

## **TAX CREDIT VOUCHER BILL TAKEN UP, THEN PARKED**

The House debated HB 639 (Jane Cunningham) for several hours on April 11, but did not bring the bill to a vote. The bill establishes a "scholarship charity" tax credit voucher aimed primarily at lower income students in provisional and unaccredited districts. Several amendments were offered and adopted. HA 2 (Bob Johnson) requires all schools accepting scholarship students to use the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) for testing students and was adopted by a vote of 86-67. HA 3 (Sara Lampe) clarified that the bill will have no effect upon the state's obligation to fund public schools or on appropriations for public schools. This amendment will ensure that the fiscal note for the bill will clearly show the loss of up to \$40 million to state general revenue caused by the bill. The amendment was adopted by a vote of 135-19, apparently without its impact being fully understood by the bill's proponents. HA 4 (Michael Corcoran) delays the effective date of the entire bill until such time as the school aid formula is fully funded. The amendment was adopted by a vote of 80-72. After taking on these amendments, the bill is no longer considered desirable by school voucher proponents. The bill was then laid over without reaching a perfection vote. Strong lobbying efforts by the Missouri State Conference of NAACP Branches, Missouri NEA and other public education advocates have clearly helped shed light on this bill, as demonstrated by adoption of the amendments and delaying the bill's vote. However, Rep. Jane Cunningham reportedly indicated an intention to continue to lobby on the bill's behalf and seek to change the votes of members who have had trouble deciding how to vote on the issue. The bill may now have to wait until after the House completes budget debate. Stay tuned for possible further action alerts if the bill is expected to be taken up again for further debate. Thanks to Mary A. Ratliff, State NAACP President, for her leadership on this issue!

Charles E. Smith,  
National NAACP Board Member  
and First Vice President, Missouri State Conference of NAACP Branches