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## **Veto Session Included Challenge to Federal Stimulus Accountability Bill**

JEFFERSON CITY — On Sept. 16, state lawmakers returned to the Capitol for their annual Veto Session. As I've mentioned on previous occasions, there was one veto that did not sit well with me. In July, the governor vetoed [House Bill 544](#) — a bill I helped pass in the General Assembly that was intended to enhance public accountability for federal stimulus money and state spending cuts.

The last time the Legislature overturned a governor's veto was in 2003 when lawmakers voted to allow Missourians to carry concealed weapons, barred certain lawsuits against gun manufacturers, and required a waiting period for abortions. Vetoes usually center on Second Amendment rights or abortion issues. A two-thirds vote in both chambers is required to override a veto, so they are a rarity.

During this Veto Session, there was an attempt to override House Bill 544, which would have made the Missouri Accountability Portal permanent by state statute. The portal is a searchable online database of state expenditures. The bill would have required the database to include daily updates of spending cuts or delays by the governor to keep the state budget in balance.

Because the bill originated in the House, an override had to begin there. The House Majority party holds an 88-73 majority, with two vacancies, and needed the support from some of the House minority members to get the two-thirds vote necessary to override a veto. In the Senate, the majority party holds a 23-10 majority, with one vacancy, but the Senate didn't get the opportunity to consider the veto since it did not clear the House.

The governor's veto message on House Bill 544 said the oversight provisions of the bill already existed in other bills signed into law, but I strongly disagree. A separate Joint Committee on Oversight of Federal Stimulus and Stabilization Funds — established in my Senate Concurrent Resolution 27 — deals with gathering information on available monies for competitive grants and does not deal with any oversight issues and is completely separate from the oversight responsibilities that were included in House Bill 544. I worked with the State Auditor's office to make the oversight panel legislation stronger and to give more audit powers to the auditor's office to go after abuse allegations before they happen, so I was shocked when the administration vetoed such an important bill.

I understand the likelihood of securing a veto during any Veto Session is difficult to do, and that's how this session played out. The veto session does, however, remain an integral part of our political process as it gives lawmakers — who represent the voice of the people — a chance to undo various measures vetoed by the governor. While the power of the veto belongs to the Executive Department, I think the governor absolutely got it wrong in this instance and many, including myself, have gone on record as saying so.

As always, if you have any 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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