

Week of December 15, 2017

No Movement for Utility Reg Reform

I have been writing over the past few weeks that Ameren appears to be putting together a larger coalition to advance its agenda of updating the regulatory framework for investor-owned utilities. Statements of support have been issued by the retailers' association, the grocers' association and the Missouri Chamber of Commerce.

BUT... the opponents – particularly as led by Sen. **Gary Romine** in the Senate – are as entrenched as ever, and appear immovable right now. The basis of their opposition boiled down to a single question that they say has not been answered: “Where’s the need?”

They are deeply skeptical that Missouri needs to change the way rate cases are handled, and they view proposals from the utilities as schemes aimed to increase returns for their shareholders.

Ray for County Executive

Bill Ray has started a campaign committee to run for St. Louis County Executive as a Democrat. He’d be joining incumbent **Steve Stenger** and businessman **Mark Mantovani** in that primary. From Ray’s LinkedIn... Missouri Outreach Manager for Small Business Majority; Commissioner on Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Commission for St. Louis County; Chairman of Berkeley Economic Development Sales Tax Commission; Board Member of North County Incorporated....

Allen for City Council

Former Rep. **Sue Allen** filed to run for Town and Country City Council. [See it here.](#) This is the seat of **Linda Rallo**. Rallo is an early childhood advocate who spearheaded the cigarette tax which failed last cycle. Rallo isn’t running for re-election. The two have been friends since they room together in Jefferson City when Allen was a rep and Rallo LA-ed for **Cole McNary**. Rallo’s husband, **Nick**, will be Allen’s treasurer.

More on HB 1273

Over the weekend I polled pre-filed HB 1273 which “grants authority to the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority to issue loans to refinance certain public or private student loans.” The respondents supported the idea (44% to 25%).

But those with an understanding of MOHELA, and the debt market are less enthusiastic. For starters, MOHELA already has the ability to refinance both public and private student loans.

However, it’s made a conscious decision to stay away from originating that type of loan because they tend to be risky and expensive to the underwriter. That’s because so much of the student loan population is over-leveraged. The exception would be to focus on the sliver of the market with super high credit scores and high income. But those folks can already refinance their loans at competitive rates.

In other words, regardless of whether HB 1273 becomes law, don’t hold your breath waiting for MOHELA to enter this market.

White Drops \$100K into Campaign

In the large contributions below, Rep. **Bill White** contributed \$100,000 of his own money into this campaign for Senate 32. He’s facing Rep. **Charlie Davis** in the Republican primary next year to replace termed Sen. **Ron Richard**. It’s a safe Republican seat.

One observer: “[White] is expected to have over \$225,000 cash on hand on next report. This contribution will give him a cash advantage of more than \$200,000 from the last report... dramatically changing the outlook of the race and makes him the clear front runner...”

Greitens Punches Down

Governor **Eric Greitens** went after state senator **Jill Schupp**, saying she’s to blame for the slow action on the St. Louis Veterans Home. [See his statement here](#). This is Trumpian – and contrary to the usual rule in politics not to “punch down.” It usually debases your position of power to engage with someone lower on the totem pole. But Trump has changed that practice by attacking all sorts of people – NFL players, wives of fallen soldiers, TV personalities.

The Trumpier Greitens acts the more perplexed I am. I imagine The Trump Show will grow more tiresome and his approval ratings will continue to slide. Why tie yourself to this wagon?

Food Stamps Changes

Governing Magazine reports that the Trump administration is green-lighting state attempts to change the food stamp program implementation. [See it here.](#)

For years, many conservative states have tried to enact policies that would effectively restrict the number of people using food stamps and how they can use those benefits. Under the Obama administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) often blocked those attempts out of concern that they would either be ineffective, too expensive, difficult to enforce or illegal. That's about to change.

The USDA is preparing to give states “new flexibility” in administering food stamps, which is properly called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In a letter to SNAP directors on Nov. 30, a USDA administrator promised increased federal cooperation with states to reduce fraud, promote employment, and improve customer service for food stamp recipients.

In Missouri, some pre-filed legislation dealing with SNAP includes Sen. **Denny Hoskins'** [SB 610](#) would cut off benefits to individuals who are delinquent on their child support payments, and Sen. **David Sater's** [SB 561](#) changes work requirements for SNAP.

Bits

Thomas Neill was elected to the Appellate Judicial Commission for a term commencing January 1, 2018. The term of the present Eastern District attorney member, Thomas Burke, expires December 31, 2017. Neill beat **Molly Jones** by a little over 200 votes in a run-off. The Appellate Judicial Commission selects “panels” for judicial vacancies on the Missouri Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of Missouri.

Governor **Eric Greitens** appointed **George Lysinger** as Saint Claire County Assessor, and **Keat Catlett** as Cooper County Clerk.

St. Louis City chose Regional Strategies – the lobbying firm started by former labor leader **Jeff Aboussie** – to handle its lobbying needs in Jefferson City.

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