



January 05, 2024

## Capitol Report

Hi All,

I was so glad to be back at the Capitol for the start of the 2024 Legislative session. It was a short week but there were a few big changes! I became a member of the Special Committee on Government Accountability and I filed a House Concurrent Resolution that establishes Missouri's ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution. We have a long session ahead of us and lot's of work to be done. I'm looking forward to updating you on some exciting new developments next week.

Sincerely,



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## **This Week in Jefferson City**

### **Legislative session gets underway with low expectations**

The 2024 legislative session began Jan. 3 with Republican leaders trying to strike an optimistic tone but hardline conservatives in the Senate making it clear they intend to continue the obstructionism that led to historically low numbers of bills winning final passage in each of the last three years.

Although Republicans hold supermajorities in both chambers, GOP infighting has sharply limited their ability to enact legislation. The Senate hardliners first organized in 2021 as the Conservative Caucus but claimed heading into the 2023 session they were disbanding to instead work from within the larger Senate Republican Caucus. In practice, however, nothing changed and the group continued block legislation supported by more mainstream Republicans.

This year, they're operating under the Freedom Caucus banner and began the first day of session by holding the Senate floor for more than an hour to air grievances against GOP leaders. The hardliners started to resume their criticisms on the session's second day but were cut off when the Senate majority leader moved to adjourn the chamber until next week.

For their part, Democratic lawmakers noted that the limited number of bills to win passage last year included several the party had long advocated for and earned bipartisan support. They look to build upon those successes this year to push for targeted tax relief for working families, bolster reproductive rights, improve public school teacher salaries and reduce violent crime by strengthening Missouri's lax gun laws, among other issues.

With an initiative petition being circulated to put a proposed amendment to the state constitution protecting abortion rights on the November ballot, House Republicans said they will make a last-ditch effort to require supermajority approval to ratify amendments. However, any changes proposed by lawmakers also would need to be approved by voters to take effect, and voters in others states have proven resistant to limiting their own power.

Even if a higher vote threshold made it on the August ballot and won voter approval, the courts likely would decide whether the changes applied to measures on the November ballot since doing so would amount to changing the rules in the middle of the process. To qualify for the November ballot, petitions signed by the requisite number of registered voters must be submitted to the state in early May – months before any changes to the vote threshold would take effect.

Republicans outnumber Democrats 24-10 in the Senate and 111-51 in the House of Representatives, which has one vacant seat last held by a Democrat. The last day of the legislative session is May 17. The constitutional deadline for granting final passage to the state budget for the 2025 fiscal year, which begins July 1, is one week earlier on May 10.

## **Governor attempts to limit foreign ownership of farmland**

Gov. Mike Parson on Jan. 2 issued an executive order purporting to prohibit people and businesses from countries designated as foreign adversaries from purchasing agricultural land located within 10 miles of a military facility. However, the governor's action appears to be an unconstitutional attempt to enact legislation via executive order.

Although the executive order doesn't specify the list of countries deemed to be foreign adversaries, an accompanying news release said those countries include China, Cuba, Iran North Korea, Russia and Venezuela.

The issue of foreign ownership of Missouri farmland has been controversial for more than a decade. Missouri law prohibited any foreign ownership – regardless of whether an adversarial country was involved – until 2013 when the Republican-controlled General Assembly overrode a veto by then-Gov. Jay Nixon, a Democrat, to repeal the ban. Smithfield Foods, which owns several large animal production facilities in Missouri, pushed for the change and shortly thereafter was sold to a Chinese company.

Parson and Lt. Gov. Mike Kehoe, who joined the governor at a press conference announcing the executive order, both voted for the bill and veto override while serving in the state Senate. Kehoe is running in this year's Republican primary for governor and is backed by Parson, who can't seek re-election due to term limits.

Democrats opposed repealing the foreign ownership limits and in the years since have sought to restore restrictions. House Minority Leader Crystal Quade, D-Springfield, is one of several lawmakers who have filed legislation this year to do so.

Those bills would limit foreign ownership of agricultural land more tightly than Parson's limited executive order. Restoring restrictions in state law also would more definitively settle the issue in the event a court strikes down the executive order as an unconstitutional usurpation of legislative power. Parson said he supports legislative action on the matter and that his executive order is intended as a stopgap until that happens.

## **Veteran elected officials picked for highways commission**

Gov. Mike Parson on Jan. 2 appointed former St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay and former state Sen. Dan Hegeman of St. Joseph to the Missouri State Highways and Transportation Commission, the independent governing authority for the state Department of Transportation.

Slay, a Democrat, served an unprecedented four terms as St. Louis mayor, from 2001 to 2017. He currently is executive director of the St. Louis Regional Crime Commission. Hegeman, a Republican, served in Missouri House of Representatives from 1991-2002 and the state Senate from 2015-2022. Before leaving the legislature due to term limits, he was chairman of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee.

Because Parson, a Republican, appointed both men one day before the legislature convened for the year, they are considered interim appointments and began serving immediately. As interim appointments, however, the Senate must confirm the selections within 30 days for them to retain their new posts.

Although commission terms typically run for six years, Parson appointed both men to fill unexpired terms. If they win Senate confirmation, Slay's term will end March 1, 2027; Hegeman's on March 1, 2029.

## Learn More About My Legislation

### HOUSE BILL 1445

- Makes General Election Day an official state holiday
- Would close colleges and universities unless used as a polling place
- Missouri would become the 15th state to adopt such a measure



State Representative  
**JAMIE JOHNSON**  
District 12

# HOUSE BILL 1446

- Creates a registration process for insurance reimbursement of doula services
- Will encourage use of doulas, who are associated with better birth experiences, shorter labor, and less pain medication use
- Most doula services are paid for out-of-pocket, with costs often reaching over \$1,500 per birth



State Representative  
**JAMIE JOHNSON**  
District 12



# HOUSE BILL 1853

- Requires transparency when customers receive back charges on their utility as a result of a billing error
- The bill must include an explanation of charges and an itemized list of services and service dates
- The company must provide options for payment plans



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

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