



News and Notes - July 20, 2005

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE - There is always a gray cloud around every silver lining.

Cynical as it may sound, that phrase became all too true in the final days of Fiscal Year 2005, the first year of the last five in which the Missouri Division of Tourism received full funding as mandated by law. With only a week remaining in the most recent fiscal year, Governor Blunt used his veto pen to call for a \$4.5 million cut to the Division of Tourism's Fiscal 2006 budget. In the preceding months, the budget had weathered a couple of attempts to cut it during the appropriations process in the House and Senate, including one attempt to reduce it by the same amount ultimately ordered by Governor Blunt.

The surprise action by the Governor's office was the main topic of discussion at a planning retreat held by the Tourism Commission in Hermann the week following the budget veto. Where to make the cuts dominated discussions and eventually led to commissioners tabling any decisions in order to study recommendations made by Division staff. Those decisions were made Tuesday (July 19) during a conference call meeting of the Commission. Missouri Travel Council has requested that a copy of approved cuts be made available to distribute to industry members.

According to MTC Legislative Consultant Dale Amick, the veto was probably the result of a combination of factors. The travel industry has done a fantastic job the past few years educating the legislature about the importance of tourism in Missouri's economy. With a change of administration this year, though, we probably took for granted that our thoughts were shared by the Governor's staff. The Department of Economic Development factors heavily in the decision. As tourism funding has slowly increased the past few years, DED programs have repeatedly been cut. When department directors were instructed to find cuts, tourism became an immediate target. The final reason, which may be as important as any, is that budget officials within the governor's office panicked. Even before revenue collections were completely in, the governor's office began making cuts to balance the budget handed to him by the legislature. Even if budget officials were skeptical about collections, it would have been much better to withhold a portion of disbursements to agencies rather than reducing the budgets at the beginning of the fiscal year. Through a withhold, it would have been much easier to restore the money later in the year if collections surpass expectations. A restoration of funding is still possible, though, and Sen. Jim Talent and other legislators have urged the Governor to do just that should the revenue side of the budget improve later this year.

As the Division and Commission decide where to make cuts, Missouri's travel industry

should now begin focusing on how to avoid similar circumstances in the future. The Missouri Travel Council board discussed a few of these options at its regular board meeting last week. First, it was agreed that before the funding issue can be addressed, the issue of the control of the Division of Tourism must be resolved. Over the past few years, it has appeared that the Department of Economic Development has slowly increased its control over the Division of Tourism, especially in budgetary matters. MTC has urged the Tourism Commission to address this issue, since it is really the Commission's authority that is being challenged. Article 620.010 of the Missouri Revised Statutes reorganized the Department of Economic Development, and in so doing, designated the Division of Tourism as a Type III agency. The same statute outlines the supervisory authority of the Department over Type III agencies. We contend that the Tourism Commission alone has control over all aspects of the Division of Tourism. The duties and responsibilities of both the Commission and the Department must be outlined in coming months. Resolving this issue will not restore the \$4.5 million this year, but it may make it a bit easier for the Division and Commission to address budget concerns.

Finally, we must seriously consider ways to prevent the pillaging of the Tourism Fund. HB 188, which set up the funding mechanism by which the Division of Tourism is now funded, has served the industry well for more than a decade. For all practical purposes, that funding mechanism no longer exists. Despite the fact that legislation was passed mandating the funding of tourism in a certain manner, that legislation has been and is being ignored. We MUST explore ways to either protect the existing formula or replace it. This discussion must be very frank with ALL options put on the table.

Due to the importance of this issue, I will ask the Missouri Travel Council board to authorize the scheduling of a legislative summit to be held with representatives of our industry partners in MACVB, Missouri Attractions Association and Missouri Hotel Lodging Association. Missouri's travel industry has developed into a powerful lobby that has earned the respect of many legislators over the past few years. We should be prepared to offer our supporters in the legislature a way to address the budget issue during the next session. It is also my intent to set up a meeting between the governor and a small group of key tourism industry members within the next few months. We should learn from our mistake and not limit our future efforts to the legislature. It was very evident that we offered little or no attention to the governor's office this year.

As most of you know by now, the hierarchy of Missouri Travel Council has changed over the summer. Former President Joe Donnelly resigned his position at the beginning of the summer in order to take a new job out-of-state. While Joe hated leaving MTC in the middle of his second year as president, the job offer by Gaylord Entertainment in Nashville was a phenomenal opportunity for him and his family. Despite leaving the state more than a month ago, Joe has remained in contact concerning the ongoing budget crisis. Joe can be e-mailed at jdonnelly@gaylordhotels.com or jdonnelly@gaylordentertainment.com. His office number is 615-316-6802. Missouri Travel Council wishes Joe the best of luck in the future.

It is my honor to now lead what I consider to be the most respected industry association in Missouri. As the umbrella organization for Missouri's travel industry, Missouri Travel Council will continue its efforts to forge alliances with other organizations in an effort to ensure the growth and prosperity of Missouri's second largest industry. I am humbled by the fact that I now hold the same position that was once held by some of this industry's strongest voices. I have had the pleasure of working with many of them, and have even

served under many others. It is my hope that I can lead this organization with even a portion of the competence displayed by that list of past presidents.

Our membership is fortunate to be served not only by a strong MTC board, but also by individual regional associations and alliances. Over the next two years, it is my intention to visit with each of those associations as a spokesman for Missouri Travel Council. I would like to request that each local association provide MTC Executive Director Pat Amick with a schedule of meetings for 2006 so that visits can be mapped out for the coming year.

My office, e-mail and telephone are always available to any person who wishes to discuss industry matters.

Gary Figgins, President, Missouri Travel Council

(573-888-1100 – gfiggins@showmemissouri.net)

EVENT ADMINISTRATOR NEEDED --- Missouri Travel Council has posted a job opportunity on its website and is seeking candidates for the position of Administrator for Missouri's on the Move – a tourism sales mission scheduled for April, 2006. If you are interested in more details, or know someone who might be, contact the MTC office immediately – we are seeking proposals no later than August 1. Contact 573-636-2814 or email pat-amick@socket.net.

MTC ACTIVITY -- The volunteers and staff of Missouri Travel Council have been extremely busy the past few months. We are proud to report a successful “Media Relations Boot Camp” workshop held in June in Columbia. We extend our appreciation to Renee Graham and the Columbia CVB for their co-sponsorship and assistance with this workshop. Attendees gave the workshop an excellent rating!

The 9th Annual Joint Meeting Planners Tradeshow sponsored by MTC, MSAE and SGMP was held in Jefferson City on July 12 with over 100 meeting planners attending and a sold out exhibit area with 76 booths. “Under the Big Top” proved a fun theme and the tradeshow was an excellent opportunity for our members to visit with meeting planners in the association and government markets. Thanks to all who participated and to the MTC Showcase Committee led by Dianne Gillespie of the Springfield CVB.

MTC SCHOLARSHIPS – Do you know of someone who is pursuing a degree in a hospitality related major? Do you know of an intern working in the industry this summer? If they are attending an accredited college or university in the state of Missouri, and they are currently enrolled as a Sophomore, Junior or Senior with a grade point average of 3.0 or better they are eligible for one of MTC's two \$1,000.00 scholarships. The next deadline is November 1, 2005. Information is posted on the MTC website and can be downloaded easily – check out -- <http://www.missouritravel.com/scholarship.htm>

INDUSTRY BIDS FAREWELL TO SUPPORTER -- Missouri's Tourism Industry said farewell this month to one of its most avid supporters. Sen. Larry Gene Taylor, who provided enthusiastic support for tourism during terms in the House and the Senate, died of complications of cancer on July 6.

The 51-year-old senator, who was serving his first term in the Senate, previously served two years in the Missouri House of Representatives. The Republican from Shell Knob garnered 69 percent of the vote last November to replace Doyle Childers, who left the senate due to term limits.

Sen. Taylor was a prominent voice in the lead to protect tourism funding during his two years in the House and this past year, his first, in the Senate. Representing the 29th District, consisting of Ozark, Taney, Stone, Barry, Lawrence and McDonald counties in Southwest Missouri, his input during budget appropriations was always persuasive. His presence will be sorely missed.

EVENT CALENDAR

2005 MISSOURI SHOWCASE MARKETPLACE – August 21-22, 2005 – Quality Inn & Suites, Hannibal.

MISSOURI TRAVEL COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING – October 11, 2005 – 10:30am-Noon – University Plaza Hotel, Springfield (in conjunction with Governor's Conference on Tourism.

2006 MISSOURI'S ON THE MOVE MARKETING TRIP – April 23-28, 2006 – Indianapolis, Columbus, Cleveland, Pittsburg

This email NEWS IN BRIEF is being sent to you to keep you informed. If you have additional individuals in your company who would also like to receive this information, please let us know.

PAT AMICK, Executive Director
Missouri Travel Council, 204 E. High St., Jefferson City, MO 65101-3287
573-636-2814 – FAX 573-636-5783
pat-amick@socket.net
www.missouritravel.com