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A TALE OF TWO PROPOSALS: ASSISTANCE FOR UNEMPLOYED, MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR UNINSURED AS LEGISLATURE ADJOURNS

St. Louis, MO – The Missouri General Assembly adjourned today after a legislative session that offered legislators many opportunities to assist low income families during these difficult times, often at little or no cost to the state. While some positive steps were taken, other critical proposals fell victim to political posturing.

Two examples of opportunities state legislators had to assist low income Missourians, without any financial cost to the state, were decided during the last week of the session. Proposals to extend unemployment insurance for laid-off workers, and to provide health care coverage for low income parents, utilized federal funds to help struggling Missourians. The health care proposal was also funded through money offered to the state by Missouri hospitals. Both proposals would have helped at least 35,000 Missourians, at no cost to the state.

Extended Assistance for Unemployed

This week, Missouri legislators did pass legislation allowing for utilization of federal funds for the extension of unemployment insurance, which provides benefits to laid-off workers. About 35,000 Missouri workers who are facing long term unemployment will receive up to 20 additional weeks of benefits from this extension. In addition, tens of thousands of unemployed families will see enhanced benefits. Missouri is estimated to receive \$200 million in additional federal funds for this extension. As of March, Missouri had approximately 262,000 unemployed people, leaving the state with an unemployment rate of 8.7 percent.

“Passing this extension in benefits for unemployed Missourians was an important step in utilizing federal funds to help Missouri’s working families, and our state’s economy, recover from this recession,” said Amy Blouin, Executive Director of the Missouri Budget Project. “By working together in a bi-partisan fashion, our legislators have made a positive impact that will be felt across the state.”

Squandered Opportunity for Uninsured

However, the state legislature did adjourn for the year before agreement was reached on a proposal to provide health care coverage to uninsured, low income Missouri parents at no cost to the state. A plan which made use of \$93 million in federal funding, as well as over \$50 million offered by Missouri's hospitals, was supported by the Governor, Republicans and Democrats in the State Senate, as well as health care advocates, providers, insurers and business leaders. It failed due to lack of support from the State House Leadership. The proposal would have provided health care coverage to 35,000 Missouri parents with incomes between 20 - 50 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

"These 35,000 low income Missouri moms and dads could have received health care coverage at no cost to our state, but instead House Members squandered this critical opportunity," said Blouin. "Our state had much to gain, and nothing to lose, from assisting these families. They must now continue to live without health care access, and our state economy will not see the stimulative impact of these significant federal funds."

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The Mission of the Missouri Budget Project is: To advance public policies that improve economic opportunities for all Missourians – particularly low and middle-income families – by providing reliable and objective research, public education and advocacy. More information is available at www.mobudget.org.