

The **Association** report

from the **Capitol**

March 15, 2004

It's half-time over at the capitol. The Missouri Legislature is scheduled to begin its annual spring break Thursday, March 18th. The 10-day recess will give legislators and lobbyists a welcome opportunity to spend time with family and friends at home as well as assess two and ½ months of progress.

Our work continued last week as Association President, Steve Cox, and Rep. Gary Kelly presented legislation to the House Retirement Committee that would offer our employees a more efficient conversion of unused sick leave to retirement credit. HB1316 would allow sick leave which has not been used by retirement time to be converted to retirement credit in 1-day or 8-hour segments. Current law permits unused sick leave to be converted to retirement credit in units of one month. Thus, for each block of 168 hours of unused, accumulated sick leave, a retiring employee is awarded one month of retirement credit. Unused sick leave hours that are left over after retirement credit is awarded on a 168-hour basis are essentially wasted. On some occasions, employees who are nearing retirement will miss work to "burn" the hours of sick leave that can't be converted to retirement credit.

Retirement system authorities agree that current state statutes dealing with unused sick leave are not efficient. A convincing argument can be made that encouraging workers to stay on the job up to time of retirement is a more productive way of doing business. However retirement system officials maintain that there would be considerable expense involved in making changes required in computer systems to offer retirement credit in increments smaller than 168 hours. A solution to this, it was determined, is to offer a full month's credit for any unused sick leave in amounts less than 168 hours.

Our Association, working closely with Rep. Kelly, Sen. Delbert Scott and retirement system officials, have produced legislation which would allow employees to convert all unused sick leave to retirement credit. Rep. Kelly offered a house committee substitute to that effect at Thursday (Mar.11) morning's committee hearing. Because the proposal was a substitute, the fiscal impact was unknown and the committee could make no recommendation on the matter.

Sen. Scott is sponsoring SB 1384 which would allow the full conversion of unused sick leave in the same manner as Rep. Kelly's substitute. SB 1384 has been referred to the Senate Pensions and General Laws Committee. A hearing has not been scheduled.

Legislators are scheduled to return Monday afternoon, March 29, for the second half of the legislative session. The session is scheduled to end at 6 p.m. on Friday, May 14th.

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