



THE STOUFFER REPORT

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Amendments on State Officials and Veterans Round Out Ballot

Sneaky, sneaky — that's what some are calling Amendment 7, another measure on the November ballot. In the past few weeks, I have taken you through the who, what, when, where and why of the ballot measures Missourians are seeing a lot of advertising about. However, there are two more issues to vote on, and one is starting to cause some controversy.

First, Amendment 6, which was proposed by the 93rd General Assembly, will offer tax exemptions to veterans' organizations and has seen little opposition. The amendment will create a tax exemption for real and personal property that is used or held for nonprofit purposes or activities of veterans' organizations.

For the rest of this column I am going to give you the who, what, when, where, and why of Amendment 7.

What is Amendment 7? This proposed constitutional amendment would prohibit pension payments for judges, state lawmakers and statewide elected officials who have been convicted of a felony.

Who proposed Amendment 7? The 93rd General Assembly proposed this amendment in the second regular session this year. The proposal was within HJR 55.

Why are people supporting Amendment 7? Supporters of Amendment 7 say it is needed to keep corrupt officials from milking taxpayer-funded pensions. However, some opponents say it is a misleading attempt to offer greater opportunities for officials to boost their incomes.

Why are people opposing Amendment 7? Opponents point out that existing laws bar lawmakers and statewide elected officials from receiving pensions if convicted of felonies relating to their jobs. Judges convicted of felonies or removed for immoral acts are also forbidden from collecting pension benefits. They say that Amendment 7 only applies to lawmakers and elected officials convicted for actions unrelated to their offices, and a simple change in state law, not a constitutional amendment, would suffice.

The most troubling issue about Amendment 7 is that it would make it easier for lawmakers to raise their wages. Currently, the Missouri Citizens' Commission on Compensation for Elected Officials proposes pay raises for judges, lawmakers and state officials. However, lawmakers have repeatedly ignored the recommendations and not voted on pay raises. Amendment 7 would automatically enact the commission's recommendations unless lawmakers reject the pay raises by a two-thirds vote. In other words, pay raises for state officials would go into effect without lawmakers having to vote for them.

When will this take affect? It will go into affect January 2007. The lawmakers will not be able to vote on a pay raise until January 2009.

This amendment raises complicated issues, and I encourage all Missouri voters to take a close look at the implications of Amendment 7.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by e-mail at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

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