

IN THE NEWS THIS WEEK

NEWS BRIEFS FROM AROUND THE CAPITOL AUGUST 25-31, 2009

August 25, 2009

Mo. House creates task force on school dropouts

KMOX, AP

A special Missouri House task force will be looking into ways to lower the state's high school dropout rate. **House Speaker Ron Richard** says he created the task force because the dropout rate has steadily increased in recent years. Richard has appointed Democratic House member **Jamilah Nasheed**, of St. Louis, as chairman of the task force. Nasheed is the founder of the "In it 2 Win" Coalition, which encourages dropouts to return to school or to pursue their GED.

NOTE: Information copied directly from media source

August 26, 2009

Legislators Smith and Brown resign, plead guilty to federal charges

St. Louis Beacon, Jo Mannies

State Sen. Jeff Smith, D-St. Louis, and state **Rep. Steve Brown**, D-Clayton, pleaded guilty Tuesday to obstructing justice in a federal investigation of Smith's unsuccessful run for Congress in 2004. Both men also resigned Tuesday from their seats in the Missouri Legislature. Gov. Jay Nixon called a special election for Nov. 3 to fill the two vacancies. In a statement issued by his office, he said: "The charges to which these officials pleaded guilty are a violation of the public's trust, and their resignations are both necessary and appropriate."

August 28, 2009

Feds look into Missouri's use of stimulus funds

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Elisa Crouch

The Federal Highway Administration has opened an inquiry into whether the Missouri Department of Transportation is doing enough to involve minority-owned businesses in projects that use federal stimulus dollars. The Missouri State Conference NAACP contacted Vice President Joe Biden and requested an investigation, according to Mary Ratliff, the group's president. "It is important that the African-American community is involved in the monies that come into our cities," she said Thursday. "We're a part of society, the economic growth of our communities." The NAACP accuses MoDOT of not following federal guidelines that require the recipients of stimulus funds to "make vigorous efforts" to maximize the involvement of minority and women-owned businesses. So far, the department has contracted \$297.8 million of the \$525 million in stimulus funds it received for transportation projects.

Tourism feels unfairly targeted by state budget cuts

KY3, David Catanese

Tourism officials say Gov. Jay Nixon's administration's \$7 million cut to their budget is disproportionate and shows a lack of respect for an industry that's key to the state's economy. Because of the ongoing recession, last week, Nixon announced how he'd slice an additional \$60 million from the budget. Tourism is one of the largest targets on his list. The head of the Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau says the cut means people outside the state will see fewer ads promoting Springfield, Branson and other Missouri cities.

August 31, 2009

NIXON'S WEEK 33 GRADE: A -

KY3, David Catanese

A year ago, candidate Jay Nixon was sailing towards the Governorship on the main premise that Medicaid cuts were bad policy. Last week, the Governor's office gently reminded this reporter that "not all cuts are bad." The Nixon administration's tussle with the state tourism division last week over the size and scope of the agency's budget cut shows why governing is always tougher than campaigning. Tourism officials feel their industry is being disproportionately targeted by the budget ax because of Nixon's rivalry with Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder. But Nixon received an assist from an unlikely source when The Missouri Record not only defended Nixon's decision but said he should have gone further. Could it be possible that Nixon is more secure politically in rural Seymour than urban St. Louis? The St. Louis Business Journal & The St. Louis American both complained that Nixon isn't devoting enough attention to their city. But Nixon's probably in pretty solid shape if that's his biggest political problem. Which it likely is not. Republicans are convinced there's more "there there" regarding E-Coligate



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and Nixon's inner circle. But if there is, an intrepid reporter is likely to find it before a State Senate committee that's still arguing over its purpose. A GOP Capitol observer whispered to me the difference between the Nixon and Matt Blunt's administration thus far: "The people around Blunt were motivated by money. The people around Nixon are motivated by fierce loyalty. They'll all fall on their swords before anything touches Jay." No politician wants to be anywhere near a scandal. And when Sen. Jeff Smith and Rep. Steve Brown went down, the Governor showed no crocodile tears. While even Republicans like Kinder praised Smith for his legislative work, Nixon showed no sympathy, offering a simple yet terse three line statement, describing the actions of Smith and Brown "a violation of the public's trust." In many ways politics is a team sport, but in the end, you're on your own. In his many years (and several tough losses) in Missouri politics, Nixon has proven himself to be ruthless survivor.

