



State
Representative
Paula Brown
District 70

CAPITOL ADDRESS:
201 West Capitol Ave
Jefferson City, MO 65101
Phone: 573-751-4163
Email: Paula.Brown@house.mo.gov

COMMITTEES:

Conservation and Natural Resources
Agriculture Policy
Elementary and Secondary Education
Joint Committee on Disaster
Preparedness and Awareness
Joint Committee on Education
Joint Committee on Public Employee
Retirement
Joint Committee on Solid Waste
Management District Operations

Dear Neighbors of the 70th District,

I would like to take this time to update you on legislation that passed this week at the Missouri State Capitol.

As always, your priorities and input are what drives my decisions and my votes. Please do not hesitate to contact my office with any concerns or questions you may have regarding state issues.

Yours in service,
Rep. Paula Brown
District 70
573-751-4163

WEEKLY CAPITOL UPDATE

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LAWMAKERS APPROVE FIRST FUEL TAX BUMP IN 25 YEARS

Following four hours of contentious debate, the House of Representatives on May 11 voted 104-52 to grant final approval to legislation to increase Missouri's fuel tax for the first time in 25 years. Over several years, Senate Bill 262 would gradually add a total of 12.5 cents to the state fuel tax, which currently stands at 17 cents per gallon. The tax would generate more than \$500 million a year in additional revenue for state and local transportation projects once fully implemented.

The first 2.5-cent increase is scheduled to kick in Oct. 1, with additional 2.5-cent bumps every subsequent July 1 until the tax tops out at 29.5 cents in 2025. Missouri currently has one of the nation's lowest state fuel taxes. It last increased in 1996 under legislation enacted in 1992.

Like the last successful fuel-tax hike bill in 1992, SB 262 isn't subject to voter approval. One unusual feature of the legislation allows Missourians to annually apply for refunds on the new portion of the tax. However, supporters expect few people will go through the trouble of maintaining receipts and filing annual refund requests with the Missouri Department of Revenue.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG MONITORING PROGRAM WINS APPROVAL

The House of Representatives voted on May 11 to grant final approval to legislation creating a statewide prescription drug monitoring program to help prevent opioid abuse. It will mark the culmination of a years-long effort to create a PDMP in Missouri, which is the only state in the nation that currently doesn't have one.

For eight straight years, PDMP legislation routinely passed the House only to die in the Senate. But with the bill's long-time House sponsor now a senator, the upper chamber approved it in early April.

Opponents of a statewide PDMP steadily lost leverage over the years as many Missouri counties joined a PDMP network started by St. Louis County in response to the legislature's prolonged inaction. The St. Louis County PDMP now covers about 90 percent of Missouri's population. Under Senate 63, however, the new statewide PDMP will supplant St. Louis County's version.

REGULATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS BOARDING SCHOOLS PASS

For the first time in several decades, religious boarding schools would be subject to state regulation under legislation that cleared the General Assembly on May 13. The bipartisan bill passed 23-9 in the Senate, 147-1 in the House of Representatives and heads to the governor.

The longstanding problem of unregulated religious boarding schools operating in Missouri came to the forefront last fall following a Kansas City Star investigation that revealed allegations of abuse at the Circle of Hope Girls Ranch in Cedar County. In March, the state Attorney General's Office charged the couple

who owns the now-closed ranch with 101 felony counts, including statutory rape, statutory sodomy, child molestation and child abuse or neglect.

Not long after, the governor appointed the attorney general to assist Cedar County officials in investigating a second religious facility, Agape Boarding School, over allegations of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Missouri and South Carolina are the only states in the nation to completely exempt religious schools from regulation.

House Bill 557 would require religious boarding schools to notify the Missouri Department of Social Services of the existence of their operations and follow basic safety requirements, such as submitting to fire, safety and health inspections and maintaining medical records for all residents. The bill also requires the schools to conduct background checks on all employees and volunteers, as well as guarantee parents have access to their children.