

For Immediate Release

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SHARING A VIEW OF THE STATE

Issues and Comments – 33rd Senatorial District

Senator

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By now you are probably saturated with attacks and sound bites from candidates you will be voting for (or against) in the upcoming November election. You may not be as familiar with some of the questions occupying the general election ballot.

Sometimes issues are placed on the ballot as a result of action taken by the Legislature. Other times they are the result of what is known as the initiative petition process. In Missouri, citizens may place a question before voters by procuring a specified number of signatures of registered voters across the state. It is not an easy process, but does provide the electorate a way to directly impact lawmaking in the state.

The issue attracting the most attention is one which has been brewing for a while. In Proposition A voters will be asked whether they wish to abolish loss limits established for casino gambling. The current law, which is unique to Missouri, is designed to prevent gamblers from losing more than five hundred dollars in a two hour period or “cruise.” It does not necessarily confine a gambler to this limit every two hours. Much depends upon when the person enters the gaming floor of a casino.

For instance, let’s say the two hour “cruise” begins at 2:00 p.m. and ends at 4:00 p.m. If a gambler enters the casino at 1:55 p.m. he may buy \$500 worth of chips or tokens. At 2:01 p.m. that person is eligible to purchase another \$500 and at 4:01 p.m. another \$500 may be acquired. Based on this scenario, our gambler could possibly lose \$1500 in a little over two hours. Of course, it works the other way as well. If our gambler doesn’t arrive until 2:05 p.m. and he loses \$500 by 2:45 p.m., he is done until after 4:00 p.m. when another “cruise” begins.

In addition to removing the loss limits, the measure would also increase taxes on casinos and direct the money into educational uses. This issued is being supported by most casinos and some business groups. It is opposed by anti-gambling and some religious organizations. Of all the ballot issues it has attracted the most organized proponents and opponents.

Also on the ballot will be Constitutional Amendment 1, a measure requiring governmental meetings to be conducted in English. In 1998, the legislature recognized English as the official language of Missouri, but the law does not have any requirements or stipulations. There has been little organized opposition to this measure and most political pundits expect it to pass.

According to a group called U. S. English, more than half the states already have passed similar legislation. In addition to requiring official meetings be conducted in English, it would also require ballots, drivers license exams, and other documents to be printed in English.

Constitutional Amendment 4 was passed by the Legislature as Senate Joint Resolution 45. You will see minimal if any television ads for or against this ballot measure. While this issue has attracted little attention, it is important to many cities and counties across the state. Most sewer and storm water projects are funded by grants and loans from the state to local entities. The monies are received from the issuance of bonds or other types of public debt. This change to the Missouri Constitution specifically states this money may only go to public water and sewer districts. It further removes the limits on how much money may be made available for these projects and eliminates restrictions on the method of distributing the funds. As money is repaid on these projects, it will be placed into a separate fund to be used for future sewer and storm water projects. Tax rates will not be affected.

Proposition B was placed on the ballot by the initiative petition process. Also attracting little attention, this issue has the potential to become quite controversial in the future if it passes. Estimated to cost the state approximately \$500,000, the measure would create the Missouri Quality Homecare Council. While the stated purpose of the Council is to recruit, train, and stabilize the homecare workforce, many people close to the issue see it as a prelude for home health workers to unionize.

Proposition C, also placed on the ballot by initiative petition, would require investor-owned electric utility companies to produce or purchase at least two percent of their power output from renewable sources by 2011. This would increase incrementally until 2021 at which point the requirement would be fifteen percent, including two percent from solar energy. Utility companies would be prohibited from raising their rates more than one percent as a result of the costs arising from this measure if it were to pass. As with the two other issues, this measure has not attracted much attention from either opponents or proponents.

This year looks to hold the potential for record voter turnout. I would urge you to join me and many of your neighbors and friends as we head to the polls in November. Voting is not difficult in Missouri. If you choose to not make the effort to vote, you give up the right to complain about the results. Even if you only feel strongly about a certain candidate or issue, it is important to participate in the process.

As always, I welcome your comments. You may write to me at Missouri Senate, State Capitol, Room 420, Jefferson City, MO, 65101, call 573-751-1882, or e-mail to chuck.purgason@senate.mo.gov.