

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF MISSOURI

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ACTION ALERT: EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

Sen. Jill Schupp's bill, Senate Concurrent Resolution 7, which would ratify the ERA, will be heard by the Senate Rules Committee on **Tuesday, April 2 at 9:00 am in the Senate Lounge**. Sen. Rowden is chair of this committee. They are looking for people to come testify, and for written testimony.

Link to the bill is [SCR7 - Ratifies the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution](#).

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/>

LEGISLATURE RETURNS FROM SPRING BREAK

The legislature reconvened on March 25 after a one-week Spring Break that began on March 14. There are now a total of seven weeks before the conclusion of session on May 17.

CLEAN MISSOURI AND ETHICS IN GOVERNMENT

The House General Laws Committee heard HJR 48 (Plocher) on March 25. As filed, the HJR makes relatively minor changes to the ethics reforms of Constitutional Amendment 1, also known as CLEAN Missouri. HJR 48 bans all lobbyist gifts by removing the allowance for \$5 lobbyist gifts and makes both House and Senate campaign contribution caps \$2000. A large number of League members from several locals were present at the hearing, as were a number of the other groups instrumental in promoting CLEAN Missouri. There is the possibility that this HJR could serve as a vehicle for other changes that could undermine the governmental ethics reforms of CLEAN Missouri, so watch it closely.

STATE DEMOGRAPHER

The House gave first round approval to HB 973 (Trent) on March 27. The Senate gave final approval to SS/SB 213 (Hegeman), a similar bill, on March 28. The bills require the nonpartisan state demographer to establish the Redistricting Public Comment Portal for the purpose of publicly accepting any comments, records, documents, maps, data files, communication, or information of any kind relating to the redistricting process. Any such submissions shall be accompanied by a disclosure that indicates whether the person making the submission was responsible in whole or in part for the submission or another person contributed money that was intended to fund preparation of the submission and, if so, the disclosure shall additionally identify each such contributor. SB 213 also includes conflict of interest language regarding the state demographer.

PRIMARY ELECTIONS

The House gave first round approval to HCS/HBs 26 & HB 922 (Stacy) on March 27, by a very close vote, not entirely along partisan lines. The HCS version of the bill would require established political parties to create a closed primary system where only voters registered for that party would be able to vote in a primary election.

LWVMO is concerned that this change may create barriers that reduce access to voting and participation in the political process by all eligible citizens. We also understand many county clerks, as elections officials, are also concerned.

INITIATIVE PETITION REQUIREMENTS

The House Elections and Elected Officials Committee heard three joint resolutions regarding the initiative petition process on March 27. The joint resolutions are HJR 7 (Sommer), HJR 25 (Deaton), and HJR 45 (Simmons). *All of the House Joint Resolutions either increase the burden of signature gathering requirements or require initiative petitions to get a 2/3 supermajority vote for approval, or both.*

LWVMO opposes all these measures that would make it harder and more costly for citizens to bring forward relevant policies through the initiative process.

The committee also heard several related bills:

HB 1055 (Simmons) requires a \$300 filing fee for a petition. The filing fee would be refunded if the measure is qualified for the ballot.

HB 290 (Sommer) imposes both a minimum \$500 non-refundable filing fee and a fee of forty cents per signature for the minimum required number of signatures if any signature circulators are paid to collect signatures. There is concern that this creates a significant financial barrier to the initiative process.

HB 496 (McGaugh) requires the Secretary of State to establish the format for initiative petition signature pages and provide the forms in electronic format (probably ok).

CHARTER SCHOOL EXPANSION

While the House has not taken up HCS/HB 581 (Roeber), the Senate now appears poised to take up SCS/SB 292 (Eigel) sometime next week. Both bills would allow charter schools to be sponsored by outside entities (other than the local school board) and operate in other parts of the state.

LWVMO is opposed due to positions established after a state study. It is time to remind your legislator that expansion of charter schools should not be attempted until revisions of their guidelines are made.

BUDGET

The House finally approved the operating budget bills, HBs 1-13 (Smith) on March 28. The bills now move to the Senate for consideration. The budget is still built on a revenue estimate of 1.7% growth for this fiscal year and beyond. Revenue numbers to date are lagging far below this level, and there is considerable uncertainty about where revenues will stand at year's end.

As the Senate completes its work in the coming weeks, April income tax return information will better inform the legislature about the likely revenue result for this year. If revenues remain well below the original estimates, the Senate may need to make significant reductions in next year's budget. There may also be a shortfall of revenue that requires Governor Parson to withhold current year funding to keep the state from running out of cash. Final legislative approval of the budget bills must be completed by May 10. The budget bills remove \$100M in general revenue funds from various parts of the budget and moved the funding to the State Road Fund to fund road and bridge work

SCHOOL BOARD TERMS and ELECTIONS

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee met again on March 27 to hear "committee" bills and reconvened on March 28 and voted to approve several bills one of which is particularly concerning to LWVMO.

HCB 6 contains HB 361 (Roeber) to change school board terms to four years and change the school board election date to November general elections in even numbered years.

LWVMO is concerned about these bills, particularly that moving school board elections away from spring municipal elections would make them more political and move such local decisions much "farther" from local voters.