



Voters Should Head to the Polls for Important Ballot Proposals

JEFFERSON CITY — Apart from the variety of races for political office in the coming election, there will be three important statewide ballot initiatives for Missourians to consider in November. Missouri voters will have the opportunity to weigh in on proposals to raise the minimum wage, offer protections to embryonic stem cell research, and raise the state tobacco tax for health care and anti-tobacco programs. All three of these ballot proposals would have a profound impact on the lives of Missourians, and I recommend that everyone makes their voices heard on these important issues.

Voters will have the chance to approve or vote down Proposition B, which would raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.50 per hour, or to the level of the federal minimum wage if that is higher. The wage would then be increased every year for inflation based on the Consumer Price Index. Some say an increase in the minimum wage is needed to ensure that workers are fairly compensated. Others argue that employers, not the government, should set wages and that artificially increased wages mean fewer jobs for the workers the minimum wage is supposed to help.

The stem cell initiative, or Amendment 2, would amend the Missouri Constitution to prohibit the state from imposing restrictions on embryonic stem cell research that are stricter than federal standards. Under the procedure, the nucleus of a cell is injected into an unfertilized egg. The egg is stimulated to divide and produce stem cells that are harvested from the embryo. Supporters say these cells can grow into any organ or tissue in the human body and that embryonic stem cell research could lead to cures for many diseases. Opponents say there is no evidence that it will produce useful results. Further, this is the same process that cloned Dolly the Sheep, and opponents say this practice amounts to unethically cloning human embryos.

Finally, Amendment 3 would institute an 80-cents-per-pack sales tax increase on cigarettes and tax increases on other tobacco products. Missouri currently has a 17-cents-per-pack cigarette tax. The plan would generate an estimated \$351 million to \$499 million in annual revenue, which would be directed toward anti-tobacco programs and public health care. Supporters say the sales tax is needed to reduce tobacco use and fund health care. Others oppose a 470 percent tax increase to fund government programs, and they say the gradually decreasing tobacco revenues would not cover increasing costs of new health-care programs.

Whatever your opinions on these important issues, I encourage all eligible voters to get out to the polls and make your vote count.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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