

Employee Association/MoDOT Management Meeting April 7, 2003

In attendance: Mike Golden, Dave DeWitt, Jay Wunderlich, Steve Cox, Mark O'Dowd (via phone), Jeff Padgett, Jim Coleman (minutes).

Senate Bill 450 Update – Jeff Padgett updated the group on Senate Bill 450-. He said the bill creates a Division of Community Health in the Office of Administration. It combines the purchasing authority of all health care plans into one agency, with all reporting to one board. He said this bill would authorize a study of this plan, which would go into effect if no legislation were introduced to stop it. Padgett said this plan would take control away from our current healthcare administration board and the commission. He said Sen. Jacob might amend the bill to authorize the study but not make the board creation happen automatically. He said the Legislative Oversight Committee did not put a fiscal note on the measure, but the cost would be in the millions.

Mike Golden asked where the employees association stood on the bill. He said, “Your voice is important.” Steve Cox said he was working with Padgett on the issue, but needed more information to take a stand. If such a merger were to take effect, the average additional weighted cost to MoDOT employees could be \$1,800. Padgett said he assumed that all stand-alone plans would be consolidated into one plan, and the \$1,800 is what it would cost if our employees were currently in the Consolidated Health care plan.

Golden said that MoDOT and the Department of Conservation support getting this measure dropped. The University of Missouri has been publicly fighting the measure. He said the problem with this bill is there is no model to base any cost assumptions on, so any costs are just a guess. He said the bigger-is-better philosophy may or may not be better. He said it depends on which plan you are with.

Padgett said the drawback to the community health care board is there's no incentive to take care of employees. Cox said this is a main concern. He said everything becomes more political and the board forgets about employees. He asked Padgett to get him more information.

Jay Wunderlich encouraged the association not to undertake a full letter-writing campaign to get this measure killed. He said senators have told him they appreciate MoDOT lying low because now is not the time to fight it. Padgett said it might be better to fight the bill in the House, where there's a better chance of defeating it. Wunderlich said this bill is only in the Senate; there's no companion bill in the House.

Padgett said he would get information to Cox.

Association Legislation – Steve Cox and Larry Thompson discussed various bills the association is interested in.

House Bill 456 – This bill would allow members of the department’s and patrol’s retirement system to get one day of service toward retirement for each eight-hour period of unused accumulated sick leave earned. Golden said he couldn’t come up with any reliable data on how much time would be lost by employees using up sick leave rather than allowing it to accumulate under the current system. He said employees might not use sick leave if they knew it would count toward retirement.

Cox said if MoDOT management would support the bill, it would help. Thompson said the bill could be cost-neutral in that people not using sick leave would offset the \$36,000 fiscal note cost.

Wunderlich said the bill hasn’t gotten out of the House. Thompson said the bill’s sponsors say that other agencies would like to have this measure also.

House Bill 443 – This is the House version of Senate Bill 479 and deals with options for using annual leave. Although SB 479 probably is not going anywhere, HB 443 might. Thompson said that over 4,000 hours of annual leave were swept away last year, while this measure would allow them to be reused instead of lost. Thompson said this could be a real benefit since state employees are not getting raises or promotions. Dave DeWitt said the measure was probably dead unless the Office of Administration buys off on it. He asked if there was a way to amend the bill to authorize a study of the annual leave process, similar to the Healthcare bill. He said this could tie in with the Office of Administration’s total benefit package.

Thompson said that currently, about 1 percent of MoDOT’s employees are affected. This measure would help people who can’t take time off.

Cox asked if it would be possible to “reset the clock” on the time period that annual leave has to be used. Golden said he would check with MoDOT Controller Jim Derisinski to see what could be done.

Thompson said since it was late in the session, some of these measures might go only as amendments rather than as stand-alone legislation.

Cox said that dealing with employees using annual leave is a supervisor’s problem and it needs to be managed as to when people can and can’t take annual leave. Golden said he would discuss the issue with district engineers and functional unit leaders.

House Bill 583 – This is the governor’s retirement incentive legislation. Golden said MoDOT’s main concern is that we would lose a lot of people, about 10 percent of our workforce, if this legislation passes, and it would be costly to replace this much experience. He said our workforce is already down; this would hurt us even more.

Wunderlich said the department has not opposed this legislation.

Mark O'Dowd said there are alternatives to the annual leave plan. He said it can be handled with scheduling and is mainly a problem with maintenance workers.

Employee Upgrades – Golden and DeWitt said that people are being promoted, if they are capable. Cox said there needs to be consistency in how promotions are handled, and there isn't. He said morale is low. DeWitt said Human Resources is studying a career ladder system. Golden said that 20 percent of the workforce had some salary adjustments because of promotions.

DeWitt said management has never told managers not to promote people along career ladders. He said there is, however, a need to have the amount of work for higher-level people to do. Thompson said he's not opposed to people getting raises but there needs to be some consistency in how they are applied. He said it seems the squeaky wheels get the promotions over those who don't say anything. He said not all business units and district engineers promote along the same lines. Some people are promoted; others doing the same job aren't.

Cox thanked the department for those who did get promotions.