

# Capitol Report

## Senator Luann Ridgeway

**February 20, 2006**

Summary for the busy reader:

1. SB 849 reviewed, a bill impacting project labor agreements and prevailing wage laws in Missouri.
2. The midwife bill status is discussed.
3. A bill to require photo ID's of all Missouri voters is pending.
4. The quote of the week: "As a woman and a hunter, it's still safer for me to hunt with Dick Cheney than it is for me to ride in Ted Kennedy's car."

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### SB 849

How did we take one of the best non-discrimination bills for jobs and the economy and turn it into the biggest pro-discrimination bill this legislature has seen in the last 25 years?

This was the question posed in the Missouri Senate this week by an astute observer. The target of the question is SB 849, which started out as a bill to do two things: first, to end the discrimination that allows state and political subdivisions to require "union-only" labor on taxpayer funded projects; and second, to put an end to the massive and costly regulations our public schools and other political subdivisions must comply with concerning prevailing wage laws.

If a camel is a horse that's gone through the committee process, then SB 849 is a classic example of a horse getting morphed into a camel by the compromise process. The bill has been turned inside out.

You should be cautioned that the bill you see on the General Assembly web site is NOT the language that is currently being floated in the halls of the Capitol. If you are a school administrator or an independent business person that would like to bid on public projects, you should contact me and I will send you the draft language that is being proposed as a compromise. This language should concern you. The biggest indicator of how much this bill has changed from its' original intent is this: One of the main lobbyists representing union-only businesses has been trying to convince me to vote against SB 849 for weeks. When I told him I was now inclined to vote against it, his response was

almost like I'd thrown cold water in his face. His exact words were "NO, we like the bill now!"

It's fine if a private contractor wants to bid a project to union-only businesses. But when tax-payer dollars are paying for public contracts, I believe the contracts should be open for union or non-union businesses and labor. Non-discrimination is the best policy. Whichever business can provide the best work for the best price should win the public contract. Public projects should not, in effect, say to non-union shops "you need not apply". Non-union businesses pay their taxes like everyone else and, therefore, in public contracts, should be treated equally. This was the intent of SB 849 as originally filed. Now the language is limited and muddled.

Prevailing wage issues are also addressed in SB 849. Prevailing wage is a mechanism to try to protect public works projects from going to foreign labor and to make sure that local contractors, who pay average wages for the area, have a fair shot at obtaining the contract. This is a reasonable goal. However, I question why the state has to interject a mandate into this area. School boards and city councils are elected by the people and, as such, should be accountable to them. If they hire a bunch of Canadians to do a local job and a local contractor, employing local people, fails to win the contract, it seems to me that the local voters would hold them accountable. But the state has rules in this area. In urban and suburban areas, the state mandated "prevailing wage" can be fairly close to what school or municipalities would pay on the open market (though it is usually higher). But it is often a very different story in small town and rural Missouri. For example in rural areas, a school may have to pay significantly more for a building than a private business would have to pay for exactly the same building. And guess what? Schools survive on your tax dollars so that means your taxes are supporting these artificially government-mandated higher costs. That's one of the reasons your property taxes are so high.

The "compromise" language currently in the Capitol significantly increases the compliance burdens regarding prevailing wage. Let me be clear: There is NOTHING in the drafts of SB 849 that would repeal prevailing wage. Anyone interested in these issues should be calling their legislators immediately.

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### The Midwife Bill

A bill was heard this week in Senate Committee that would legalize the practice of midwifery in Missouri. Midwives are people skilled in one narrow area, which is prenatal care and delivery of babies. Last year, there was another attempt to legalize midwifery. Frankly, the bill was a mess and I could not support it.

This year, the bill is in much better shape than it was last year. Current law allows certified nurse midwives to practice under the direct supervision of a physician. Missouri used to allow midwives to practice in Missouri, but the practice was outlawed in the

1950's. Certified nurse midwives were made legal during the 1990's. The pending legislation would allow lay midwives, who are not nurses or physicians, to legally provide pre-natal care and attend deliveries. If this legislation becomes law, prospective lay midwives would be required to go through a nationally recognized training course and apply for a midwife license in Missouri. The bill has not yet been voted out of committee. I would be happy to provide a copy of the bill to anyone interested.

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### Election Fraud Attacked

SB 730 / 1014 was heard in Senate Committee this week. This legislation tightens up requirements for the identification required of voters. It would require registered voters to show government-issued photo identification before being allowed to vote. It would also prohibit the use of paychecks, utility bills or bank statements as valid identification and requires the state to issue free photo voter IDs to registered voters who cannot acquire photo ID's. This bill has not yet been heard by the full Senate.

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### Quote of the Week

A lot of jokes have been made this week at the expense of Vice President Dick Cheney. I'm a hunter and a person who enjoys shooting sports. From what I can tell, this was purely an accident. It could even be argued that the injured man failed to follow hunting protocol by failing to let the other hunters know that he had rejoined the hunting party after departing to look for a downed bird. Most of the ire seems to be coming from a press corps who is offended generally that a local Texas press outlet was notified first (rather than the "elite" media) and that it was an accident involving firearms and hunting – which are both decidedly against the grain of the politically correct crowd.

As I heard it said in the Missouri Capitol this week:

"As a woman and a hunter, it's still safer for me to hunt with Dick Cheney than it is for me to ride in Ted Kennedy's car."

So much for "political correctness".

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