



## **Being a Justice Advocate in the Voting Booth: Ballot Measure Guide for the General Election, 2016**

On **November 8, 2016**, Missouri voters have the opportunity to pass or defeat five proposed amendments to the Missouri Constitution and one statute change via petition initiative. The General Assembly's long-standing failure to address Missouri's outdated, unfair, and inadequate revenue system is at the root of several measures. Here is a summary of these six ballot measures and concerns that relate to justice:

### **Amendment 1 – We urge a YES vote.**

This is the fourth time since 1984 that Missouri voters have been asked to authorize a one-tenth-cent statewide sales and use tax to support soil and water conservation programs and operation and maintenance of state parks and historic sites. By the wording of the 2006 vote to retain this tax, this measure will appear on our ballot every ten years, so we vote in 2016 and again in 2026, etc.

While Empower Missouri advocates that a well-structured progressive income tax system is the most just way to fund the common good, **our Board of Directors does urge a yes vote on Amendment 1**. Eliminating the tax would only save \$20 in a year for a family with a take-home income of \$20,000 – if they spent every penny of their income in Missouri. Without the \$90 million that the Missouri Department of Natural Resources receives from this tax annually, lawmakers would have to cut funding to soil and water conservation and state parks or fund them out of general revenue, reducing the amount available to essentials like education, health care and public safety.

### **Amendment 2 – Empower Missouri is neutral.**

Many Empower Missouri members took action to impose limits on the amounts individual donors can give candidates by voting yes on Proposition A in November 1994. However, in 2008, the General Assembly repealed those limits. House Bill 1038 passed on a mostly party line vote, and then-Gov. Matt Blunt signed it into law.

Amendment 2 would again cap campaign giving. Individual donors would be prohibited from giving a candidate for statewide office, state senate, state representative or judicial office more than \$2,600 per election. Individual donors also would be barred from giving more than \$25,000 per election to the same political party. Those limits would be adjusted for inflation, and additional campaign regulations would be established.

***Empower Missouri supports campaign finance limits.*** Amendment 2 is weaker than we prefer and contains drafting errors that may lead to costly litigation after the vote.

**Amendment 3 – Our members make strong justice arguments on both sides.**

If ratified by voters, Amendment 3 would phase in an additional tax of 60 cents per pack on all cigarette brands and levy an additional wholesale fee on certain discount brands. The new tax would generate up to \$374 million annually, constitutionally earmarked for early childhood education programs, early childhood health care and smoking cessation. The levy on discount brands relates to what “Big Tobacco” calls a loophole, allowing some companies to avoid escrow payments that “Big Tobacco” pays. “Little Tobacco” argues that they never signed on to the agreement that “Big Tobacco” signed (which offered “Big Tobacco” protections from litigation for past bad actions).

Empower Missouri members supporting Amendment 3 point to our Legislature’s failure to adequately fund early childhood education. Extensive research proves the value of such an investment. Our members opposing Amendment 3 highlight language about abortion, stem cell therapies, and U.S. residency in the measure that they find offensive or potentially damaging. There are also fears of how a new Early Childhood Commission would handle distribution of public funds to private or religious child care providers. Presently state subsidies to low-income families may be spent at public and private, licensed and unlicensed, religious and secular child care providers.

We urge our members to recognize that others have taken their positions out of concerns for justice. Please study this issue carefully and be an informed voter. See [www.raiseyourhandsforkids.org](http://www.raiseyourhandsforkids.org) and <http://www.badformissouri.com/>.

**Amendment 4 – We are neutral, but note the Missouri Budget Project opposition.**

Amendment 4 would constitutionally prohibit state and local governments from charging sales or use taxes for services that were not already subject to such taxes as of Jan. 1, 2015. This is a preemptive strike against repeated attempts by super-wealthy Rex Sinefield to replace the income tax with a higher sales tax on virtually everything. We are not fans of sales taxes to fund the common good. Still Missouri Budget Project does urge a no vote for reasons that may be found at <http://www.mobudget.org/tax-issues-on-the-november-ballot/>. We do agree that constitutionally tying our own hands as to how our state may respond to future economic realities holds many dangers.

**Amendment 6 – We strongly urge a No vote.**

Amendment 6 would weaken current strong voting rights in our state constitution by allowing imposition of photo voter identification rules. Federal courts have increasingly acknowledged that such laws do nothing to reduce fraud while unfairly depriving low-income voters, disproportionately People of Color, of their constitutional rights. **DEFEAT OF AMENDMENT 6 IS AN EMPOWER MISSOURI PRIORITY FOR 2016.**

**Proposition A – We urge a No vote.**

Prop A is a phased in 23-cent increase in tobacco tax, promised to transportation, put on the ballot by tobacco sellers as a strategic move to defeat a larger increase to our lowest-in-the-nation tobacco tax. It is set up in a way that any future attempt to change tobacco taxes or to strike down any part of Prop A will invalidate it. Lawmakers could clearly use these funds for programs other than transportation also. Please vote NO.