



THE STOUFFER REPORT

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Workers' Compensation Bill is Fair for Workers, Employers

Do you think if someone is drunk on the job they should receive money if they get hurt? What if you knew 30 percent of the costs to remodel your house was to pay for the contractor's worker's compensation expense? The Missouri Legislature tried to address some of these issues in the 2005 Legislative Session and 2005 Special Session.

Missouri's workers' compensation system was in dire need of reform. No major changes had been made to the system in 11 years. Although safety improvements have decreased the number of work-related accidents in our state, workers' comp costs to employers have not decreased. So while Willis Brothers Inc. in Macon, Fowler Bus Co. in Richmond, ConAgra Foods in Marshall and others in the 21st District are paying out more for coverage, working conditions are being improved so employees are injured less and require less compensation. That is why legislation was necessary to stabilize the program.

Senate Bill 1 tightens the definition of work-related injury to ensure that the Missouri workers' compensation system only covers valid claims, exempts injuries from unknown causes, and reduces the amount workers can collect if they are injured while drunk or in violation of safety regulations.

This new system also improves communications between employees and workers. Under the new law, employers must post in a visible place notification of the requirement employees must inform their employers of an accident within 30 days.

A small wording error required the workers' compensation bill to be taken up again during special session because it threatened the entire workers' comp system itself. So lawmakers took up a new version of the bill and easily sent it through the Legislature.

However, an emergency clause was needed to enact the bill immediately upon the governor's signature. Otherwise the bill would not be instituted for 90 days, and Missouri would be without a workers' comp system for that period. Unfortunately, members of the minority thought it was necessary to put politics before Missouri's workers and voted against the emergency clause causing the failure of immediate implementation of the bill after the governor's approval.

I am proud the Legislature was able to come together and at least fix the errors in the first bill even though we were unable to come together on the emergency clause.

If you have questions or comments about this issue or any other issue please call toll free 866-768-3987 or by email at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

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