



## State Representative Rep Ron Copeland District 120

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This week at the capitol the House addressed the budget and Initiative petition reform. One of the most important issues our rural communities need to address is the fact that their vote is not being heard, with how the current initiative process is working. The last initiative petition that was sent to the voters, was passed by only 13 counties out of 114 counties in the state. The 13 counties were all in urban areas, St Louis, Kanas City, Springfield and Columbia. Our founding for fathers were very aware of how a democracy worked, that is why we have an electoral college to elect the President of the United States. What is happening in Missouri needs to be addressed so urban areas cannot force their morals and ethics on our rural communities. If you live in a rural community, please be aware, this initiative petition reform HJR 86 is to allow all citizens in the state to have a voice in constitutional issues. If people are telling you this is taking your voice away, they do not live or support rural communities. I just want everyone's voice to be heard, it is not fair that the urban (city voters) has more influence in the current initiative petition process.

### **HJR 86 – Initiative Petition Reform**

This legislation amends the signature requirements for the initiative petition process to require 8% of the legal voters in **all** congressional districts. Furthermore, voters in each congressional district shall have an opportunity to review and comment on the initiative petition proposals to better understand the contents and consequences of a proposed constitutional amendment.

The bill defines “legal voter” as a United States citizen that is a resident of Missouri.

This bill prohibits foreign governments and political parties from sponsoring initiative petitions and from engaging in electoral activity in support of or opposition to an initiative petition.

Concurrent Majority – for a constitutional amendment by initiative petition to pass, it must receive **both** a majority of the votes cast statewide and a majority of the congressional districts for approval.

This bill limits the Legislature’s authority to modify *statutory* measures submitted by initiative petitions within two years of the effective date of the change by imposing a 4/7<sup>th</sup> majority.

Overall, these provisions aim to promote fairness, accountability, and democratic integrity in the initiative petition process, ensuring that it remains a tool for citizen empowerment and effective governance in Missouri.

### **Talking Points**

- 1. Enhanced Representation:** Requiring signatures from 8% of legal voters in all congressional districts ensures that proposed initiatives reflect the diverse perspectives and needs of constituents across the entire state, rather than being dominated by populous regions.
- 2. Increased Accountability:** Allowing voters in each congressional district to review and comment on initiative petition proposals fosters a more informed electorate. This enables citizens to better understand the contents and consequences of proposed constitutional amendments, promoting accountability and transparency in the legislative process.
- 3. Protection against Foreign Interference:** Prohibiting foreign governments and political parties from sponsoring initiative petitions and engaging in electoral activity ensures that the initiative process remains free from external manipulation and interference, safeguarding the integrity of the democratic process.
- 4. Balanced Approval Criteria:** Requiring a majority of votes both statewide and in individual congressional districts for a constitutional amendment to pass ensures that proposed changes have broad-based support across diverse geographical and demographic constituencies, preventing the domination of state politics by heavily populated areas.
- 5. Preservation of Voter Intent:** Limiting the Legislature's authority to modify statutory measures submitted by initiative petitions within two years of enactment helps to preserve the integrity of the initiative process and respect the will of the voters. Requiring a 4/7th majority for modifications ensures that significant changes cannot be made hastily or without substantial consensus.
- 6. Empowerment of Citizens:** By strengthening signature requirements and promoting public engagement in the initiative process, the legislation empowers citizens to have a more direct and meaningful impact on shaping the laws and policies that affect their lives, fostering a sense of civic participation and ownership in the democratic process.

### **Passing a Balanced Budget**

This week, the House passed a **balanced budget** that meets the infrastructure investment needs for the state while avoiding burdening future generations with debt and securing a \$1.8 billion surplus for the future. Supporting a balanced state budget and preserving a significant surplus like \$1.8 billion is crucial for maintaining fiscal responsibility and ensuring long-term economic stability.

Key Figures:

- **Preserves \$1.8 billion surplus**
- \$727.5 million to rebuild the I-44 corridor
- \$100 million for rural roads
- \$43 million for additional road improvement projections
- \$16 million for port infrastructure projects

### Talking Points:

1. **Fiscal Responsibility:** A balanced budget demonstrates responsible financial management by ensuring that the state government lives within its means. It prevents excessive borrowing, which can lead to unsustainable levels of debt and financial instability in the future.
2. **Resilience against Economic Uncertainty:** Economic downturns are inevitable, but a surplus helps mitigate their impact by providing a buffer against revenue shortfalls and expenditure increases. It allows the state to navigate through tough economic times without sacrificing essential services or resorting to austerity measures that could harm vulnerable populations.
3. **Maintaining Credit Rating:** A state with a balanced budget and surplus is more likely to maintain a high credit rating. A strong credit rating allows the state to borrow money at lower interest rates, saving taxpayer dollars in the long run and enabling investment in critical infrastructure projects. According to Fitch, the State of Missouri maintains a credit rating of AAA, higher than many of our neighbors.

### An Update on General Revenue

The March 2024 General Revenue Report for the state of Missouri indicates a 6.4 percent decrease in net general revenue collections compared to March 2023, falling from \$959.7 million to \$898.6 million. However, fiscal year-to-date figures show a slight increase of 0.5 percent, rising from \$9.27 billion to \$9.32 billion.

The breakdown of tax types reveals notable changes:

- Individual income tax collections dropped by 10.0 percent for the year and 14.5 percent for the month, while Pass Through Entity tax collections surged from \$0 to \$439.4 million.
- Sales and use tax collections saw a 9.1 percent increase for the year but dipped by 10.0 percent for the month.
- Corporate income and corporate franchise tax collections rose by 1.6 percent for the year but declined by 3.6 percent for the month.

Additionally, all other collections increased by 28.1 percent for the year and 17.5 percent for the month, while refunds increased by 6.6 percent for the year but decreased by 2.4 percent for the month. It's worth noting that Pass-Through Entity tax collections were previously reported within Individual Income, potentially skewing the perception of growth in Individual Income tax collections

To search the legislation within this report, please go to: <https://house.mo.gov/LegislationSP.aspx>

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*Missouri State Capitol, early spring morning.*



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