earning bonus cash from the feds for more than seven years, based on the faulty numbers – something like \$14 million. So here's the big question – will the feds force Missouri to pay the money back?

Taking on the Tax Commission

The State Tax Commission this week raised the value of the most productive farmland for the first time in several years, angering farm groups. The end result of the decision – if it stands – will be higher property taxes for people who own that type of farmland.

Rep. Brian Munzlinger (R-Williamstown) says he plans to file legislation to undo the Tax Commission decision.

“This is the wrong time to be raising taxes on any Missourians,” he said. “People are struggling.”

E-Coli

We should find out in the next week or two the final results of the Senate Commerce Committee's investigation into the alleged cover-up of the E-Coli problems at the Lake of the Ozarks last summer. One early peek, provided by committee chairman Sen. Brad Lager (R-Savannah), indicates the report will be widely read, to say the least.

Lager told the *Columbia Daily Tribune* that the Department of Natural Resources director and a spokesman for Gov. Nixon should have been fired.

“You don't fire low-level employees and protect political cronies,” Lager said. He said the committee's report will outline exactly what happened and why, and what should be done in the future to protect the Lake of the Ozarks.

The bills just keep on coming

As of this writing, 90 bills and constitutional amendments have been filed this week. Here are some of the most interesting:

- HB 1365 specifies that no pharmacy can be required to perform, assist, recommend, refer to, or participate in any act or service resulting in an abortion.
- HB 1368 prohibits school districts from scheduling time off within five weekdays of Veterans Day unless Veterans Day is also scheduled as a day off.
- HB 1381 prohibits using a wireless telephone while driving.
- HB 1383 adds citizenship information to the sex offender registration form and requires the feds to be notified of all non-citizens on the registry.
- HB 1387 creates a sales tax holiday for guns and ammo.
- HB 1389 creates the Missouri Safe Cosmetics Act of 2010, requiring the disclosure of all cancer-causing or toxic ingredients.
- HB 1390 prohibits legislators from contracting with each other for political activities.
- HB 1395 allows felons to own some firearms if they're not concealable.
- HB 1407 seeks to regulate premarital agreements.
- HB 1414 prohibits the receipt of any benefits to elected or appointed officials who are found guilty or plead guilty to a felony.
- HB 1425 declares the period between Thanksgiving and Christmas to be the “Christmas Season” in Missouri.

As always, if you have questions about these or other bills, contact your lobbyist.

Quote of the Week

Regarding the proposal to ban meals from lobbyists, Rep. Charlie Norr (D-Springfield) said this:

“I’ve turned down filet mignon and lobster at the country club. If they want to buy me a sandwich, I don’t see anything wrong with it.”

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