



# WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler  
District 32



Room 433 - State Capitol Bldg. - Jefferson City, MO 65101 - Contact: Barbara Mustoe at (573) 751-2306

**Week of June 12, 2006**

## **Ballot Initiatives**

Democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Missourians get a say in the legislative process by choosing who represents them in political offices. But a citizen's lawmaking powers don't end there.

If any group or individual wants to change a state statute or amend the state constitution, they can file a petition with the Office of Secretary of State to put an initiative on the ballot in an upcoming election. Initiatives changing state law require the petition to include enough signatures from registered voters to equal at least 5 percent of the total votes cast in the latest gubernatorial election in six of Missouri's nine congressional districts. For an initiative changing the state constitution to be placed on the ballot, signatures are needed from registered voters equal to 8 percent of those votes cast.

The November 2006 ballot has the potential to host seven initiatives changing either the state law or the state constitution. I would like to introduce the ballot issues to you now, so you can further explore them and make educated decisions come November 7.

The only initiative to be officially approved, meaning it will definitely be on the ballot, was proposed by the 93<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly last year. The measure calls on voters to decide if the Missouri Constitution should be amended to reauthorize for 10 years the one-tenth percent sales/use tax for soil and water conservation, and state parks and historic sites. Voters must also choose if this issue should be on the ballot every 10 years or at an earlier special election. The tax generates approximately \$82 million annually for soil and water conservation efforts and operation of the state park system.

Four issues have cleared the first review and will be further considered for ballot placement. One seeks to raise the tax on tobacco products to generate an estimated \$351 to \$499 million a year for funding tobacco-control programs, health care for low income Missourians, and payments for services provided to Missouri Medicaid beneficiaries and uninsured Missourians. The proposed tax increase would raise the current 17 cent cigarette tax to 97 cents per pack and boost taxes on other tobacco products by 20 percent.

Another initiative slated for the ballot deals with embryonic stem cell research. The measure amends the state constitution to allow Missouri to engage in any stem cell research that is permitted under federal law. The initiative also bans any attempt to clone a human being. Voters will determine whether constitutional protection would be ethical and in line with their beliefs about when human life begins.

The third initiative that could show up on the ballot aims to restore Medicaid eligibility thresholds to the levels that existed prior to last year, when the General Assembly adjusted them with the goal of preventing Missouri from spending beyond its means. If the proposal is approved, the estimated fiscal impact on state government would be approximately \$325 million the first year.

The last ballot measure to have made it through the first round of verification review raises the minimum wage. Missouri currently follows the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour. The proposal would raise that to \$6.50 by Jan. 1, 2007, and increase the wage rate each year in line with the cost of living.

The secretary of state recently threw out two proposed constitutional amendments because they did not meet statutory requirements for organization. One sought to restrict eminent domain laws and ban governments from seizing property for private development projects. The other aimed to establish more rigid limits on state government spending. The groups sponsoring the initiatives are challenging the secretary of state's decision in the courts. Unless a judge says otherwise, constraining eminent domain and limiting government spending will not make it to the ballot by this November.

Regardless how you personally feel about the issues, I urge you to voice that opinion by going to the polls in five months. Voting is your right, it is your duty and it is what differentiates the United States from many other countries in the world.

*Senator Gary Nodler represents the people of  
Newton, Jasper and Dade counties in the Missouri Senate*