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**Capitol Report**

**January 29, 2021**

***Weekly Overview***

Was it the State of the State Address or was it just a speech given in the Senate chamber? Hallway denizens have been arguing this question ever since Governor Parson delivered his remarks and presented his FY 2022 Budget in the Senate chamber yesterday. Many events this year have been altered due to COVID and Governor Parson’s State of the State Address was no different. The address is always presented to a joint session of the Missouri General Assembly in the House chamber. The Governor’s full cabinet is in attendance as well as statewide elected officeholders, member of the Supreme Court and other specially invited guests. The speech is usually over an hour long and includes many interruptions for introductions and applause. But this State of the State address was much different.

Last week we reported that Senator Andrew Koenig had tested positive for the virus and was home quarantining. This week, a staffer close to him also tested positive which caused two other senators to self-quarantine. Additionally there were a couple of non-COVID absences, making it questionable whether the Senate could muster a quorum for an official joint session. In the meantime, both the House and Senate Democrats decided that they would not attend the address in the House chamber unless everyone was required to wear a mask. The mask request was denied and this made it nearly impossible for House Republicans to establish a quorum for the joint session. Tensions flared between the Governor and the House Speaker on how to move forward with the address, but no solution was agreed to and the Governor’s plans for his first State of the State as the elected Governor quickly unraveled.

Eventually, an agreement was reached and the Senate agreed to host the Governor in the Senate chamber. So the Governor delivered his State of the State speech and presented his budget, not to a joint session, but to the Senate in the chamber with a few dozen representatives in attendance. You can find the details of the Governor’s speech and proposed budget below in this report.

The additional COVID positive cases in the Senate ruined all plans to begin work SCS/SB 51 which would provide liability protections to businesses arising from COVID-19 lawsuits. Only four weeks into the 2021 Session and both chambers have already been affected by COVID positive cases.

***In the news…***

* On Wednesday State Budget Director Dan Haug said in a briefing session prior to the State-of-the-State address that health care costs in the budget are unsustainable if they continue on the current trajectory. The FY 2022 proposed budget allocates $450 million more to the Medicaid Program than the amount budgeted for the current fiscal year. He warned that increases of this magnitude can be absorbed in a good year, but not in an average year. Governor Parson emphasized during his speech that his proposed budget would fully fund the Medicaid expansion approved by voters in the August, 2020 primary election.
* This week *The New York Times* compiled vaccination data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that showed that Missouri is last among the states to deliver vaccine shots. According to that article, only four percent of Missourians had received a first shot and only about half of the vaccines available had been administered.