

Briefing the Joint Study Committee: What Can Go Wrong?



The Sunset Provision: The Legislature faces a “sunset” provision that repeals the Food Market Development Authority effective December 31 of this calendar year. The Authority is a state agency, funded in part by general funds, which promotes consumption of catfish, red meat, and poultry. The Legislature did not deal with the December 31 termination issue during the recently-ended regular session. The meat industry persuaded the Governor to call a special session in November to consider the agency’s fate. The Speaker of the House and Senate President agreed to refer the matter to the **Joint Committee to Review the Food Market Development Authority** that the Legislature created three years ago in anticipation of the sunset provision.

Joint Committee Expectations: The Joint Committee met briefly for organization purposes three months ago. The minutes of that meeting state:

Senator Anne Barber, Chair, reported that the Bureau of Legislative Research had assigned Mr. John Turcotte and two other full-time analysts to assist the Joint Committee. The Joint Committee adopted a motion by Representative Karen Clarke and Senator Joseph Booth that the staff:

- Determine the costs and benefits of Authority programs including a geographic breakdown (by legislative district if possible) of meat industry employment and employees of the Authority;
- Answer Senator Dale Claxton’s question: Given the inelastic demand for food, is it not economically unsound for the state to promote the consumption of meat? Do these promotions merely cause consumers to switch from one type of meat to another and in effect create a perpetual “canceling out” effect? and;
- Develop a list of policy options for the Committee’s consideration including but not limited to an option recommended by the staff concerning whether the Authority should be terminated.

The Chair announced that Mr. Turcotte would present the staff report in three months.

Briefing Day Three Months Later

You are a member of the Joint Study committee. At 10:00 a.m. today, Mr. Turcotte will make the staff’s presentation. Because of the presentation, you declined an invitation to a hometown brunch that will be attended by prominent political supporters. You left your hometown at 4:45 a.m. this morning and drove 162 miles in a steady rain. Upon arrival, you attended two *ad hoc* legislative meetings. At noon, you are meeting an important area customer threatening to cancel her account with your business. You promised your family that you would buy a portable TV on sale at “Capital Wholesale Club” before making the drive home. You cannot find your checkbook but are nearly positive it is in the glove compartment in your car. You are limping because your new shoes don’t fit. Your cellular phone has rung four times in the last half hour (two wrong numbers, the Chair of the Joint Study Committee reminding you to attend the meeting, and Mr. Turcotte also reminding you to attend). After taking a sip of de-caf that you thought was real coffee, you take your seat in the committee hearing room. You say to yourself: “Things have to get better. Thank goodness the committee minutes made it clear to Turcotte what we wanted. I should be out of here in a half hour.”