



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

Delbert Scott
28th Senate District

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 416
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

A Weekly Column for the
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Contact: Debbie Poire
(573) 751-8793

Committee Passes Legislation to Regulate Petition Circulators

JEFFERSON CITY – This week legislation that places certain requirements on petition circulators was approved by the Financial and Governmental Organizations and Elections Committee. Senate Bill 909 includes components of three other measures related to petition circulators. Now that the combined measure has been passed by committee, it will be placed on the Senate calendar for likely debate on the Senate floor later in the session.

Senate Bill 909 requires that petition circulators be U.S. citizens and Missouri residents who are not being paid on a per signature basis. Also, the groups circulating the petitions would need to submit information confirming the fulfillment of all requirements to the Secretary of State before collecting any signatures.

Petitions are a particularly useful tool that allows voters to take the legislative process into their own hands by attempting to gather enough signatures to place an issue directly on the ballot. First and foremost, any change made to the Missouri Constitution must be approved by the voters. This can be done one of two ways — either by the Legislature placing the proposed change on the ballot or by an initiative petition. For a constitution-changing petition to be valid, it must be signed by 8 percent of legal voters in each of two-thirds of the nine congressional districts in the state. Referendum petitions can be used to propose new laws, and to do so, require 5 percent of voters' signatures. However, gaps in the current law make it too easy to corrupt the virtuous idea of giving a voice to the people.

Lately, I've seen more and more interest groups paying people to collect signatures on initiative and referendum petitions. Changing the constitution or proposing a new law is no small feat, and it's crucial that all petitions are legitimate. The voice of the people should be heard in a fair and honest way, and these provisions would help ensure that petition circulators are not trying to deceive voters for the sole purpose of making money.

Petitions are an excellent way to gauge the public opinion, but only when executed correctly. My hope is that my colleagues will realize the importance of fully legitimizing Missouri's petition process, so we can better our constitution and continue to craft new laws that make a positive change in the lives of Missourians.

On another note, I would like to thank those of you who went out to vote on Super Tuesday, particularly if you had to brave unpleasant weather to get to the voting booth. With both races going down to the very last vote, all eyes were on Missouri in what will surely be a historic presidential primary.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.state.mo.us.

Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.