

# The **Association** report

## from the **Capitol**

May 19, 2009

The '09 legislative session came to a predictable conclusion in the Missouri Capitol at 6 p.m. Friday (5-15-09.) I use the word "predictable" for a couple of reasons. First, state law requires that the regular session of the general assembly end on that day and hour. Secondly, it was predictable because the difficult economic conditions limited what legislators were willing to tackle.

This was especially true when it came to state employee benefits. Early in the session, there were discussions of a modest state worker pay raise. However as revenue numbers started trickling in, any mention of a pay raise was quickly shelved.

Energized by our success in the '08 session with the deferred compensation revival, Rep. Ray Salva was determined to move it along even further this year. In '08, you recall, Rep. Salva led the effort in the house of representatives to increase the state's contribution to the deferred comp plan from \$25 (where it had been stuck for several years) to \$50 a month. A compromise was reached that resulted in a \$10-a-month increase, to \$35.

Rep. Salva recalled that during the '08 debate on the deferred comp issue, a commitment was made by legislative leaders to move it on up to the \$50 level. The Sugar Creek legislator offered an amendment to make the change during house debate on appropriations bills. There were a number of house members who supported the idea, reminding their colleagues that it would promote saving among state employees. When a vote was taken, however, there appeared to be just too much apprehension about the state's financial situation and the proposal was defeated.

Some observers said that the vote is a temporary setback, but for future considerations it is a positive step to have the deferred comp issue debated even in a lean year.

The rough economic times had an affect on another part of our Association agenda - that of retirement issues. Our MPERS retirement system has been hit especially hard by the downturn in the stock market. A couple of bills were introduced early in the session that were intended to result in some saving for MPERS. HB347 and SB150. would have disallowed the use of overtime pay when calculating a retirement annuity. Neither of the bills advanced beyond the committee level.

Unless the economy rebuilds quickly and strongly, retirement issues will likely be dealt with on a broader scale during next year's legislative session. Two key legislators in the MPERS situation, Sen. John Griesheimer and Rep. Charlie Schlottach, have displayed a willingness to work with the Association on these retirement issues. Both men are on the MPERS board. Sen. Griesheimer came to a January '09 Association meeting held in Jefferson City to discuss retirement issues. Rep. Schlottach has agreed also to meet with the Association, perhaps late in the summer.

The '09 session can be reviewed as one where we were able to discuss our issues and position ourselves for future legislative sessions when the climate and conditions are more favorable for state employees and MoDOT.

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