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Missouri Budget Committee Work Reaches Next Step

The Missouri House Budget Committee has unveiled the Fiscal Year 2025 operating budget, totaling \$49.9 billion. It prioritizes education, infrastructure, and workforce development, with significant investments in areas such as K-12 education, transportation, and broadband access. Key highlights include funding for road reconstruction, teacher salary increases, and broadband expansion. The budget also addresses government initiatives to support state employees and combat social issues like human trafficking. The committee emphasizes fiscal conservatism, ensuring accountability and transparency in budget decisions.

Some of the key highlights are as follows:

- \$727.5 million investment for rebuilding I-44
- \$100 million for rural and low volume roads
- More than \$43 million for additional road improvement projects
- Over \$16 million in port infrastructure projects
- \$120.6 million increase to fully fund the foundation formula
- \$14 million increase to fully fund school transportation
- \$4 million to increase teacher pay to \$40,000 per year
- 3.2 percent pay raise for state workers
- \$1.5 billion toward broadband access
- \$8 million for National Guard
- \$2 million for pregnancy resource grants

These initiatives demonstrate a comprehensive approach to governance, addressing immediate needs and long-term challenges across the state.

Missouri House Passes Bill to Protect Military Signing Bonuses

We also signed off on a bill aiming to relieve the financial burden on Missouri's military personnel by ensuring that a significant portion of their signing bonuses remains with them, rather than being surrendered to the government. This initiative, supported by the House, reflects the sentiment that those serving in the armed forces deserve support from their home state.

Currently, Missouri law provides a tax deduction for active and reserve members of the Armed Forces. House Bill 1713 extends this deduction to signing bonuses, recognizing their importance in major life events such as purchasing a home, a vehicle, or supporting a growing family.

Our soldiers, along with their families, already dedicate a substantial portion of their lives to serving their country. This legislation ensures that when they receive a bonus, it directly supports them and their families, without a significant portion being withheld by the government. It also acknowledges the significance of federal tuition assistance as a draw for young people considering military service. By reducing Missouri's cut into signing bonuses, we aim to support recruitment efforts and honor our military personnel.

This proposal comes at a crucial time when both recruitment and retention in Missouri are experiencing a decline of around 30 percent.

We need to ensure that our military personnel receive fair treatment and support. This legislation not only honors their service but also acknowledges the sacrifices they make in protecting our freedoms. By extending tax deductions to signing bonuses, we are sending a clear message: Missouri stands with our brave men and women in uniform.

Missouri House Honors State's Veterans with Passage of HB 1496

This week, we also signed off on a bill to further honor those who have served our country so faithfully. HB 1496 establishes the "Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, and Operation Allies Refuge" program, which will award medallions, medals, and certificates of appreciation to Missouri veterans. The bill language states that every veteran who honorably served, at any time, on active duty in the United States military from October 7, 2001 through August 30, 2021 is entitled to receive the aforementioned.

Veterans are entitled to this program, allowing for the following criteria:

- Is or was a legal resident of Missouri at the time of enter, discharge, his/her death, or served in a unit of the Missouri National Guard (regardless of state resident status)
- Honorably separated or discharged from service, still in active service (honorable) status, or was in such status at the time of his/her death.

Furthermore, the programs' awards and recognitions are to be awarded regardless of whether an eligible veteran was under the age of 18 at time of enlistment, served within the United States or in a foreign country.

We are deeply committed to the well-being of our veterans who have selflessly protected our nation, and wish to honor and recognize the sacrifices they have made. This bill passed with support from both sides

of the aisle, and goes to show our unwavering commitment to honoring the bravery and sacrifice of our veterans who served honorably during pivotal periods in our nation's history. This is just one small step we can take to express our profound gratitude and ensure that their contributions are recognized and commemorated for generations to come.

Safeguarding Election Integrity

This week, we also gave initial approval to **HB 1413**, a crucial piece of legislation aimed at ensuring the integrity of elections within the state. This bill would introduce a requirement for Missouri driver's licenses or nondriver's licenses issued to citizens of the United States, including naturalized citizens, to bear a distinguishing mark indicating their citizenship status on the front of the license.

This legislation addresses existing loopholes in the law that create challenges in preventing non-citizens from voting. Certain practices by contracted Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) services have inadvertently registered individuals who are not citizens or are otherwise ineligible to vote. By implementing a citizenship marker on identification documents required for voting, the bill aims to empower election workers to screen potential voters at polling places effectively.

Our current laws have a blind spot in identifying violations related to non-citizen voting, and we know that it is very difficult to verify legal citizenship, as our election authorities have no tools to do so. Non-citizens have been verified as having been placed on voter rolls, and unfortunately, most are only discovered through special circumstances. This bill specifies that the license holder is a citizen of the U.S. and would denote such through a distinguishing mark. Most Missourians believe that only citizens should be allowed to vote, and that is the intent of our current laws. We believe it should be easy for legal citizens to vote in our state, and not cheat the system.

HB 1413 not only seeks to safeguard the integrity of Missouri's elections but also aims to restore public trust in the voting process. By clarifying citizenship status on identification documents, the legislation ensures that only eligible citizens participate in the electoral process. This measure is vital in preserving the integrity of Missouri's elections and restoring faith in our democratic process.

HB 1413 still awaits the chance to be third read on the House floor before moving on to the Senate.

Improving Missouri's Electoral Process

The Missouri House of Representatives is taking a significant step towards improving election procedures with the initial adoption of **HB 2140** with the hopes of bringing about several crucial changes to election administration in the state.

HB 2140 addresses various aspects of the electoral process, from updating filing dates for candidacy declarations to enhancing protections for election officials. The bill also introduces measures aimed at safeguarding the integrity of absentee voting and expands access to provisional ballots.

Here is a breakdown of the key provisions and changes proposed in the bill:

- **Notification of Elections via Email:** The bill allows the officer or agency responsible for calling an election to notify the election authority via email.

- **Changes to Filing Dates for Declaration of Candidacy:** The bill alters the opening and closing dates for filing a declaration of candidacy for offices in political subdivisions or special districts.
- **In-Person Voting for Covered Voters:** Covered voters, including those eligible to register to vote, interstate former residents, and new residents, may now vote at the office of the election authority on Election Day for presidential and vice presidential electors.
- **Confidentiality of Lists of Absentee Voters with Permanent Disabilities:** The bill specifies that lists of absentee voters with permanent disabilities shall be kept confidential and not be publicly displayed or shown to unauthorized persons.
- **Signature Verification for Absentee Ballots:** Election authorities are required to compare the signature on the absentee ballot envelope with the signature on the voter's registration record. Inconsistent signatures will result in rejection of the ballot.
- **Expansion of Provisional Ballots:** Provisional ballots, previously available only at elections with federal or statewide candidates or measures, are now available at any public election.
- **New Election Offenses and Penalties:** Threatening or harassing election officials, attempting to pressure them to violate election laws, and doxxing them or their families are designated as election offenses, with varying degrees of severity.
- **Extension of Electioneering Restrictions:** Restrictions on electioneering activities, previously applicable only near polling locations on Election Day, are extended to locations where in-person absentee voting occurs during the absentee voting period. Circulating initiative and referendum petitions are also added to the list of prohibited activities near polling locations.
- **Creation of Missouri Elections Sovereignty Act:** This act reserves the right for the State of Missouri to determine the time, place, and manner of its state elections, asserting that federal laws regulating elections shall apply only to federal elections.

HB 2140 would have a positive impact on Missouri's elections, as the provisional changes are improve election administration, clarify procedures, and provide additional protections for election officials. These reforms are necessary to streamline our election procedures, enhance transparency, and protect the rights of voters, all while contributing to the integrity and efficiency of our electoral process.

Valentine's Law seeks to Improve Public Safety

The Missouri House of Representatives has perfected **HB 1692**, also known as "Valentine's Law", aimed at enhancing public safety by addressing concerns regarding fleeing suspects. Inspired by the sacrifice of fallen St. Louis County Police Detective Tony Valentine, the bill introduces measures to combat fleeing suspects, streamline penalties for resisting arrest, and establish stricter consequences for aggravated fleeing. Representative Justin Sparks, the bill's sponsor, highlighted the importance of prioritizing public safety and honoring Detective Valentine's legacy. House Speaker Dean Plocher praised the bill's passage, emphasizing support for law enforcement and community safety. With this legislation, Missouri aims to honor Detective Valentine's memory and ensure the safety of its residents.

I have enjoyed the many visits to the office this week; please come by when you are in the Capitol!
You are always welcome here.
If you would like to tour your State Capitol, please call the office!

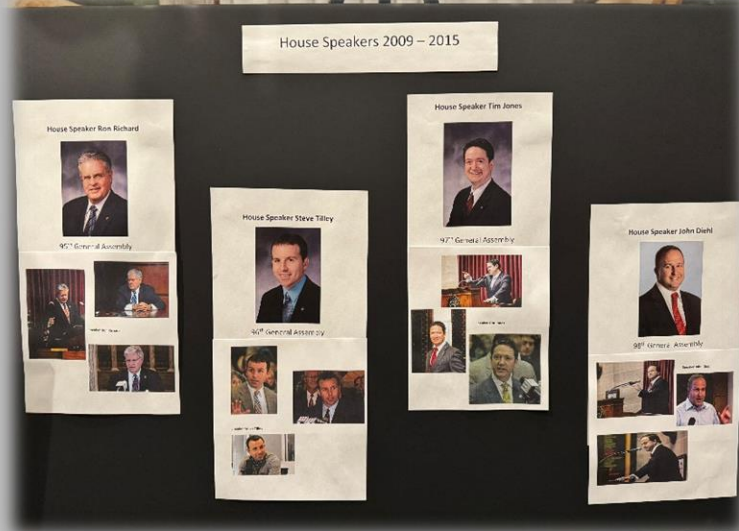
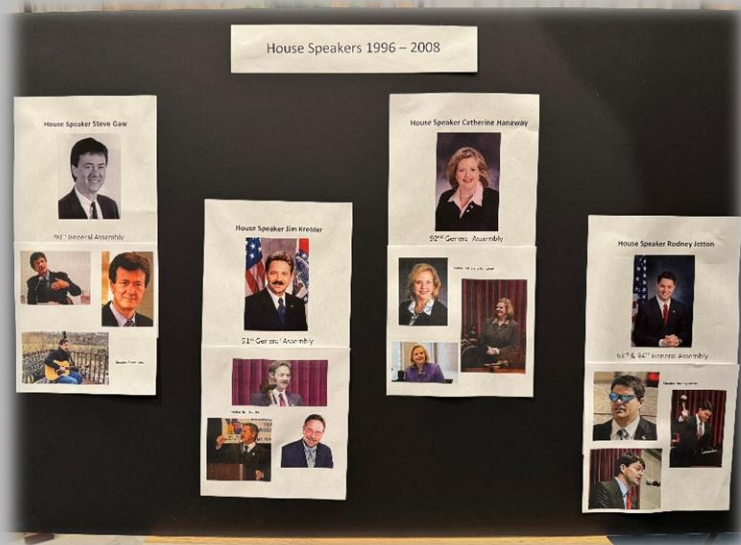


Compass Health Representatives

With Gary Mace



I had an opportunity to meet with several former Speakers of the House this week



With Representatives from AGCMO



I am pleased to sponsor House Bill 2878, which the “Dillard Family Highway” in Dent county.

To research the bills references in this report, please go to:
<https://house.mo.gov/default.aspx>

For more information on the bills I am sponsoring this session, please go to:
<https://house.mo.gov/MemberDetails.aspx?year=2024&code=R&district=120>

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