



## State Representative Rep Ron Copeland District 120

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This has been a very busy week in the office, with many opportunities to spend time with constituents and guests, and to work on legislation that not only impacts the state, but impacts my district as well.

### **House Passes Tax Credit Package to Boost Childcare**

The Missouri House worked quickly to move a tax credit package aimed at addressing the state's childcare crisis. The House this week passed a plan with a vote of 113-39 to provide tax credits to childcare providers, donors to daycare centers, and businesses who help to cover the childcare costs of their employees as a solution to the ongoing workforce crisis while also serving as an economic development tool for the state.

The bill sponsor emphasized the severity of the issue, telling her fellow legislators that there is only one available childcare slot for every three children under the age of five in Missouri. With 94 percent of Missouri counties labeled as childcare deserts, many businesses struggle to find workers due to childcare challenges. The bill sponsor told members of how the rising cost for childcare has become a major factor in the budget of many Missouri families, and is often the major factor when deciding whether one parent should stay home and forgo rejoining the workforce.

“Missouri has lost more than \$1.3 billion annually as a result of childcare shortages, including \$286 million of tax revenue that we could have collected,” the bill sponsor said. “This plan serves as an innovative solution to the problem, as business, parents, and government can all work together. Affordable, reliable, safe, childcare is an important infrastructure in our state. We will have a reliable workforce because that workforce will be able to rely on this to have quality, affordable childcare available.”

**HB 1488** asks the state legislature to approve a tax credit package intended to boost access to childcare options statewide. The bill is broken out into three parts:

**Child Care Contribution Tax Credit Act (Effective: Jan 1, 2025, to Dec 31, 2030):**

- Taxpayers can claim a 75% tax credit against state liability for childcare contributions.
- Credit range: \$100 to \$200,000 per year.
- Eligible donations must directly support childcare for children aged 12 or younger.
- Non-refundable tax credits capped at \$20 million annually, with a 15% increase for contributions in "childcare deserts."

**Employer Provided Child Care Assistance Tax Credit Act (Effective: Jan 1, 2025, to Dec 31, 2030):**

- Taxpayers with two or more employees can claim a 30% tax credit for childcare expenditures.
- Maximum credit: \$200,000 per taxpayer per year.
- Applicable to corporations, certain charitable organizations, and individuals subject to state income tax.
- Non-refundable tax credits capped at \$20 million annually, with a 15% increase for contributions in "childcare deserts."

**Child Care Providers Tax Credit Act (Effective: Jan 1, 2025, to Dec 31, 2030):**

- Childcare providers with three or more employees can claim a tax credit for withholding tax and up to 30% of capital expenditures.
- No credit for capital expenditures under \$1,000.
- Maximum tax credit: \$200,000 per provider per year.
- Non-refundable tax credits with excess credits carried back or forward up to five tax years.
- Capped at \$20 million annually, with a 15% increase for contributions in "childcare deserts."

The tax credits, estimated to cost up to \$70 million, are justified by the potential economic growth and tax revenue they could generate. The bill would be valid for six years, allowing lawmakers to assess its impact.

**Lawmakers Receive Annual Update on the State's Court System**

The General Assembly convened for a joint session in the House Chamber as lawmakers gathered to receive the 2024 State of the Judiciary address. Members of the House and Senate listened to Missouri Chief Justice Mary R. Russell outline the successes of the court system and the areas where the court and the legislature have worked well together to improve the justice system.

The Justice proudly noted that, for this first time in the history of our state, the Missouri Supreme Court currently has a majority of women on its bench, and that Missouri's court is now one of 15 in the nation with a female majority.

“This is something I simply never imagined happening,” she said. “I truly hope this historic achievement inspires Missouri’s children – no matter their background – to believe that they, too, can become a state Supreme Court judge if they want... We are all grateful for Governor Parson’s appointments under the Missouri Plan and for his recognition that, sometimes, the best man for the job is actually a woman!”

Justice Russell discussed the success of treatment courts and urged the legislature to consider adding mental health courts to the approved treatment court list. Addressing the growing impact of mental health issues on the courts and jails, she called for collaborative efforts across branches of government and sectors to find comprehensive solutions.

In conclusion, Chief Justice Russell expressed gratitude to legislators and executive branch officials for their collaboration. She encouraged everyone to acknowledge the frontline heroes working for the citizens of Missouri and emphasized the importance of focusing on gratitude amidst the challenges of the legislative session.

### **Israeli Consul General Visits Missouri Capitol**

The Missouri General Assembly was pleased to host Israeli Consul General Maor Elbaz-Starinsky this week, celebrating Missouri’s relationship with Israel as an ally and trade partner. After meeting with Governor Mike Parson, the Israeli diplomat spoke before a joint session of the General Assembly Tuesday in the House Chamber.

Standing before Missouri General Assembly, the Israeli consul general spoke of the ongoing conflict happening in the Middle East, and said Israel would stand resolute in safeguarding its citizens and borders, while seeking peaceful resolutions

“Our soldiers are fighting for the entire free world,” he said. “This is a war between evil and good, darkness and light, and if someone cannot tell which is which, they are part of the problem.”

### **Preventing Foreign Ownership of Land in Missouri**

A bill seeking to prohibit any further foreign ownership of Missouri land is once again working its way through the Missouri legislature. This issue has gained prominence not only in Missouri but also at the national level and in other states. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, foreign individuals already hold an interest in over 43.4 million acres of U.S. agricultural land, constituting approximately 3.4 percent of the country's agricultural land as of December 31, 2022, with a notable increase in foreign ownership observed over the past decade.

In the 2023 legislative session, Missouri lawmakers attempted to pass restrictions on foreign farmland ownership, but the efforts faced challenges as debates arose regarding the scope of the measures. Until 2013, foreign countries were prohibited from purchasing Missouri farmland, but this changed to implement a one percent cap on the percentage of Missouri farmland that can be owned by foreign entities, a restriction that remains in place.

**HB 1957** proposes further limiting foreign ownership to 0.5%. It necessitates reporting to the Department of Agriculture and the Attorney General 30 days before finalizing any sale or transfer of agricultural land by an alien or foreign business. Approval from the Attorney General is mandatory, and violations could result in court action and divestiture. The bill also mandates reporting changes in land usage, with exemptions for specific research or experimental land. Moreover, it prevents foreign businesses from identified foreign adversaries by the federal government from purchasing any land in the state, requiring adherence to the USA Patriot Act of 2001. The bill broadens enforcement responsibilities to include the Attorney General alongside the Department for requirements related to agricultural land owned by foreign entities.

Addressing the House Committee on Local Government, the bill sponsor emphasized the matter as a security concern, stating that the legislation aims to protect Missouri from potential adversarial or foreign threats while safeguarding one of the state's crucial assets.

### **Increasing Teachers' Salaries**

Addressing the enduring challenge of attracting and retaining educators, the House Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education has introduced two bills that specifically concentrate on enhancing teacher salaries. Both proposals advocate for the establishment of a "Teacher Baseline Salary Grant Fund" aimed at assisting school districts in fulfilling the new minimum salary requirements, with a recommended grant matching ratio of 70/30.

In a Missouri school district, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education reports that, on average, 43.3% of teachers depart after three years. The Missouri National Education Association reports that the state is ranked 50th in terms of average starting teacher pay and 47th in average teacher pay.

**HB 1447** suggests adjustments to teacher salaries, raising the minimum to \$38,000 in the 2025-26 school year and incrementally reaching \$48,000 by 2029-30. The bill includes provisions for annual salary adjustments based on inflation, allows school boards to differentiate salaries for hard-to-staff subjects and schools, and makes changes to teacher education requirements. Additionally, the "Urban Flight and Rural Needs Scholarship Program" is renamed the "Teacher Recruitment and Retention State Scholarship Program" with enhanced scholarships and revised repayment terms for those teaching in challenging areas.

"The problem is obvious to all of us at this point," the bill sponsor told the committee on Wednesday. "We don't have enough teachers for our public schools and, to some extent, for the private and parochial schools as well."

Meanwhile, **HB 1431** proposes raising the minimum teacher salary from \$25,000 to \$38,000 in the 2025-26 school year, with higher minimums for teachers holding a Master's Degree and 10 years of experience, ultimately reaching \$46,000 by 2027-28. Districts have the opportunity to apply for grants

from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education between the 2025-26 school year and June 30, 2028, to facilitate the increase in minimum teacher salaries.

“I just insist that it’s time that we start paying our teachers what they deserve,” the sponsor said.

### **The Right to Hunt and Fish**

**HJR 87** proposes a Constitutional amendment in Missouri to protect the rights of hunters and anglers, ensuring legal engagement in hunting, wildlife harvesting, and fishing upon voter approval. The amendment aims to enshrine the "right to hunt and fish" in the state constitution, safeguarding these activities from potential restrictions. It acknowledges the Conservation Department's authority to regulate natural resources while striking a balance with individual rights. The amendment preserves the Conservation Department's powers and allows the General Assembly to enact laws limiting these rights in specific cases, maintaining equilibrium between individual rights and conservation goals. Notably, the amendment does not impede legislation restricting these rights for individuals with certain legal conditions. The bill sponsor emphasized that the legislation seeks to uphold these rights in the state constitution, respecting the historical significance of hunting and fishing in Missouri without intending to challenge the Conservation Department's decisions.

### **An Update on General Revenue**

The January 2024 General Revenue Report for Missouri, presented by State Budget Director Dan Haug, reveals a positive trend with a 6.3% growth in net general revenue collections compared to January 2023, reaching \$1.45 billion. However, fiscal year-to-date figures show a 0.2% decrease from the previous year, totaling \$7.59 billion. Notable changes include a 17.6% decrease in individual income tax collections, an increase in pass-through entity tax collections to \$688.5 million, a rise of 11.2% in sales and use tax collections for the year, and a notable 38.3% increase in all other collections for the month. Corporate income and franchise tax collections increased slightly for the year but decreased by 12.5% for the month. Refunds increased by 18.2% for the year and a substantial 198.2% for the month.



*Israeli Consul General Maor Elbaz-Starinsky during his historic visit to the House Chamber*

*Here are just a few visitors in the office this week! Please feel free to drop by any time you are in the Capitol.*



*David Spear and Andrea Jira; Mr. Spear painted this beautiful mural found in Salem.*



*I enjoyed my visit with Bear Bass and Larry Avo.*



*Gabriel Todd, State Vice President, Missouri FFA*



*I was able to support (along with several colleagues) a very successful fundraiser for our local Safety Net organization:  
Safety Net provides support to family members of law enforcement, fire fighters and EMS during critical work incidents.*

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