

STRATEGIC CAPITOL

C O N S U L T I N G

January 9, 2025

The first week of session is officially in the books! Lawmakers, their staff, lobbyists, and advocates returned back to the Capitol Wednesday afternoon for the start of the first regular session of the 103rd General Assembly. After the November elections, the number of seats Republicans and Democrats hold in the Senate chamber remained unchanged with Republicans maintaining 24 of the Senate's 34 seats and in the House, Republicans hold 111 of the House's 163 seats. Which means entering the legislative session today, Republicans continue to hold supermajorities in both the House and Senate chambers.

Although Wednesday was largely focused on ceremonial procedures as new members and re-elected members of the Missouri Senate and House took the oath of office, both chambers also elected new leadership. Making Missouri history, Republican Senator Cindy O'Laughlin (R-Shelbina) was officially elected as the first woman to lead the Missouri Senate as the new Senate Pro Tem, and Senator Tony Luetkemeyer (R-Parkville) was elected as the new Senate Majority Floor Leader. While the past couple of years the Senate has been filled with gridlock and disagreements, which has halted legislation from moving forward, with the election of new leadership and new members, the goal is this session will be more productive than previous years.

While the Senate has functioned in chaos the past couple of years and now seems to be back on track, in a turn of events the House got off to a rocky start as Representative Justin Sparks (R-Wildwood) started a campaign about a month ago to try to block and prevent Representative Jon Patterson from winning the Missouri House speakership. With only 10 members voting in support of Sparks, his campaign failed dramatically Wednesday afternoon, with Representative Jon Patterson officially receiving a total of 152 votes and was elected as the new Speaker of the House. While Representative Sparks campaign was a longshot, he based his campaign on a call for changes to the House rules and objections to the fundraising tactics of the House Republican majority. With a current total of 111 Republicans in the House, Sparks only needed 29 other Republicans to join him to prevent Patterson from obtaining a majority vote, however no effort to block the majority party's nominee from becoming speaker has succeeded since 1996.

By the end of Wednesday, a total of 1438 bills have been filed between the two chambers. The next couple of weeks will be dedicated to forming committees, appointing chairman, and appointing members from both parties to the newly formed committees. Once committees are formed, bills will be referred for hearings and the legislative process will begin in earnest.

With a new Governor and new leadership in the House and Senate, there is a glimmer of hope this session will be more productive than previous years, but only time will tell!

Your custom webpage URL for bill tracking is <https://govwatch.net/report/LGKp> As a reminder, this is a hotlink and updates automatically as things are added, progress, or change.

Highlights

- MO United States Representative Sam Graves bill to increase broadband access in rural areas, the Eliminating Barriers to Rural Internet Development Grant Eligibility (E-BRIDGE) Act, was signed into law last Friday as part of the Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act of 2024 ([S. 4367](#)). The E-BRIDGE Act removes hurdles for broadband projects under Economic Development Administration (EDA) grants, including difficult last-mile efforts that often delay rural broadband deployment. It also ensures that local communities can partner with the private sector in carrying out broadband projects and gives communities more flexibility in complying with their funding match requirements.
- This week, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) transferred \$5,459,172 in funds generated by Missouri's adult use marijuana program to agencies as outlined in Article XIV, Section 2, of the Missouri Constitution. This brings the total amount transferred from funds generated by Missouri's adult use marijuana program this fiscal year to \$21,836,688.
- The St. Louis County Council held its first meeting of the year Tuesday evening after swearing in two new members. One of the first orders of business was Chairman Rita Heard Days looking to get a proposal on the April 8th ballot which would give the council the ability to remove county department heads, and it could apply to the current County Executive Sam Page. The proposed legislation would require a change of the St. Louis County charter, which means the people would end up deciding whether they want to give this removal power to the council. There was no vote or discussion between council members on the call for this legislation, however a more finalized version of this bill will likely be presented at the next county council meeting.

Commission and Board Updates

MO Highways and Transportation Commission

The Missouri Highway and Transportation Commission (MHTC) convened in Jefferson City Tuesday morning for a brief financial forecast and again Wednesday morning for their monthly commission meeting. Wednesday's agenda included a brief discussion of the annual reports MoDOT is required to submit to both the Governor and General Assembly, the Director's report, consideration of bids for transportation improvement, a more in-depth recap of the financial forecast, Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) development, an update on I-70 improvements, motor carrier services, and excess property updates.

The annual reports have been submitted to both the Governor and the General Assembly, and they contained a recap of activity conducted by MoDOT along with a comprehensive financial review. In July, MHTC approved the FY2025-2029 STIP, which made available a record-setting \$14.6 billion in federal and state revenues for all modes of transportation. Included is funding allocated for improvements to I-70 and I-44, fixing low volume roads in poor condition and making improvements to bridges, airports and rail crossings. After the annual update, the commission then considered bids for transportation improvement. Most bids were approved for the lowest and best bidders and, MHTC was pleased to note, the first contract was awarded for the Forward 44 improvement program.

The commission then turned its attention towards the financial forecast for FY2025 and FY2026 and were informed the FY25 budget increased by \$1.3 billion more than the FY24 budget. This was primarily due to the Improve I-70 Program, the Forward 44 Program, and the rural routes funding. The FY25 budget began with a net position of \$33.1 billion and is mostly achieved through capital assets. The department released the first rounds of bonds in November 2024 and plans to issue another series in 2026 and 2028, with \$136 million dedicated to debt bond service each year.

The update for the FY2025-2029 STIP included information regarding the Long Range Transportation Plan which is planned for publication in early 2026. This will be a 25-year plan for transportation in Missouri and will include such goals as ensuring current transportation systems are maintained, keeping travelers safe regardless of the mode of transportation, invest in projects that spur economic growth, improve transportation choices and reduce congestion on Missouri's transportation system. Commissioners were also reminded their remains over \$10.5 billion in unfunded needs. The Improve I-70 program update included an update on the Columbia to Kingdom City stretch which has parts of the West bound lanes completed with plans to move to the East bound lanes in the Spring. The Warrenton to Wentzville stretch has been awarded and the department is currently planning a Spring groundbreaking ceremony, with construction to begin shortly afterward. In 2025, both Blue Springs to Odessa and Rocheport to Columbia projects will be awarded.

A brief overview of what motor carrier services are commenced before the update was given to MHTC. In 2024, approximately \$207.4 million in user fees was collected and \$117.4 million was deposited into the road fund from motor carrier services. It was also reported that over 44,000 vehicles were inspected through a partnership with the Missouri Highway Patrol. MHTC then moved on to the final agenda item regarding the excess property management process. On average 1,400 driveway permits are issued each year, including 260 commercial driveways. Additionally, there are also 300 requests for the purchase of excess right of way each year. The asset disposal process begins with a customer request, has a district review, includes a sales agreement, requires commission approval and finally the sale is closed and the records retained.

The next meeting has been scheduled for 9:00am on Wednesday February 5th in Jefferson City.

State Board of Education

The State Board of Education met for their monthly meeting on Tuesday January 7th via Webex due to the inclement weather. The agenda included discussion of classifying school districts, teacher recruitment and retention data, teacher quality data and a governmental affairs update. During the discussion regarding classification of school districts, Board Member Kerry Casey pushed for St. Louis Public Schools to be demoted from fully accredited to provisional accreditation as she felt the district was failing to meet the requirements for full accreditation. Her proposal ultimately failed and most of the state's district will remain fully accredited.

The Board then moved to receive an update regarding teacher recruitment and retention and teacher quality data. During the 2023-2024 school year, 88.7% of all teachers remained in the profession, but schools struggled to retain first-year teachers. There are also more people enrolled in teacher preparation programs than before the pandemic. The state-funded programs like Grow Your Own, scholarships for students in teacher training programs and changes to other programs are keeping teachers in schools. The board also learned DESE created and released a "Teacher Recruitment and Retention Playbook," which contains a set of guidelines for schools' leaders to

help further curb teacher shortages in their district. The teacher quality data study indicated negative perceptions of teaching impede recruitment, rural and large city Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) had the largest percentage of vacancies, and also inappropriately certified teachers. Additionally, there is a geographic imbalance to access of educator preparation programs, preparation curriculum creates an unnecessary obstacle, and a large percentage of people that complete the program never enter the public-school workforce.

Finally, the board noted that they had learned there are currently over 185 bills regarding education that have been pre-filed. Some of the bills address school safety, school safety standards, assessments and accreditation, virtual school assessments, childcare access and affordability, school choice and open enrollment. DESE will be watching these bills as session gets underway and will report back to the board in February on any movement.

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday February 11th.

Upcoming Dates of Interest:

- January 8, 2025 – First Day of Legislative Session
- January 13, 2025 – Inauguration Day
- January 20, 2025 – MLK Day – NO SESSION
- January 28, 2025 – State of the State Address
- February 26, 2025 – State of the Judiciary Address
- February 28, 2025 – Last Day to File Legislation
- April 21, 2025 – Easter Holiday – NO SESSION
- May 9, 2025 – Last Day to Pass the FY26 Budget
- May 16, 2025 – Last Day of the 2025 Legislative Session
- September 10, 2025 – Veto Session

