



[TOP](#)

# Happenings at the Missouri State Capitol by Tila Hubrecht

MARCH 04TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

Happenings at the Missouri State Capitol by Tila Hubrecht

## **Helping Missouri Small Businesses Grow**

The Missouri House recently approved legislation that would provide a boost to the state's small businesses, including many in rural areas. House members voted in favor of a bill that would expand the Missouri Works program so that more of the state's small businesses would be eligible for workforce training benefits.

The sponsor of the bill noted that in many areas of the state there are small businesses that do not qualify to obtain the benefits provided through Missouri Works. These businesses fall short of the program's qualification criteria such as number of workers employed, or health insurance benefits provided. The bill approved this week would allow these businesses to pool together with businesses that do meet all of the program's criteria in order to receive benefits. Specifically, the bill would allow a group of businesses to qualify as long as the majority of them meet the program's criteria.

The Missouri Works program, which was created by the legislature in 2013, is the state's number one incentive tool for expansion and retention. The program helps businesses access capital through withholdings or tax credits to embark on facility expansions and create jobs. It works to assist companies with the training of employees in new jobs and the retraining or upgrading of the skills of full-time employees in retained jobs.

Supporters of HB 93 say the bill will help more small businesses take advantage of the Missouri Works program. The change will give the department more flexibility to distribute the program's benefits throughout the state.

### **Preparing Students for the Workforce**

The members of the Missouri House approved legislation this week to give students a more direct path to the workforce. The bill approved by the House would provide students with the option to obtain ACT National Career Readiness Certification. The certification is meant to demonstrate the individual has essential, verifiable workplace skills.

As the sponsor of the bill told her colleagues on the House floor, many students take the traditional ACT test and then end up not going to college. By making the National Career Readiness Certification an option, legislators hope to give Missourians the ability to document their essential job skills, while also giving employers a helping hand in identifying capable workers.

Right now Missouri has 84 counties that participate in the Certified Work Ready Communities program that is designed to attract, retain, and develop a workforce with the education and fundamental skills to succeed in the 21st century. More than 3,300 businesses across the state participate in the program and are ready to hire employees with National Career Readiness Certification.

### **House Approves Bill to Continue Support for Pregnancy Resource Centers**

The Missouri House took action this week to continue a tax credit program that helps secure funding for pregnancy resource centers and maternity homes in the state. Supporters say the tax credits encourage investment in programs that benefit many of Missouri's most vulnerable citizens.

Under current law, the tax credit for donations to maternity homes is set to expire June 30, 2020. The tax credit for donations to pregnancy resource centers expires December 31, 2019. The legislation approved by the House would extend the sunset for both credits to 2023. There are \$2.5 million in credits available each year for pregnancy resource centers. Each credit requires a minimum contribution of \$100, of which 50 percent is tax-credit-eligible. Donors can claim up to a \$50,000 credit per tax year. The maternity home tax credit works in similar fashion.

There are currently 69 pregnancy resource centers in Missouri that benefit from the tax

credits. The centers provide assistance to women with crisis pregnancies or unplanned pregnancies by offering pregnancy testing, counseling, emotional and material support, and other similar services to encourage and assist such women in carrying their pregnancies to term. The state currently has 17 qualified maternity homes, which are residential facilities established for the purpose of providing housing and assistance to pregnant women who are carrying their pregnancies to term.

## House Members Urge the United States Senate to Confirm Judge Neil Gorsuch as United States Supreme Court Justice

Members of the Missouri House took action this week to urge the United States Senate to confirm Judge Neil M. Gorsuch as a United States Supreme Court Justice. The House approved a resolution supporting Gorsuch, who was nominated by President Trump and currently serves as a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit.

The resolution notes that Gorsuch is an outstanding jurist with a commitment to upholding the United States Constitution and the rule of law. It also points out that he respects the role state government has and he consistently defends the constitutional rights to freedom of speech and religion and the right to bear arms. In passing the resolution, House members also praised Gorsuch for being a constitutional scholar, who will ensure the three branches of government act within the roles assigned to them by the United States Constitution.

Gorsuch's confirmation hearing in the Senate is scheduled for March 20.

## **House Speaker Forms New Committees to Examine Issues Ranging from Student Debt Relief to the Tax Burden on Working Families**

In recent weeks the Speaker of the Missouri House of Representatives has formed several special and sub committees to address issues ranging from student debt relief to agricultural education to the tax burden on working families.

The House Special Committee on Tax Policy for Working Families will take a closer look at legislation that could reduce the tax burden for Missouri families. One bill the committee is expected to review and discuss thoroughly is a state earned income tax credit. The House approved an earned income tax credit during the 2016 legislative session, but the bill failed to make it through the Senate. Legislators are again proposing legislation this year that would authorize a state individual income tax credit equal to 20 percent of any federal earned income tax credit claimed by the taxpayer. If approved this

year, the legislation could provide meaningful tax relief to more than a quarter million working Missourians.

The House Subcommittee on Agriculture Education will look at ways to bolster agriculture education in Missouri. The House Speaker and the chair of the House Agriculture Committee formed the subcommittee to look at ways to encourage more young people to pursue fields in the agriculture industry. The state currently has a shortage of young farmers with the majority of farmers falling in the age groups of 45-54 and 70 plus. More than 28,000 students are enrolled in agriculture education programs, but legislators hope to find ways to encourage even more young people to pursue careers in agriculture.

The House Subcommittee on Student Debt Relief will review legislation that could help Missouri students more easily repay their college loan debt. The committee is expected to review legislative measures such as the "Student Debt Relief Act" that would enable the Department of Higher Education to refinance student loans through consolidation. The legislation is meant to reduce interest rates, extend repayment periods, and enact a cap for monthly payments proportional to each graduate's amount of discretionary income.

### **Ensuring Students Gain Skills in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Fields**

On Thursday the Missouri State Capitol was filled with students and education supporters who made the trip to Jefferson City to observe the state's annual STEM day. The day is meant to highlight the important roles STEM education plays in the state's economy and the opportunities it provides to students. The day was highlighted by various hands-on technology displays, including an F-18 flight simulator provided by the Boeing Company. Students also competed for the Capitol Cup in the first Lego League Robotics Challenge. The event is hosted each year by the Missouri Chamber Foundation's Mathematics and Science Coalition. The coalition is a group of business, education, government and community stakeholders who have come together to foster collaboration to ensure Missouri citizens are equipped with knowledge and skills in mathematics, engineering, technology and science to prosper in a global economy.

In the coming weeks, the House is set to discuss legislation that would raise awareness of the need for young people to pursue STEM careers. The bill (HB 248) would require the Department of Economic Development to establish a statewide, online program for middle schools designed to promote careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

LAST UPDATED ON MARCH 04TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

<https://showmetimes.com/Blogpost/v6t9/Happenings-at-the-Missouri-State-Capitol-by-Tila-Hubrecht>

[Go to post](#)

More from ShowMe Times:



SUBSCRIBE TO "POLITICAL BLOGS"

**ShowMe Gold Sponsors**