



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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Senate Bills Sent to the Governor

JEFFERSON CITY — In the final week before we in the Missouri Senate broke for a weeklong spring recess, lawmakers have approved the first Senate bills sent to the governor this year.

Senate Bill 284 allows cable and telecommunications companies to receive statewide licenses to provide cable service. Currently, cable providers and telephone companies looking to enter the cable market must establish franchise agreements with local governments in order to provide service. Similar legislation introduced last session did not pass. The legislation will become law with the governor's signature. Proponents say the measure will improve competition and lower prices for consumers.

The Senate has sent to the House legislation implementing the Green Power Initiative, which sets targets for the use of renewable energy sources by certain Missouri utility companies. SB 54 sets goals for the use of renewable fuels, such as wind, solar, hydroelectric and biomass power, at 3 percent by 2012, 7 percent by 2015 and at least 10 percent by 2020. The Missouri Public Service Commission is responsible for overseeing and reporting the utilities' progress. House approval returns the bill to the Senate. Once the two bodies agree on the language of the legislation, it will then be sent to the governor.

Also sent to the House was legislation implementing state controls over when Missouri public schools can begin classes. SB 64 prohibits the school year from starting earlier than 10 days before Labor Day, the first Monday in September. To begin classes before that, school boards must hold public hearings and vote for an earlier date. Bill supporters say early start dates often lead to early dismissals due to the heat and humidity.

Senators gave first-round approval to a resolution asking voters to change the Missouri Constitution to overturn a court decision affecting sex offenders. Senate Joint Resolution 9 would modify a constitutional provision prohibiting state laws from applying retroactively. In June, the Missouri Supreme Court ruled that because of the constitutional provision, sex offenders convicted prior to Jan. 1, 1995, do not have to be included in the statewide sex offender registry. That is the date Missouri began requiring registration. Final Senate approval sends the measure to the House.

The Senate Health and Mental Health Committee has advanced SB 577, which implements MO HealthNet in place of the state's Medicaid system. The new program focuses on wellness and preventive care over more costly emergency care. It also emphasizes transparency and choice to produce more informed health-care consumers. Supporters of the measure say it is needed to create a more efficient health-care program. Opponents say it will mean fewer benefits for needy Missourians. The legislation is scheduled for a first-round vote.

After lengthy debate this week, including a filibuster lasting through Monday night, lawmakers were unable to come to a compromise on a plan to sell off student loans to pay for construction projects on Missouri college campuses. The proposal, labeled the Lewis and Clark Discovery Initiative and included in SB 389, calls for the sale of assets from the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority, or MOHELA, to raise \$335 million for the construction of campus facilities.

The plan has taken several forms since it was originally introduced in early 2006, but the current opposition focuses on whether this will reduce MOHELA's ability to offer low-interest loans to future students in need of assistance to afford them the opportunity to go to college.

In spite of repealing the life sciences projects and including in the bill provisions prohibiting such research at MOHELA-funded facilities, several groups continue to oppose the plan. Because of this sticking point, opponents are refusing to allow the plan to come to a vote.

Nearly lost in the parliamentary jousting over the MOHELA asset transfer is another controversial provision in the legislation affecting higher education funding. SB 389 includes language penalizing public institutions that raise tuition higher than the rate of inflation. Colleges and universities that fail to meet the standard could lose 5 percent of their state funding. SB 389 supporters have vowed to bring up the legislation again later this year.

The Missouri Senate has adjourned for the annual spring recess. Senators will reconvene at 2 p.m. Monday, March 26. The First Regular Session of the 94th Missouri General Assembly runs until Friday, May 18.

As always, please feel free to come join us at the Capitol, or let me know your thoughts. We are always available to answer your questions on all issues facing the state of Missouri. Please feel free to contact us with your concerns at (573) 751-2108 or via e-mail at Frank.Barnitz@senate.mo.gov.

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