

The **Association** report

from the **Capitol**

May 25, 2005

Our Association fared pretty well in the legislative session that just ended down at the state capitol. We won a couple of significant ones, especially a law change that was critical for this year. And a couple more - we simply ran out of time.

Probably the most pressing need, that of changing the "overtime" statute, was added to SB367 by amendment. It passed both chambers and was sent to the governor. This is legislation that would allow our workers to retain as much as 240 accumulated overtime hours to use at their discretion. Beginning next year, Jan. 1st, 2006, our employees would have been allowed to keep no more than 80 overtime hours without this change in current law.

Another win for us in the '05 session was stopping legislative proposals that would have consolidated our retirement system with MOSERS. HB333 would have required the two retirement systems be merged by Jan. 1, '06. The bill was sponsored by the chairman of the House Retirement Committee who held a public hearing on the bill in March. We believe that the merger proposal left questions unanswered and would result in the loss of a stable, responsive retirement system that our Association helped establish more than 50 years ago.

The merger issue was threatening enough that Association President Mark O'Dowd traveled to the capitol to present testimony in opposition to the proposal. HB333 subsequently was never brought to a vote and died in committee.

If the '05 session could have lasted a couple of hours longer, another of our priorities, SB317, likely would have passed. This was known as the "prior-service purchase bill" and would have allowed employees to buy at a reduced rate, as much as four years prior, non-federal public service for retirement credit. The bill was on the House Consent Calendar, "Senate Bills for Third Reading," but died in the No. 10 position when time expired at 6 p.m. on May 13th.

The bill was sponsored by Sen. Rob Mayer of Dexter. It passed the senate on Mar. 8th, cleared the House Rules Committee on Apr. 4th and was added to the house calendar on April 22nd, positioned in the No. 52 slot. It gradually moved up the debate calendar and started the final day of the session in the No.14 position. It, along with 18 other consent bills, died when time expired.

Still another issue left on the table was the "work zone safety bill." This was a victim, not so much for a lack of time, but of highly divergent philosophical views (legislative squabbles.) In their original form, both HB518 and SB221 were intended to enhance worker safety by increasing penalties for repeat offenders and defining motorist behavior that would be threatening to highway workers.

Controversial amendments were added that affected seatbelt usage, motorcycle helmets and the use of remote cameras to convict certain traffic violators. Several legislators had strong feelings about the amendments and a compromise between the house and senate could not be reached before adjournment. As is sometimes the case at the capitol, a proposal of merit is killed by those who want to add their projects which haven't picked up enough momentum to pass on their own.

We didn't get everything we wanted this year. But the issues that were facing a Jan. 1st deadline threat were resolved. Over the years, we've learned that patience is a necessary commodity when working at the capitol. Look to next year with optimism.

**From Harry Hill, Lobbyist
Missouri Highway and Transportation Employees' Association**