

The **Association** report

from the **Capitol**

April 26, 2004

A faint light at the end of the tunnel? Is the state's financial picture starting to brighten? There are indications for optimism.

For the past couple of years, legislation has been difficult to move. Even relatively minor changes in worker benefits or retirement systems are met with resistance. Legislation which might (and I emphasize "might") carry a small price tag, is shelved - shoved back into a corner of a legislative closet for a more appropriate time. Recently a bill we are pushing was delayed because of the perceived cost, less than \$50,000. A retirement system official remarked that "two or three years ago, that bill would have passed without the blink of an eye."

But have we turned the corner? Recently appropriations committees have started to discuss state worker pay raises - possibly \$1,200 a year for all employees. Its not what our people need or deserve but it's a start. And possibly of more significance, it could be an indication that economic forces have changed in such a manner as to improve the state's revenue stream.

Meanwhile, just weeks remain in this year's regular legislative session. (The 92nd General Assembly is scheduled to close at 6 p.m. Friday, May 14.) Our Association is pursuing alternatives for advancing provisions of our legislative priorities. Specifically this would be a more efficient conversion of unused sick leave to retirement credit (HB 1316) and a statutory change that would allow our MoDOT employees to buy prior public service work for retirement credit. The provisions of this bill are found in Sen. Harry Kennedy's SB1216.

Last week, our Association held a revised version of "lobby day" at the state capitol. An ice cream social was held in the 3rd floor rotunda between the house and senate chambers. More than 50 gallons of ice cream with popcorn, peanuts and soft drinks was served by Association members to legislators and their staff. Larry Thompson and Association President, Steve Cox, greeted the dignitaries in the relaxed setting as they moved to and from their respective chambers.

**From Harry Hill, Lobbyist
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