



Monday *MONITOR*

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WRONG PRIORITIES IN SENATE: 5+ HOURS OF DEBATE ON ABORTION—ZERO ON PREVENTION

As members of the press (and Missouri health advocates and concerned citizens) have remarked, the Missouri legislature appears to be obsessing on abortion at the expense of programs that will help Missourians in these tough times—healthcare, social services, jobs, a fix to the economy, prevention...

On its first day back from spring break (see over), the Senate debated—for more than 5 hours—**SB264** sponsored by **Sen. Rob Mayer** (R-Dexter). This is the companion bill to **HB46 & 434** (Davis/Pratt) that was debated for two legislative days in the House. The bill, which creates a new crime of ‘coercion of an abortion’, renders a woman in an abusive situation incompetent to consent for herself to an abortion, even if she believes it to be the best choice for her. It also renders the physician liable to criminal charges if he or she would perform the abortion. In addition, the bill meddles with the already well-functioning informed consent and counseling process making it more difficult for the woman seeking that abortion with no increased benefit to her.

In an interesting and revealing exchange between Sen. Joan Bray and Sen. Mayer, Sen Bray inquired: ‘Shouldn’t we be equally as careful to make sure that a woman isn’t coerced into childbirth?’ Sen. Mayer’s repeated response was: ‘The state of Missouri’s policy is to protect life.’

Sen. Bray also noted that for all of the time spent debating further restrictions to abortion, no time is spent debating bills that could safely reduce abortions in the state. Sen. Mayer responded, after hearing about some of the programs and services in the bill, that this would be something he could perhaps support and wondered out loud why the bill was not being given a hearing. When Sen. Bray reminded him that the bill—SB329—was referred to his Education Committee, he stumbled and then defended himself by saying he had already heard some of her bills.

SB264 was laid over Monday evening after it became clear that opponents were prepared to talk for some time on the bill. Thanks to Sens. Bray, Callahan, Days, Justus, Smith, Wright-Jones and Wilson (who was resting up in preparation for debate) for speaking out.

‘WHY WOMEN SEEK ABORTIONS’ REPORTING BILL HEARD IN COMMITTEE

HB570, sponsored by **Rep. Belinda Harris** (D-Hillsboro) would require abortion providers to report to the state information demographic and technical data that is already being reported. In addition it would require providers to ask women—and report to the state—the reasons why they are seeking an abortion. Perhaps a focus on increasing access to, and effective use of, contraception would be a better road to pursue.

CONNECTING THE DOTS BETWEEN MISSOURI MILITIAS & ANTI-ABORTION VIOLENCE

While the Missouri Highway Patrol is being strongly criticized by Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder for a recent report on the modern militia movement and ties to anti-abortion violence, it should be noted that a [report produced in 1999](#) by MO Citizens Education Fund provides historical evidence of such ties. Nationally, Planned Parenthood has a full-time Security Department dedicated to monitoring anti-abortion groups, as well as death threats, vandalism, arson, and other illegal actions directed at PP affiliates.

HEADS UP: WOMEN’S HEALTH/PUT PREVENTION FIRST LOBBY DAY APPROACHING

On Tuesday, April 28th advocates and supporters of reproductive healthcare and comprehensive sex education, will be in the Capitol to talk with elected officials about putting Missouri on the right track and making prevention a priority. Go to: www.ppmissouri.org for more information.

ECONOMY? WHAT ECONOMY? MISSOURI LEGISLATURE PREOCCUPIED WITH ABORTION

By Barb Shelly, Kansas City Star editorial page columnist

On its first day back from spring break, the Missouri Senate spent a little more than five hours debating a controversial bill that would make it a crime to coerce a woman into having an abortion. The extent to which this kind of coercion actually happens is questionable, and proving it is problematic. The sponsor, Rep. Sen. Rob Mayer, laid the bill over after Democrats showed no signs of giving up on a filibuster.

The attention given to an abortion bill shows that the more folks promise change in Jefferson City, the more things remain the same.

Before the session, the talk was all about cooperation and getting the state's economy back on track. Now, midway through, the debate is once again about abortion.

An anti-coercion bill was introduced last year and went nowhere. Had the legislature passed it, there was a good chance then-Gov. Matt Blunt would have signed it into law. This year, there's a good chance that Gov. Jay Nixon, a Democrat, will veto such a bill. As the former attorney general, he need only cite the legal pitfalls.

The slim chances of getting this bill signed into law make the prolonged debate even more of a waste of time.

ABORTION ISSUE UPSTAGES JOBS IN MISSOURI LEGISLATURE [excerpted]

By Tony Messenger | POST-DISPATCH JEFFERSON CITY BUREAU | Thursday, Mar. 26 2009

Jobs, jobs, and jobs.

Those were the priorities Missouri's political leaders listed for themselves as the General Assembly got to work in January. They were the priorities of Gov. Jay Nixon, a Democrat, and of Senate President Pro Tem Charlie Shields and House Speaker Ron Richard, both Republicans. The three state leaders hitched their futures together and tied them to the creation of jobs.

So what was the Senate discussing on the first day after spring break, about halfway through the legislative session?

Abortion.

For five hours on Monday, Republicans tried to thwart a Democratic filibuster of a bill that would create the new crime of coercing an abortion. The same bill passed the House last year and never earned floor time in the Senate because Democrats promised to stall it. But this year, new Senate floor leader Kevin Engler had promised conservatives in the Republican caucus that he'd make sure the bill got floor debate.

Engler knew the bill wouldn't pass in its current format. Attorneys in both parties who occupy the Senate believe the bill is unconstitutional. Pro-abortion-rights Democrats, such as Sen. Joan Bray of University City and Sen. Jolie Justus of Kansas City, stood in its way. But Engler had a dilemma. Spend too little time on the issue, and he faced revolt. Spend too much time on it, and he faced revolt from others.

This is the reality of political debate in the General Assembly. "Two hours isn't going to cut it," he said about an hour and a half into the debate. So senators talked.

They didn't talk much about the bill, mind you. A filibuster is about wasting time. They talked about women's rights. They talked about Twitter. They talked about former colleagues. They talked about everything but, well, jobs.

"We now have given almost twice as much time to this bill as we have the economic development bill," Senate Minority Leader Victor Callahan, a Democrat from Independence, said during the filibuster, which worked, as the bill stalled. Indeed, for all the blustery speeches about jobs and fixing Missouri's moribund economy, the General Assembly hasn't spent much floor time at all talking about jobs.

The House quickly passed the so-called "Quality Jobs" bill, which gives incentives to employers who promise new jobs, but the bill stalled in the Senate. Late Wednesday afternoon, two days after the abortion debate, the Quality Jobs bill finally made its way to the Senate floor. It didn't pass. And even the debate raised questions about those promising new jobs. [...]

Other bills that might create jobs are also stalled. [...]

So with a month and a half left in the session, the stated priorities of the three men who stood together on the steps of the Supreme Court building shortly after the November election remain unmet.

"We're going to work together," Nixon said then.

And perhaps they have.

But during a late-night filibuster discussing abortion and not jobs, their "shared principles" seemed like a distant memory.

Statewide Website

www.ppmissouri.org