

Glossary of Legislative Terms

Appropriations: Bills that appropriate funds to the state departments of Missouri government, for example, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. Appropriation bills always originate in the Missouri House of Representatives. Like all bills, appropriation bills must be approved by both the Missouri House and Senate and then approved by the governor. The governor can line-item veto a particular program in a department's appropriation bill.

Bill: Proposed legislation that will be debated and voted upon by the Missouri General Assembly. If a bill is approved by both the house and the senate and signed by the governor, it becomes state law.

Calendar: A list of bills pending on the floor of a legislative chamber for debate and votes. Each chamber maintains several calendars, for example, there is a calendar for perfection (when a bill can be amended) and a calendar for third reading (when a bill is considered for final approval by a chamber).

Caucus: A standing group of legislators that belong to the same political party. The caucus nominates the officers for each chamber and decides party positions and strategies on key legislation. Caucus meetings are not open to the public.

Chamber: The House of Representatives or Senate of the Missouri General Assembly.

Committee: Committees of each chamber consider legislation addressing specific areas of public policy. For example, the Missouri Senate has an education committee. Committees hold public hearings on bills and make recommendations on bills to their respective legislative chamber.

Conference Committee: If both chambers pass the same bill but in different forms, then the bill may be referred to a conference committee to work out the differences. Conference committees are composed of five senators and five state representatives. Any bill approved by a Conference Committee must be sent back to both chambers for final approval.

Constitutional Majority: The majority of all elected members of each chamber required for final passage of a bill. In the House 82 votes are required; while in the Senate 18 votes are required.

District: The geographical area – based on approximately equal population – that a state representative or state senator serves. A state representative represents on average 34,300 constituents while a state senator represents about 164,500 constituents. There are 163 house districts and 34 senate districts.

Effective Date: The date on which a bill approved by the general assembly and the governor becomes state law. Unless an effective date is specified in the bill or there is an emergency clause, a bill becomes effective as law 90 days after adjournment of the legislative session.

Emergency Clause: A section added to a bill that puts it into effect as state law as soon as it is approved by the governor. Emergency clauses require approval by a two-thirds majority of each chamber.

Filibuster: A legislative tactic to delay or avoid a vote on a bill, or to encourage compromise by a bill's sponsor. In the Missouri House filibusters are often ended when the majority floor leader calls for the previous question. Filibusters are much more common in the Missouri Senate where there is a tradition of allowing unlimited time periods for debate.

Fiscal Note: Each bill must have a fiscal note detailing what its fiscal impact will be on the state of Missouri and on local governments. Bills with fiscal notes projecting large losses of funds to the state or local governments undergo additional scrutiny by the Budget Committee in the Missouri House and the Fiscal Oversight Committee in the Senate.

General Assembly (State Legislature): The body of elected legislators prescribed by Article III of the Missouri Constitution. A general assembly comprises two sessions over a two year period.

Joint Resolution: Legislation that proposes a change to the Missouri Constitution. Any joint resolution approved by the Missouri General Assembly must be submitted to the voters of Missouri for final approval. A simple majority vote of Missouri voters is required for approval of a constitutional amendment.

Journal: The daily minutes of the proceedings of each chamber. The journals do not include remarks and debate by members but they do include all motions and votes on bills and amendments.

Legislator: A state senator or state representative.

Majority Party: The political party with the majority of legislators serving in a legislative chamber. Normally, the majority party ensures the election of one of its members to the primary legislative offices, for example, Speaker of the House, and President pro tem of the Senate.

Majority Floor Leader: A member selected by the chamber to manage the calendars of bills. Normally, the majority floor leader is a member of the majority party. The majority floor leader has considerable discretion in determining which bills will be debated and for what length of time.

Minority Party: The political party with less than half of the legislators in a legislative chamber.

Perfection: The stage at which a bill is debated and amended (“perfected”). The vote may be an unrecorded voice vote.

Point of Order: Any member may raise a point of order when he/she believes the rules of the chamber are not being followed. For example, a member may raise a point of order that an amendment to a bill is not germane to the general subject matter of the legislation. In the Missouri House points of order are ruled on by parliamentary committee while in the Missouri Senate the President Pro Tem rules on points of order.

President of the Senate: The Lieutenant Governor, who may preside over the Senate and break tie votes.

President Pro Tem: A member selected by the Missouri Senate to lead the Senate. The majority party normally ensures the President Pro Tem is one of its members. The President Pro Tem assigns bills to committees and rules on parliamentary points of order.

Quorum: A majority of the members of a chamber – 82 in the House, 18 in the Senate. A member may note the absence of a quorum in order to summon members back to the chamber for debate and votes.

Regular Session: The time prescribed by the Missouri Constitution during which the General Assembly meets. A legislative session begins on the first Wednesday after the first Monday in January, and ends on May 30, but action on bills stops on the first Friday after the second Monday in May.

Reconsideration: If a bill fails on perfection or third reading, a member who voted on the prevailing side may, within three days, move that the bill be reconsidered.

Roll Call Vote: The recorded vote of a legislator. Roll call votes are recorded in the journals of each chamber. Bills cannot be third read and finally approved with a roll call vote.

Rules: In addition to the rules found in Article III of the Missouri Constitution, it is customary for each chamber to adopt a set of rules to govern their daily business. These rules are normally adopted at the beginning of a new General Assembly. If a member believes a rule is being violated he/she may raise a point of order. (See “Point of Order”)

Speaker: The member of the Missouri House of Representatives chosen to be Speaker of the House. He/she is usually a member of the majority party. The speaker refers bills to committee, often presides at the dais and participates with a parliamentary committee in deciding points of order.

Special Session: The governor may call a special session. In a special session the general assembly may only consider matters included in the governor's call. A special session ends automatically 60 calendar days after convening.

Sponsor: The state representative or senator who introduces a bill and shepherds it through the legislative process. Sponsors often ask other members to co-sponsor their bill.

State Representative: The person elected by the people of one of the 163 house districts for a term of two years. A representative must be at least 24 years of age, a qualified voter for two years, and a resident of the district he or she represents starting at least one year before the election.

State Senator: The person elected by the people of one of the 34 senatorial districts for a term of four years. Half of the membership of the senate is up for election every two years. Senators from even-numbered districts are elected in U.S. presidential election years. Senators from odd-numbered districts are elected in non-presidential election years. A senator must be at least 30 years of age, a qualified voter of the state for at least three years, and a resident of the district starting at least one year before the election.

Substitute Bill: One form of amending a bill is approval of a substitute bill. Usually this involves more substantial changes than single amendments. A committee substitute may join together several bills relating to the same subject matter.

Term Limits: A state representatives may serve only four terms totaling eight years. A state senator may serve only two terms totaling eight years. In total a state legislator may only serve 16 years.

Third Reading: After a bill is perfected it must be third read before it can be sent to the opposite chamber. To third read a bill requires approval by a constitutional majority – 82 in the Missouri House, 18 in the Missouri Senate. These are recorded votes kept in the legislative journals.

Veto: The governor may veto a bill. If a bill is vetoed, the governor must send a veto message to the general assembly explaining the reasons for the veto. The general assembly automatically reconvenes on the first Wednesday after the second Monday in September to consider the governor's vetoes. A veto session may last up to 10 days. Missouri has no "pocket veto." If the governor neither signs nor vetoes a bill it becomes law as if it was signed by the governor.

Voice Vote: Many legislative decisions – a vote on an amendment or on whether to perfect a bill – frequently involve only a voice vote. The presiding officer at the dais calls the vote. Voice votes allow for a more efficient legislative process; however, they also allow members to avoid being recorded for controversial votes. Votes giving final approval to bills, however, always require a recorded vote, which can be found in the legislative journal for that day's action.