



State Representative
Mark A. Sharp
District 37

WEEKLY CAPITOL UPDATE

Monday, December 11, 2023

STATE PREDICTS FLAT COLLECTIONS

Missouri budget officials on Dec. 4 announced they now expect the state to collect 0.7% less general revenue during the 2024 fiscal year than it did during FY 2023 and anticipate revenue collections for the upcoming 2025 fiscal year will grow by just 0.2% over the diminished FY 2024 estimate.

The consensus revenue estimate (CRE) for the two fiscal years represents the amount of net state general revenue the Governor’s Office and the House and Senate Budget Committee chairs agree the state is likely to collect during each year.

As lawmakers begin the process of crafting the next state budget, the CRE ensures all parties are working from the same revenue numbers when making appropriations decisions.

Under the original CRE for FY 2024 issued last December, the state expected net general revenue

growth of 0.7%. Budget officials now expect the state to collect \$13.14 billion in net general revenue during FY 2024, which would represent a 0.7% decline over FY 2023 collections. The 0.2% growth expected under the FY 2025 CRE would result in roughly flat collections of \$13.16 billion.

The anemic collections largely stem from a state income tax cut benefitting mainly the wealthy that took effect in January. Because the state has been sitting on a multi-billion dollar surplus from an influx of federal pandemic relief funds, Missouri so far has been insulated from the need to cut spending. However, that surplus eventually will be depleted.

In a departure from longstanding tradition, House appropriations subcommittees began meeting Dec. 4 to take testimony from officials of the various state departments regarding their FY 2025 budget requests for the fiscal year that begins next July 1. This process typically doesn't start until the annual legislative session begins in January.

But whether House lawmakers will be able to get much of a jump on the budget process by starting hearings early is questionable since Gov. Mike Parson won't present his proposed FY 2025 budget to lawmakers until Jan. 24. As a result, the committees likely will hold additional hearings to question administration officials once the governor's actual budget plan is released.

SENATOR TO BECOME NEXT DESE LEADER

The State Board of Education on Dec. 6 voted to hire state Sen. Karla Eslinger as the next leader of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Eslinger, R-Wasola, will remain in the Senate during the upcoming legislative session before resigning to become state education commissioner on June 1.

A 30-year education veteran, Eslinger holds a doctorate in educational leadership and policy analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia and previously worked at DESE as assistant commissioner in the Office of Educational Quality from 2010 to 2013. She also enjoyed a long career as a public school teacher and administrator, including serving as superintendent of the Ava and West Plains school districts.

Eslinger was first elected to the state legislature in 2018, serving one term in the House of Representatives before winning election to the Senate in 2020. She was one of only three Republican senators to vote against controversial legislation enacted in 2021 that established a private school tuition voucher program in Missouri.

Since Eslinger's Senate seat is already scheduled to be up for election next November, the governor likely won't call a special election to fill out the final months remaining on her current term once she resigns in mid-May after the 2024 legislative session ends.

Eslinger will replace current Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Margie Vandeven, who in October announced she will retire effective July 1. Vandeven originally led DESE from January 2015 to December 2017 before returning to the post in late 2018.

With Eslinger joining the department a month before Vandeven leaves, it will allow for a transitional period for the leadership change.

COLLECTIONS DOWN SO FAR IN FY

Year-to-date net state general revenue collections decreased 2.2% through the first five months of the 2024 fiscal year which started July 1, going from \$5.15 billion last year to \$5.04 billion this year.

Collections had been down 2.4% through the first four months of the fiscal year.

Net general revenue collections in November 2024 decreased 1.2% compared to those for November 2023, going from \$1.01 billion last year to \$1 billion this year. Although sales and use tax collections increased for the month, most of those gains were offset by reduced individual and corporate income taxes.

Bailey opposes protections for LGBTQ children in foster care

Missouri Attorney General Andrew Bailey on Nov. 27 joined Republican attorneys general in 18 other states in opposing a proposed federal regulation seeking to ensure LGBTQ children in foster care are placed in “an environment free of hostility, mistreatment or abuse” based on the child’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

Federal law already requires states to provide safe and proper care to foster children. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services promulgated the proposed rule on Sept. 28. It would allow “but not require” foster care providers to undergo training to be designated a “safe and appropriate placement” for LGBTQ children and establish a process for children to request such a placement. The proposed rule also would prohibit foster care providers from retaliating against children based on their LGBTQ status.

Bailey and the other Republican attorneys general who object to shielding LGBTQ children from hostility, mistreatment or abuse while in foster care claim in a letter to DHHS that the proposed rule violates the First Amendment rights to freedom of religion and free speech of foster care providers who oppose LGBTQ rights.

The attorneys general submitted their letter on the final day of the public comment period regarding the rule, which could be modified before it is finalized. In their letter, the attorneys general asked the department to reject the rule outright.

Supreme Court rejects appeal in abortion rights petition case

The Missouri Supreme Court declined without comment on Nov. 20 to hear Republican Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft's appeal of a lower court's rewrite of ballot language for an initiative petition effort seeking to constitutionally protect reproductive rights in the state. The high court's refusal to take the case marks yet another judicial rebuke of Ashcroft, who prepared deceptive ballot language that a three-judge panel of the Missouri Court of Appeal Western District said was "replete with politically partisan language" in violation of state law.

The Supreme Court also declined to take a related case brought by two Republican state lawmakers who unsuccessfully sought to force State Auditor Scott Fitzpatrick, also a Republican, to drastically inflate the petition's official cost estimate. While Fitzpatrick concluded the measure would result in no additional costs to the state, the lawmakers wanted the official estimate to falsely state it would cost in excess of \$12.5 billion. A different Western District panel from the one that heard

the ballot language case concluded Fitzpatrick's estimate was accurate.

The proposed amendment to the Missouri Constitution seeks to restore abortion rights at the state level in response to last year's U.S. Supreme Court ruling eliminating federal abortion rights. With the two cases now resolved, the proposal's sponsors can begin the process of collecting the minimum 171,000 signatures from registered Missouri voters needed to qualify for the November 2024 statewide ballot.

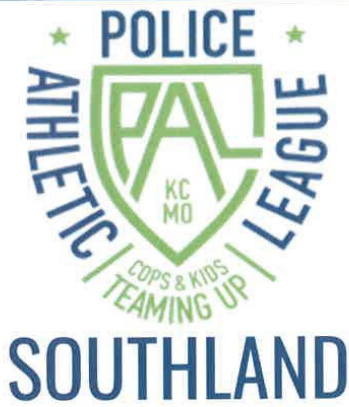
A separate initiative effort filed by a veteran Republican operative would provide more limited state constitutional protections to abortion rights, allowing restrictions after 12 weeks of gestational age in most circumstances. Litigation over deceptive ballot language Ashcroft prepared for that measure is still in its earliest stages, though its sponsor said she intends to move forward with circulation while the case is pending.

Initiative petitions seeking a spot on the November 2024 ballot must be turned into the Secretary of State's Office by early May. The ballot language case is *Dr. Anna Fitz-James v. John R. Ashcroft*, while the fiscal estimate case is *Hannah Sue Kelly, et al., v. Scott Fitzpatrick, et al.* The case involving the other abortion rights initiative is *Jamie Corley v. John R. Ashcroft, et al.*



I had the pleasure to attend the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum 2023 Buck's Bash in honor of Buck O'Neil's 112th birthday. While there I had a chance to present a check in the amount of \$1.35 million to the NLBM on behalf of the state of Missouri. With me in the photo are Betty Brown (past board chairperson, NLBM board), me, Bob Kendrick (president, NLBM) Representative Anthony Ealy and Kevin Battle (current chairman, NLBM board).





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South KC Food Pantries

South Kansas City is fortunate to have several food pantries to help less-fortunate residents have enough healthy food to eat. These

include:

Community Assistance Council, 10901 Blue Ridge Blvd. on the north end of the Ruskin High School campus, from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Persons should call 816-763-3277, ext. 100, or email info@cackc.org for appointments or questions.

Red Bridge Area Food Pantry, 100 W. Red Bridge Rd. in the First Baptist Church of Kansas City, from 10 a.m. to noon on the third Saturday each month. Persons must call 816-908-7800 for appointments by the prior Wednesday.

Harvesters (the community food network) brings the semi-truck that serves as its mobile food pantry to seven sites in south Kansas City monthly to distribute fresh produce and other healthy food to families in need. The sites are:

Center School District, 8701 Holmes Rd., from 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. as long as food is left on the first Saturday of the month. Persons should drive through the bus parking lot to the district warehouse. The event is sponsored by Three Trails Community church in partnership with the Center School District.

Center District Warehouse, 8701 Holmes Rd., from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. the second Friday of each month. Persons should go to the entrance to the Center Administrative Office and drive through the bus parking lot to the warehouse where volunteers will load the food. Persons should take the Troost Ave exit. The event is sponsored by the Center Education Foundation in partnership with the Center School District.

Evangel Church, 1414 E. 103rd St., from 7 to 8:30 a.m. the second Saturday of the month. Persons may remain in their vehicles, and food will be brought to them.

United Believers Community Church, 5600 E. 112th Terr., with vehicles lining up at 8:30 a.m. and contactless food distribution running from 9 to 11 a.m. the third Wednesday of the month.

Ruskin High School, 7000 E. 111th St., from 4 to 5:30 p.m. the third Thursday of the month. Vehicles should line up on Ruskin Way on the east side of the school, and staff and students will load the food when vehicles reach the school.

Colonial Presbyterian Church, 9500 Wornall Rd., with registration beginning at 8 a.m. and food distribution running from about 8:30 to 10 a.m. on the third Saturday of the month. Families are asked to bring two cardboard boxes for volunteers to put the food in.

Red Bridge United Methodist Church, 636 E. 117th St., from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. on the fourth Friday of the month in the church parking lot.

Serve and Lift Center â€™ South KC, 8001 Longview

Rd., from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Walk-in, call for an appointment or order online at <https://catholiccharities-kcsj.org/pantry/>



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**Please don't hesitate to contact me
with any feedback, questions or ideas!**