

LWW LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF MISSOURI

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LWV Legislative Bulletin

April 27, 2020

LWV members are encouraged to personally communicate, as individual voters (not as LWV members), with their legislators on the various legislative bills. Previous issues of the Legislative Bulletin can be found at this link: <https://lwvmissouri.org/legislative-bulletin/>

MISSOURI LEGISLATURE RETURNS TO SESSION

The House and Senate have largely been out of session since the regularly scheduled break during the week of March 23-27. Both chambers will return to session activity on April 27. *While a primary goal is to complete next year's budget by the Constitutional deadline of May 8, legislators will also be trying to make up for lost time in passing various other legislation. They may create omnibus bills made up of already passed legislation or even legislative language not previously approved in committees. Therefore, we need to be vigilant.*

Some legislative leaders are eager to finish action on their top priorities, including SJR 38 (Hegeman), a joint resolution that seeks to undermine the ethics and redistricting reforms of CLEAN Missouri. SJR 38 has already been approved by the Senate and would only require House approval in the remaining weeks, assuming the House makes no changes to the language.

It is possible that the wording of SJR 38 (and HJR 101) might be incorporated into an omnibus bill. The intent of those bills is to not only reverse the changes of Clean Missouri which was approved by a majority of voters in 2018 but is to make it even more extreme than before. It would make possible the most extreme gerrymandering in the nation. The new proposed changes by legislators is, as noted in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (February 11, 2020) “an incumbent-protection measure pure and simple.” It will rig the redistricting process and make it more partisan and secretive and change what citizens can do about it. It will rig the math by counting only citizens over 18, which leaves out a very high percentage of citizens. It will weaken legal restrictions that protect communities of color.

***ACTION ALERT – PLEASE CONTACT YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVE TODAY TO VOTE
“NO” on SJR 38 or any attempt to reverse CLEAN Missouri!***

To find your legislator, here is a link to [Legislator Lookup](#).

LWVMO Joins in Lawsuit to Protect Missouri Voters

We told you about this in our last *Legislative Bulletin* but are including it again in case you missed it.

Note that there will be a court hearing on this lawsuit in Cole County Court this week.

To protect the right to vote in 2020, the League of Women Voters of Missouri has joined the NAACP and several individual voters in filing a lawsuit in Cole County Friday that seeks a declaratory judgment that physical distancing and fear of contracting COVID-19 are valid reasons to request an absentee ballot in Missouri. The suit also seeks injunctive relief preventing local election officials from refusing such ballots or requiring them to be notarized.

“Missouri must expand and protect access to the ballot in these unprecedented times,” says LWVMO President Evelyn Maddox. “We want any Missouri voter who is social distancing in compliance with CDC guidelines to be able to request an absentee ballot in 2020 and return it without a notary seal.”

“Inconsistencies between voting jurisdictions violate the equal protection clause,” says Denise Lieberman, General Counsel for the Missouri Voter Protection Coalition. “Fear of contracting the coronavirus should be a valid reason to request an absentee ballot. Since election authorities can verify voter signatures, they should be told to accept all ballots without a notary seal this year. Absentee voting either by mail or in person will reduce the crowds at polling places and make them safer for other voters in 2020 elections.”

The state has a new electronic notary system, but the Secretary of State’s office indicates that it won’t work for absentee ballots. Here is a link to the [LWVMO Press Release](#). For more information or to support the ACLU Support team, click [here](#).

Most of the following information about the session and the budget is from *MNEA Legislative Bulletin*, April 24, 2020.

CORONAVIRUS CONTINUES TO AFFECT LEGISLATIVE PROCESS & CAPITOL ACCESS

Legislators will still be observing social distancing while in the Capitol. Senate committee hearings will only take place in the Senate chamber itself and the joint committee room on the first floor of the Capitol. Members of the public will be allowed in the Capitol and will be screened regarding any possible symptoms or contacts.

GOVERNOR REITERATES PLAN TO “REOPEN” MISSOURI ON MAY 4

Governor Mike Parson stated again on April 24 that his office plans to lift the current statewide stay at home order on May 4 and allow businesses to reopen with certain restrictions. The Governor mentioned that his order may not apply in the same way in all areas of the state, depending upon the level of impact of COVID-19 pandemic. Additional details regarding guidance for various businesses to reopen will be provided this week. Local health and medical officials in many areas have cautioned against prematurely relaxing the stay at home requirements and social distancing requirements, as this could trigger a second wave of infections. Local governments will still have authority to enact local requirements regarding quarantine and other restrictions.

BUDGET ACTION

The House bills for next year's budget (HBs 2001-2013) will be taken up by the House this week. The House Budget Committee completed its versions prior to leaving on spring break and the revenue outlook for next year has significantly declined due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both major sources of state general revenue, sales tax and personal income taxes, are expected to be significantly reduced by economic shutdown and loss of employment caused by the pandemic.

The Governor announced that his office expects about \$700 million in cuts will be needed to balance the budget next year. Other budget analysts expect that even more cuts may be needed and could reach \$1 billion. Since the Budget Committee has already produced HCS versions of the budget bills, the House may waive the rule against offering a floor substitute and allow substitute versions to be offered when the budget bills are taken up next week.

While the effects of the pandemic are significant and unexpected, they also highlight the lack of resilience in the state budgeting process caused by the cumulative effect of harmful state tax cuts in recent years. These tax cuts have reduced the state's ability to invest in public education and other vital services while also maintaining responsible levels of budget reserve funds.

The time is long overdue for the legislature to change course, stop cutting necessary taxes and enact positive tax and revenue policies that will meet the needs of Missourians. These policies should ensure the state has ongoing capacity to adequately invest in public education and other vital services. State policy should also ensure that responsible and adequate levels of budget reserve funds are available and ready for use to maintain state operations and vital services in the context of a significant economic downturn.

“WORKING GROUP” ON FEDERAL STIMULUS FUNDING

Gov. Parson established an “informal working group” to provide recommendations on how to best spend billions of dollars in federal stimulus money. The group is chaired by State Treasurer Scott Fitzpatrick and includes representation from state agencies and legislative budgeting committees. The group is expected to hold public meetings to discuss how the state can best use its projected \$2.38 billion in federal funds. Last week, Missouri received the first installment, \$1.18 Billion in federal funding to help tackle the many issues caused by this virus.

The budget must be substantially redrafted based on the best possible projections of state revenues in a changing world with a slowing economy and skyrocketing unemployment. Final action on the budget bills in regular session must be completed by May 8.