

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF MISSOURI

8706 Manchester Rd., Suite 104, St. Louis, MO 63144
314-961-6869 ★ league@lwvmissouri.org ★ www.lwvmissouri.org

LWV Legislative Bulletin **March 4, 2019**

LWV members are encouraged to personally communicate, as individual voters (not as LWV members), with their legislators on the various legislative bills.

VOTER PROTECTION

From Missouri Voter Protection Advocates

Two bills in the Missouri Legislature that could *affect voting rights in a positive way*:

HB508 (Bruce Franks) - Rights Restoration - allows anyone convicted of a felony who has been released from prison and is currently on probation or parole to vote. For more information on this bill, go to: <https://www.house.mo.gov/Bill.aspx?bill=HB508&year=2019&code=R>. It was heard in committee on February 27.

From Rep Franks: "HB 508 is a bill that restores voting rights to offenders as soon as they get out of jail. Currently, those rights are restored not after they get out but after probation or parole is done. If the parole board sees fit for someone to re-enter into society to become a productive citizen, then it is not only my belief, but 14 other states believe that voting rights should be restored upon release. We want them to work, get an education, take care of their families and responsibilities, but not vote? When you're working, you're paying taxes, when you re-enter back into your children's lives they go to school, you will be represented by somebody whom you didn't decide on but still pay with your tax dollars."

Some 6 million people in the US cannot vote due to a felony conviction. The vast majority of them are NOT incarcerated, but living in their communities, working and paying taxes. Laws that continue to deny the vote (as Missouri does) to people on probation and parole who are living and working in their communities hinder rehabilitation. Study after study shows that voting reduces recidivism. African Americans are 7 times more likely to be denied their vote under such laws than their white counterparts.

HB 368 (Peggy McGaugh) - No Excuse Absentee Voting - allows any registered voter to vote by absentee ballot without stating a reason. It also expands those who are exempt from the notary requirement for absentee ballots not just to those who are physically disabled but to caregivers as well. It requires voter identification for in-person absentee voting. For more information on this bill, go to: <https://www.house.mo.gov/Bill.aspx?bill=HB508&year=2019&code=R> This bill was heard in committee on February 27.

Minimum Voter Turnout Threshold for Tax Increase Elections

HJR 19 (Christofanelli) to create a minimum voter turnout threshold for tax increase elections. The joint resolution would nullify a state or local election to approve a new tax or increase an existing tax, even if it receives a qualifying majority of the those voting in favor, if fewer than 50% of all qualified voters vote in the election. This bill was heard by the House Downsizing State Government Committee on February 25.

This provision is unfair to those citizens who do participate in elections. It also serves to discourage citizens from participating in future elections if their past participation was nullified.

CLEAN MISSOURI

From Empower Missouri and Clean Missouri:

Last November, 1,469,093 Missouri voters made it clear that we want a state government that is open, transparent, and accountable to its citizens. We are proud to have worked with a strong, bipartisan coalition to pass Amendment 1 and clean up politics in Jefferson City. This was a bill that the League strongly supported.

Now, some politicians are ignoring the mandate from voters and trying to gut the Sunshine Law. Our state legislators should be held to the same standard of openness and transparency as every other public official in Missouri. More than that: it's what the state constitution now requires. Even though the voters have spoken, certain members of the Missouri Legislature just don't care.

Overturning the will of the people

This follows on the heels of decades of overturning the will of the people. For example, decisions made at the ballot box related to conceal and carry, campaign finance laws, and puppy mills were all changed by the Missouri General Assembly. A St. Louis ordinance to raise the minimum wage was also overturned by the Legislature, despite the often cited sacred nature of "local control."

It is of concern that state leaders in powerful positions are expressing interest in "making some changes" to the new redistricting process created by Amendment 1. Both Governor Mike Parson and Senator Caleb Rowden, Majority Floor Leader in the Senate, have indicated they are open to revision of Amendment 1. National experts have said Amendment 1 has made Missouri a national leader in protecting the power of communities of color in redistricting. Changes to our new process could weaken the system and again make gerrymandering the status quo in Missouri. Missourians deserve a state government that is open, transparent, and has safeguards to make sure politicians aren't abusing their power in office. We can stop them if we come together and speak up.

ACTION ALERT: If you haven't already contacted your legislator(s) about this, you can defend the will of the people by contacting your legislator(s) at this link to Clean Missouri:

<http://bit.ly/openandtransparent>

CONCEALED WEAPONS “Everywhere”

The Senate Transportation, Infrastructure and Public Safety Committee heard SB 121 (Burlison) on Feb. 28. The bill would take away local control of college and university governing boards to regulate concealed weapons on campus and allow any person, including students and staff, with a concealed carry permit to carry concealed weapons on campus. Many other locations are also affected. Here is text from the bill:

This act *repeals* provisions that prohibited someone with a valid concealed carry permit from carrying a concealed weapon in the following locations:

- Any meeting of the governing body of a unit of local government or the General Assembly.
- Any polling place on any election day.
- Any establishment that serves intoxicating liquors.
- Any portion of a building that has a child care facility.
- Riverboat gambling facilities.
- Any gated amusement park.
- Any hospital accessible to the public.
- Any public higher education institution building.

This act prohibits the state or any county, municipality or other political subdivision from restricting by ordinance, rule, policy, contractual agreement, or employment agreement where someone with a valid concealed carry permit can may carry a concealed firearm. Moreover, any public higher education institution may construct their own policies regarding concealed carry weapons on their campus, so long as such policies do not generally restrict the ability to carry a concealed weapon.

Finally, this act repeals the offense of possession and concealment of a dangerous or deadly weapon upon a bus and removes language that made it unlawful for someone to possess a deadly or dangerous weapon in a bus terminal.

ACTION ALERT: Contact your state senator to oppose this bill. This would allow guns in colleges, polling places, bars, child care facilities, gambling facilities, etc.

TAX BILLS

On Tuesday, the Senate Ways and Means committee will hear a proposed constitutional amendment (SJR 20, Koenig) to cap tax rates at 5.9%, and prohibit the combined state and local sales tax rate from exceeding 12%. LWVMO opposes any more reductions/limits on state taxes that would adversely affect the state’s ability to fund basic services.

The House Ways and Means Committee will hear (again) HB 548 which would implement a way to collect sales taxes owed for online sales (good) but puts in a tax cut over time (bad). The bill’s fiscal note exceeded \$100 million but the sponsor may be planning to modify it to make it more acceptable to the committee. LWVMO opposes.

EITC

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in HB 291 (good) passed the committee last week and might soon be reported to the House floor. Watch for it; this would benefit many low-income people in our state and help the economy by allowing these folks to have more money to spend.

BUDGET

This past week the House Budget committee received the recommendations of the House Appropriations subcommittees and the House Budget Chair is expected to release his bill this coming week. The Chair's bill could have changes to amendments that have been previously been accepted by the subcommittees. We will keep you apprised.

EDUCATION

From St. Louis LWV Education Committee

The Foundation Formula for K-12 Education

Among the many education issues, the most important is to fully fund the Foundation Formula to, at a minimum, the level which was in effect before the formula was reduced. This level was established as the least amount of spending necessary to provide students with a basic education. The committee feels there are many ways education outcomes can be improved, however, the lack of sufficient funding significantly undermines nearly all potential improvements. Keeping taxes low is said to be necessary for attracting new businesses to Missouri, which would provide more jobs and revenue. But low taxes are not the only thing businesses seek. *A skilled work force is certainly a big consideration, as well as the of quality of life provided to employees.*

In addition, the committee is watching several specific bills currently in the legislature. These include two which members feel would be quite detrimental and do NOT want to pass:

HB 361 would mandate that all school board elections be held as part of the November general election. Supporters say this would save money and be more democratic due to higher voter turnout. While this are good points, the hidden danger is that a school board candidate could also run for a legislative position, allowing the disclosure of a partisan affiliation and potentially lead to partisan funding of school board candidates. This could make it harder for an unaffiliated candidate to raise competitive campaign funding, which would likely be costlier during the November election. Furthermore, a higher voter turnout may not result in well-informed voters due to information overload. Many voters may not vote for any candidate in the "lesser races".

SB51

The other bill the committee would like members to speak out against is SB 51 which would allow charter schools to open in any charter county or city of 30,000 or more, even if no school in the district is underperforming. The League opposes this bill.