

Drug Testing for Welfare Recipients

This week the Healthcare Transformation Committee of the Missouri House, that I chair, voted out a bill that would require applicants and recipients of benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program to undergo drug testing if a screen revealed a reasonable cause to suspect illegal drug use.

We need to put strong incentives into public policy for people to not use drugs. We need to put the interests of the taxpayers who are footing the bill above those of people who abuse the system and let taxpayers support them while they spend their own money on drugs.

I co-sponsored the bill, HB1377, which would require every TANF recipient and applicant to be screened, but only those suspected of illegal drug use, based upon the screen, would be tested for drug use. Under the bill, those who tested positive would be given a reasonable time to complete a drug treatment program, but those who failed, or tested positive a second time, would be ineligible for benefits for a year. Other members of the household who remain eligible would still receive benefits, but they would be administered through a third party.

The federal law makes it difficult for us to test every applicant. This bill is the toughest approach we could take and avoid a successful Constitutional challenge.

The TANF program provides cash payments only to poor families with children. We need to take steps to protect these children from exposure to drug use and make sure that taxpayer funds are not enabling drug behavior. These poor parents need a reason not to waste precious dollars on drugs, dollars that should be spent on their kids. This bill gives them a good reason. The text of the bill can be found online at <http://www.house.mo.gov/billtracking/bills101/biltxt/intro/HB1377I.htm>



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Government is Too Big to Succeed

Rep. Jim Guest | Guest Writer
MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Last week, the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission kicked off their first round of hearings on the causes of the economic meltdown on Wall Street. The commission is being compared to the the Pecora Commission launched in 1932 to investigate the causes of the Great Depression. The Pecora commission is beloved by those who believe the solution to every problem is more laws because it was used to justify a number of new laws, including Glass-Steagall. Of course, none of those laws addressed the real causes of the Great Depression. It was the introduction of unsound monetary policy and central economic planning pursued by the Federal Reserve that really threw everything off balance. The Fed was founded in 1913 to stabilize the economy and prevent a recurrence of the short-lived Panic of 1907, but instead it promptly produced the Great Depression which lasted more than 15 years.

The Pecora Commission was stacked with big government sympathizers who blamed the free market and the gold standard without question, and without any consideration of government interference in the economy. This panel is no different. Never will they contemplate how government steered us into this crisis, and what perverse incentives can be removed or repealed so that the market will function more smoothly. Never will they discuss how investment should come from savings, not debt. Never will it occur to them that fiat money, artificially low interest rates and the whole Federal Reserve System might be unwise and unstable, not to mention unconstitutional. The answer will always be more government regulation and oversight. It is predictable that this government panel will eventually come to the firm conclusion that government needs to be bigger, and that the market is just too free.

How sad is this when exactly the opposite is true?

It is big government that gives out tax breaks to engineer behavior, often creating large pockets of malinvestments. It is government that created the FDIC and the Fed as lender of last resort which all encourages moral hazard. It is big government that gives bureaucrats the ability to bail out cronies with taxpayer dollars while screaming that the economic sky is falling if they don't. It is big government that every year adds new layers to the already labyrinthine regulatory code that smaller businesses can't keep up with while simultaneously

preventing new businesses from emerging. It is big government that misdirects economic productivity into bankrupt businesses that they consider to be too big to fail.

If this panel was serious about understanding the root of the problem, as they claim to be, they would have people testify who understand the crisis and saw it coming. To my knowledge, none of them have received a phone call. The problem is those people would say too many things the government panel would find inconvenient. They would point fingers at too many of the state's anointed. They would recommend getting government out of the way of the free market and getting back to simply protecting contracts and punishing fraud. But the biggest fraud is perpetrated by the Federal Reserve. No one on this panel takes that viewpoint seriously. Instead, they will be asking people who are still scratching their heads at how they could have missed the housing bubble what new regulations they can put in place to prevent future bubbles. Thus, I don't expect much real wisdom to come out of this current investigation.

"Cut Through the Chase"

Food Prices Leveling!

Diane Olson | Guest Writer
MISSOURI FARM BUREAU

2009 brought some good news for grocery shoppers! Following a year of rising food prices, consumers were pleased to see food prices dropping or at least not increasing.

The American Farm Bureau and state Farm Bureaus conduct a quarterly survey to track trends in food pricing. The same 16 items surveyed each time are representative of a cross section of agricultural commodities and can be utilized in preparing a variety of meals.

Missouri shoppers paid \$42.47 for these items in the fourth quarter. This amount shows a drop of \$3.47 from the third quarter price of \$45.94. A year ago, fourth quarter 2008, those same prices were \$49.54. This is a marked drop of \$7.07 from year to year.

Price declines occurred in 11 items and increased for five. The greatest quarter-to-quarter price drops were noted in deli sliced ham, shredded cheddar cheese, bagged salad mix and boneless chicken breasts.

One gallon of whole milk dropped 21 cents from the third quarter to a price of \$2.66. The same time last year, the average milk price was \$3.62 per gallon.

Sluggish retail demand, particularly for dairy products and meats, coupled with lower wholesale prices paid to producers, contributed to the decline in retail food prices reported for the fourth quarter.

The Show Me state once again found prices for the list of items less than the national average of \$42.90. The local savings was only 43 cents, however, Missouri shop-

pers typically experience food dollar savings compared to the nation's prices.

Consumers paid less for many food items during the final quarter of 2009. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the average price farmers received for their products compared to a year ago, remained flat or showed negligible changes.

The farmer is the source of our food products. Prices in the grocery store are beyond their control, but they work every day to produce an abundant supply of food for all of us. Prices may increase and decrease, but it is important to be reminded of the farmer's role in our safe and affordable food supply. So, as you shop and eat, be reminded to ...thank a farmer.

(Diane Olson, of Jefferson City, is the director of promotion and education for the Missouri Farm Bureau)



Sen. Jim Webb wants Mass.' Brown seated before more health care votes

Senator Jim Webb (D-VA) issued the following statement in response to the special election results in Massachusetts:

"I congratulate Scott Brown on his victory, and I look forward to working with him in the United States Senate.

"In many ways the campaign in Massachusetts became a referendum not only on health care reform but also on the openness and integrity of our government process. It is vital that we restore the respect of the American people in our system of government and in our leaders. To that end, I believe it would only be fair and prudent that we suspend further votes on health care legislation until Senator-elect Brown is seated.

(Editor's Note: Sen. Jim Webb is a native of St. Joseph)

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