



Governmental Services Group

This week, the Missouri Legislature had quite a bit of action despite the shortened week due to icy road conditions statewide. First, Governor Mike Parson delivered his final annual State of the State address to a joint session of both the House and Senate. In his speech, Governor Parson highlighted the state's progress and outlined his priorities for the remainder of his time in office.

Parson focused on Missouri's strong economic performance, citing low unemployment, job growth, and rising wages. He credited his policies of tax cuts, deregulation, and workforce development for these positive trends. Parson also called for increased funding for education, with a focus on early childhood education, career and technical education, and teacher pay.

The Governor also expressed support for expanding access to affordable healthcare, although he did not outline or commit to any concrete policy proposals. Additionally, he noted his opposition to Medicaid expansion as well as abortion.

Additionally, Parson expressed his commitment to improving both I-70 and I-44, acknowledging the vital role they play in the state's economy and transportation system. While prioritizing ongoing work on I-70, he laid out the groundwork for future I-44 improvements with an "I-44 improvement fund", signaling his intention to address both crucial highways during his remaining time in office. The details were light but will be an ongoing focus during the budget process.

Additionally, this week Missouri Senate President Pro Tem Caleb Rowden stripped four members of the Freedom Caucus from their committee chairmanships. Those who lost their chairmanships were Senators Brattin, Eigel, Hoskins, and Koenig. This action, following weeks of escalating tension, represents a significant power shift within the Missouri Senate and has potential consequences for both state legislation and upcoming statewide elections.

In terms of legislation, the House held hearings on initiative petition reform on Tuesday. One of the bills proposed during the hearing, HB 1749, would require anyone circulating petitions to be a Missouri resident or to be in the state for 30 days prior. They would have to be U.S. citizens and could not be paid based on the number of signatures they collect. The committee also heard two House Joint Resolutions (HJR) which would, upon voter approval, amend the state constitution to prohibit initiative petitions from raising sales taxes on food or imposing taxes or fees on real estate or real or personal property.

The Senate disarray continued Thursday despite Pro Tem Rowden committing to assigning bills to committee. Senators Eigel and Hoskins held the floor into the early afternoon over the alleged suggestion by Floor Leader O'Laughlin that a Senator could be expelled from the body with 23

votes. Senator Eigel took offense to this and led to an additional filibuster over gubernatorial appointments.

As we approach the end of January, committees have started to see more bills assigned and the pace of public hearings has increased. The budget process begins in full Monday, as will House floor action, but it is still anyone's guess if the Senate can find a way to function. As always, we will keep you updated on all key developments.

Telehealth

HB 1907, sponsored by Representative Stinnett, adjusts the definition of "telehealth services" under Chapter 191, RSMo, to include audiovisual and audio-only technologies. The term "telehealth" or "telemedicine" shall not be limited only to services delivered via select third-party corporate platforms. This bill had a hearing in the House Healthcare Reform Committee this week.

Testifying in support of the bill was the Missouri Psychological Association, Missouri Hospital Association, Missouri Academy of Family Physicians, Missouri Association of Social Workers-Missouri Chapter, Missouri Mental Health Counseling Association, Missouri Association of School Psychologists, Missouri Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics, Phoenix Home Care, Missouri Rural Health Association, Missouri Association of Osteopathic Physicians and Surgeons, Paraquad, Missouri Association of Rural Health Clinics, St. Luke's Health, and the MO Nurses Association.

Blood Testing for Pregnant Women

HB 1979, sponsored by Representative Stinnett, this bill modifies provisions governing blood tests and maternal screening for pregnant women. Currently, pregnant women are asked to take a blood test at the time of the first prenatal examination, or no later than 20 days after the first prenatal examination, to screen for syphilis and hepatitis B, as well as any other treatable diseases and metabolic disorders as are prescribed by the Department of Health and Senior Services.

This bill requires an additional blood sample to be taken, with the woman's consent, at 28 weeks of pregnancy, and expands the list of diseases for screening to include hepatitis C and HIV. The bill also repeals a provision outlining the procedure for a later sample of a woman's blood in any area of the state designated as a syphilis outbreak area, and provides that if a woman tests positive for syphilis, hepatitis B or C, or HIV, or a combination thereof, the physician or person providing care shall administer treatment in accordance with the most recent accepted medical practice to treat such diseases.

The bill additionally repeals a reference to the Missouri Genetic Disease Advisory Committee, granting the Department the sole authority to make rules pertaining to such tests, provided that the tests are of the types approved or accepted by the US Food and Drug Administration. The bill also repeals a requirement that approved and standard tests for these diseases shall be made in a Department-approved laboratory.

This bill had a hearing in the House Healthcare Reform Committee this week.

In support of the bill was the American Academy of Pediatrics, Phoenix Home Health. American Academy of OBGYNs, and MOCPE.

There was no opposition to the bill.

Prior Authorization

HB 1976, sponsored by Representative Stinnett, creates provisions relating to prior authorization of health care services. This bill was voted out of the House Healthcare Reform Committee this week.

Animal Confiscation

HB 1826, sponsored by Representative Smith, modifies provisions relating to animal confiscation. The following provisions are contained in the bill:

- Specifies that a warrant issued under the bill must be served in the presence of a law enforcement official;
- Requires a person acting under the authority of a warrant to appear at a disposition hearing before the court through which the warrant was issued within 15 days of the confiscation, instead of being given a disposition hearing within 30 days of the filing of the request, for the purpose of granting immediate disposition of the animals. An animal cannot be sterilized before the completion of the disposition hearing unless it is necessary to save life or relieve suffering;
- Allows a third party approved by the court to care for confiscated animals;
- Specifies that all animals confiscated must receive proper care as determined by state law and regulations. Any facility or organization must be liable to the owner for damages for any negligent act or abuse of the animal which occurs while the animal is in its care, custody, and control;
- Specifies that any person or entity that intentionally euthanizes, other than as permissible under the provisions of the bill, or intentionally sterilizes an animal prior to a disposition hearing, will be guilty of a class B misdemeanor and is liable to the owner for damages including the actual value of the animal.
- Includes dogs confiscated by any member of the State Highway Patrol or other law enforcement officer that were involved in dog fighting to those animals covered under these provisions.

This bill had a hearing in the House Agriculture Committee this week. The committee had a thorough discussion on the bill. A main point of disagreement was over who ended up having to pay costs whenever an animal is confiscated. The chair asked both a minority member of the committee and the sponsor of the bill to investigate facts associated with costs and instructed them to bring back answers for next week when the House Agriculture Committee meets.

Testifying in support were the MO federation of animal owners and the MO Pet Breeders Association.

In opposition was the Animal Welfare Legal Defense fund and the USHS.

DHSS Authority

SB 818, sponsored by Senator Brown, states that the Department of Health and Senior Services shall not promulgate or make an order, rule, or regulation to delegate the Department's authority to make orders, rules, or regulations to any official, agency, or department and shall not promulgate or make an order, rule, or regulation to grant the authority to promulgate or make orders, rules, or regulations to a state or local official.

This bill had a hearing in the House Government Accountability Committee today.

The Missouri Restaurant Association and Missouri Century Foundation testified in support of the bill.

STL County was in opposition to the bill.

Protect Small Business Act

HB 2381, sponsored by Representative Brown, establishes the "Protecting Missouri's Small Businesses Act", which changes the law regarding businesses closed because of a shutdown order. This bill was voted out of the House Special Committee on Small Business DO PASS.