



November 17, 2023

## Capitol Report



Hi All,

Session is around the corner and pre-filing is a couple weeks away. I want to thank everyone who came out to me and Rep. Aune's town hall on Wednesday. We discussed our outlook on the 2024 legislative session and answered questions about local government, constituent services, healthcare policy, and more! Hearing from you makes us better legislators so please continue to make your voices heard. Enjoy your thanksgiving and I'll keep you posted.

Sincerely,



  
Jamie J. Johnson

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## **This Week in Jefferson City**

### **GOP to try to make amending state constitution harder**

In the wake of voters in strongly Republican Ohio enshrining abortion rights in their state constitution earlier this month, GOP lawmakers in Missouri are expected to take a final desperate shot next year at making it significantly harder to amend the Missouri Constitution in an effort to avoid a similar outcome here.

Reproductive rights supporters in Missouri are working on an initiative petition to put a proposed constitutional amendment on the November 2024 ballot guaranteeing access to abortion, birth control and other reproductive health services. Abortion rights opponents are hoping the Republican-controlled General Assembly can put a separate proposed amendment on the August 2024 ballot to require supermajority voter approval to ratify future constitutional changes, instead of the traditional simple majority threshold.

It is a tactic that failed to block voters from constitutionally protecting abortion rights in Ohio. That state's Republican-dominated legislature put a measure on this year's August ballot asking voters to raise the ratification threshold for future amendments to 60 percent of votes cast in an attempt to thwart November's abortion rights vote. The August measure failed resoundingly with 56.9 percent of voters opposed, while the abortion rights measure went on to pass easily with 56.6 percent in support.

Despite several attempts in recent years, Republican lawmakers in Missouri have so far proven unsuccessful in getting tougher ratification standards through the legislative process. In the final days of the 2023 legislative session, a proposal to set the threshold at 57 percent was one Senate vote away from going on the statewide ballot but failed to win final passage amid GOP infighting. After the measure failed, House Speaker Dean Plocher, R-Des Peres, conceded Missouri voters "absolutely" will restore abortion rights if given the chance and that a higher vote threshold is necessary to block them from doing so.

Even if Republicans successfully put a measure on the ballot raising the ratification threshold, voters would still have to approve it, and the chances of that happening are far from assured with Missourians – like their Ohio counterparts – likely to be resistant to limiting their own authority to enact constitutional changes independently of lawmakers.

A further complicating factor is whether a higher threshold enacted this August would apply to ballot measures already set to be voted on in November. Although new constitutional amendments take effect 30 days after ratification, raising the minimum vote requirement just two months ahead of a scheduled election would amount to changing the rules late in the game and might not pass muster with the Missouri Supreme Court.

## **Parson signals possible clemency for convicted KC cop**

Gov. Mike Parson signaled possible support for pardoning the only Kansas City police officer ever found guilty of killing a Black person when he criticized Jackson County Prosecutor Jean Peters Baker's handling of the case in comments during a Nov. 15 radio interview, The Kansas City Star reported.

Rumors have been swirling since June that Parson might pardon former KCPD detective Eric DeValkenaere, who is currently serving a six-year prison sentence for involuntary manslaughter and armed criminal action. DeValkenaere fatally shot Cameron Lamb, a 26-year-old father of three, on Dec. 3, 2019, as Lamb was parking his truck in a garage behind his house. The trial judge in the case determined DeValkenaere, who was investigating alleged traffic violations, was illegally present on Lamb's property at the time of the shooting and had no legitimate cause for using deadly force.

During an interview on KCMO radio in Kansas City, Parson, a Republican, said he hadn't made a decision about whether to grant DeValkenaere's clemency request, which the former officer recently filed after a three-judge panel of the Missouri Court of Appeals Western District unanimously upheld his convictions in October. However, Parson took a shot at Baker, a Democrat.

"It's been one of the toughest issues that's really on my desk," Parson said, according to the Star. "But the one thing that bothered me more than anything about that case was the way the prosecutor handled that in Kansas City, by the accusation she was making about guilt or innocence without actually even knowing the facts herself."

It is, however, a prosecutor's job is to make accusations of guilt and then prove them in a court of law, which Baker's office successfully did in this case. As a former Polk County sheriff, it is a process with which Parson should be well acquainted.

As with the first inklings over the summer about possible clemency for DeValkenaere, Parson's latest comments sparked a negative reaction from Black community leaders and others in Kansas City, who have urged the governor to stay out of the case and allow justice to prevail.



The White House shared this picture from my visit to Vice President's residence this summer. I want to thank Vice President Harris for her service and for giving me and my colleagues the opportunity to connect with other Black leaders from across the country.

## Upcoming Events

**November 18, 2023**

### **Parkville Nature Immersion**

Parkville Nature Sanctuary  
100 E 12 St, Parkville, MO 64152  
10am-12:00pm

**November 18, 2023**

### **Resources Committee Meeting**

Parkville City Hall  
8880 Clark Ave., Parkville, Mo, 64152  
8:30-9:30pm

Feel free to contact my office with your questions or requests.

573-751-9760

