

April 21, 2017



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Serving parts of Cass, Jackson and Lafayette Counties

Capitol Report

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Friends,

The House has approved legislation that contains several important tools to help better prepare Missouri's workforce for high-paying jobs. The bill is a combination of two pieces of legislation that have already received House approval, and a third that has received committee approval.

The first component of the bill passed this week is meant to provide a boost to the state's small businesses, including many in rural areas. The provision would expand the Missouri Works program so that more of the state's small businesses would be eligible for workforce training benefits.

In many areas of the state there are small businesses that do not qualify to obtain the benefits provided through Missouri Works, which is the state's number one incentive tool for business expansion and retention. These businesses fall short of the program's qualification criteria such as number of workers employed, or health insurance benefits provided. The bill 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 second component of the bill is meant to give students a more direct path to the workforce. The bill approved 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. 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.

The third and final component of the bill would allow a teacher to count hours spent in a local business externship as classroom hours of professional development. Supporters say this change would encourage teachers to engage in learning experiences with businesses in the community and bring real world skills back into the classroom. The change is meant to improve the link between schools and industry.

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Preparing Students for High-Tech Jobs (HCB 5)

The Missouri House passed legislation this week that would ensure high school students across the state have access to computer programming courses. The bill would require all school districts to offer a course on computer programming beginning after the 2017-18 school year. Currently, school districts may elect to offer such courses, but are not required to do so.

Supporters say the bill is meant to help prepare students for the many unfilled programming and coding jobs in the computer technology field. The bill would provide options for school districts to develop or use an established curriculum for the course. It would require that the course be taught by a certified teacher, but it could be offered as an online course or through videoconferencing. The bill would not require students to complete the course in order to graduate, and those who take a computer programming class could count it as an elective or practical arts credit.

Improving 911 Services for Missourians (HB 334)

The Missouri House of Representatives gave final approval to legislation designed to consolidate and provide adequate funding for the state's 911 call centers. The bill is meant to ensure Missourians have access to 911 emergency services in all parts of the state.

The bill would update the current funding model for 911 services that was put in place more than three decades ago and is based on a surcharge on traditional landline phone lines. Supporters of the bill note that more and more residents have done away with landlines and switched to cell phones, which has caused funding for 911 services to diminish. The legislation approved by the House would allow local municipalities to submit for voter approval a fee of up to \$1.50 for any device capable of contacting 911.

The legislation approved by the House would also allow and encourage municipalities to work together to consolidate 911 services. It also would implement a 3 percent surcharge on each retail purchase of a prepaid cell phone to provide additional funding for 911 services. An amendment added to the bill on the floor would put the state on track to implement a next generation 911 system that would allow for the use of electronic messages including text, images, video, and data.

Supporters say the legislation will provide a flexible framework for the consolidation of 911 public safety programs, which will in turn improve emergency response times, and will help provide 911 services in under-served areas of the state.

House Urges Federal Government to Bring Closure to Families of Missing Veterans (HCR 35)

The Missouri House has voted to urge the federal government to determine what happened to 15 Missourians who fought in the Vietnam War. Of 35 Missourians unaccounted for in that war, 20 are classified as killed in action. Fifteen Missourians are classified as presumptive finding of death.

The House approved HCR 35 to ask the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) to prioritize resolution of the cases of these 15 men. The DPAA was created in 2015 with the goal to remain committed to bringing the nation's missing and fallen heroes home. The DPAA has launched investigations worldwide to locate sites associated with unaccounted servicemen, including Vietnam where 1,617 Americans remain missing.

The sponsor of the resolution said it's time the families of these soldiers know what happened to them. "When our nation has the opportunity to bring our fallen heroes home and to provide

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closure to the families who simply want to know what happened to their loved ones and to give them an honorable burial, it's heartbreaking to see our nation fall short in its duties and to see these families forced to live for decades with the pain of loss and uncertainty," the sponsor said.

House Approves Bill to Ensure State Parks Are Properly Maintained (HB 698)

The Missouri House recently approved legislation meant to ensure the state doesn't create any new state parks until it catches up on taking care of the ones it has.

The legislation that is now under consideration in the Senate would require that before any new parks are established and before any parks are expanded by more than 10-percent in acreage, the state's current parks should be maintained, brought up-to-date, and have all maintenance work completed. The bill would allow the Department of Natural Resources to accept the donation or gift of additional land, but no work could be done to it except to address public health, safety, or welfare concerns, until the other requirements of the bill are met. The bill would also require the Department to report annually to the General Assembly on maintenance at state parks and historic sites.

Supporters say the bill is about making the Department of Natural Resources more accountable and more communicative with Missouri residents. They note that the state has more than \$200 million in state park maintenance backed up, but in recent years the department has created and prepared new parks while letting others stay at various levels of disrepair.

Opponents say that, while they support seeking greater accountability, a policy that prohibits new parks until all maintenance is caught up is unrealistic. They point out that there will always be maintenance and repair work that needs to be done at parks in the state. Opponents also say the bill will tie the hands of the new governor when the mismanagement lawmakers hope to prevent occurred under the watch of the previous governor.

Missouri Continues to See Positive Trend in Employment Statistics

The latest employment data is in for Missouri and the state continues to see a positive trend in the jobless rate. Missouri is now at 3.9 percent unemployment as of March, which is down from 4.1 percent in February. The number is also a significant drop from the rate last year when the state saw 4.5 percent unemployment in March.

Data from the Missouri Department of Economic Development shows Missouri gained approximately 770 jobs from February to March. The increase took Missouri's adjusted nonfarm employment to more than 2.97 million in March, which is an increase of more than 17,500 jobs from the same time last year.

Warmest regards,

Donna