



COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

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GOODBYE FOR NOW FROM 54 COUNTRY



Clayton Steward • Missourian

Kirt Kleindienst addresses a packed house of patrons on Jan. 28 at 54 Country in Fulton. 54 Country is not closing their doors for good, just moving to a new location. The Kleindienst family hopes to reopen in the Kingdom City area by November 2023. See more on page 4A.

Fowler ends re-election campaign

BY MISSOURIAN STAFF
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Pat Fowler has decided to end her run for re-election to the First Ward seat on the Columbia City Council. Fowler posted an announcement on her campaign Facebook page, saying she wants to focus on caring for her stepmother, who has been in declining health.



PAT FOWLER

"Whether I have weeks or months to spend time with the woman who helped raise me, I want to make certain she has my best attention and my best efforts," Fowler wrote. "She was the reason I had family support to go to law school, she was the person who talked me through case law in the evenings when I returned home from the library, and it was she who insisted that when I bought a house that it be within walking distance of city hall where she knew I spent increasing amounts of time."

Fowler said in the post that she has worked hard between City Council meetings to do her homework "so I can ask informed questions to get to the heart of the matter and to help us sort out who is advantaged and disadvantaged by the votes we make and the policies we set.

"But no one does this work alone," she continued. "I have been blessed by the strong support and intentional work of outstanding community advocates and

involved residents. Together we have built a strong foundation for our collective work on both sides of the podium."

The other First Ward council candidate, Nick Knoth, said Wednesday afternoon that he will continue his campaign and talking with constituents, and he thanked Fowler for her work over the past few years. He added the competition between the two of them has always been healthy.

"I recognize the difficult decision she has made and know that family comes first," Knoth said.

Fowler, a longtime member of the North Central Columbia Neighborhood Association and past member of the Historic Preservation Commission, was elected to her first term on the council in April 2020. She defeated Greg Pierson with nearly 93% of the vote.

During her time on the council, Fowler has been an advocate of the city's unsheltered population and has urged her council colleagues to put millions of dollars in federal pandemic relief money toward programs that target those who were disproportionately affected.

She pledged in her post to remain diligent in her council work through April 3, the night before the municipal election, and to continue her advocacy work.

"... please understand this is not the end of my advocacy or activism," she wrote. "This is a pause so I can tend to my family and get ready for this next season, as there is still so much to do."

Missourian assistant city editor Sofi Zeman and reporter Stephanie Meininger contributed to this report.

State Health and Welfare Committee listens to testimony on abortion bills

BY MELISSA JACQUES
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JEFFERSON CITY — Anti-abortion senators proposed several ways on Wednesday to limit state funding for reproductive health care and enshrine anti-abortion language in the state constitution.

One abortion bill and two joint resolutions limiting activities of abortion providers and affiliates were presented in the Senate Health and Welfare Committee.

SJR 8 proposes a constitutional amendment, which would require a statewide vote, that would prevent the Missouri government from funding abortion providers or their affiliates. SB 160 proposes a similar concept, though in statute, not as a constitutional amendment. SJR 19 would amend the state constitution after a statewide vote to prevent any part of it being mis- construed to protect abortion.

Similar bills to SB 160 have been proposed five times.

Four men and two women testified in favor of the SJR 8. They included representatives from Missouri for Life, the Missouri Catholic Conference and other anti-abortion organizations. These witnesses argued that abortion is now illegal in Mis-

souri, so funding it should be as well. Several witnesses voiced concerns about Medicaid funding going to Planned Parenthood.

Samuel Lee, the director of Campaign Life Missouri, said that Planned Parenthood is a "provider and promoter" of abortions. He also raised concerns about Medicaid-funded abortions, which are not possible under the federal Hyde Amendment, except in cases of life endangerment, rape or incest. In Missouri abortion is only available in cases of life endangerment.

Vanessa Wellberry, vice president of policy and advocacy at Planned Parenthood, testified in opposition to both SJR 8 and SB 19. Wellberry said she is concerned about the language in both the bill and the resolution which would deny funding and Medicaid coverage to abortion provider affiliates, as Planned Parenthood provides abortion care in other states.

Other witnesses in opposition from the Missouri Family Health Council and Pro Choice Missouri shared their concerns about access to birth control, pap smears and mammograms, STI testing, and gender-affirming care if Planned Parenthood lost funding.

Both witnesses were questioned by Sen. Mike Moon, R-Ash Grove, who sponsored SJR 19. He asked why they were concerned about loss of funding for facilities that do not provide abortions. Both witnesses voiced concerns about the term "affiliate or associate." Planned Parenthood in Missouri is affiliated with Planned Parenthood clinics in other states that provide abortions. Moon suggested that Planned Parenthood could stop providing abortions in other states to continue to be able to operate in Missouri.

Several more witnesses in opposition voiced their concerns about the high maternal mortality rate in Missouri. Maggie Olivia, from Pro Choice Missouri, gave testimony praising Planned Parenthood's trauma-informed approach to women's health. Olivia said she could not go to any OB-GYN appointment without trauma-informed care due to a previous sexual assault. Other witnesses also mentioned their concerns about the strain any lack of funding for Planned Parenthood would put on other health care providers.

Moon argued that abortion has caused Missouri to lose

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Gaming and sports wagering debates continue

BY ALLIE FEINBERG
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JEFFERSON CITY — Sports wagering and video lottery game terminals (VLT) were once again a contested topic in Jefferson City on Wednesday morning, as VLTs were touted as a beacon to some and a problem for others.

The Senate Appropriations Committee heard testimony on two competing bills. SB 30, sponsored by Sen. Tony Luetkemeyer, R-Parkville, authorizes only sports wagering, while SB 1, sponsored by Sen. Denny Hoskins, R-Warrensburg, authorizes both wagering and licensing VLTs.

Supporters of VLTs say that formally legalizing the practice creates a safe, regulated environment for people who have already been using unregulated terminals in establishments around the state.

support, but historically has been dragged down by opposition to legalizing VLTs. The two practices are often paired together, making it more difficult for sports wagering to win approval.

Executives from all six major league professional sports teams in Missouri testified in support of the sports wagering aspect of both bills and described themselves as "agnostic" to the legalization of VLTs.

In opposition to both bills, a representative from the Player's Association of the MLB, MLS, NHL, NFL and NBA testified that the bills do not provide player protection.

Supporters of VLTs say that formally legalizing the practice creates a safe, regulated environment for people who have already been using unregulated terminals in establishments around the state.

April Kabrick, who owns a small bar in Liberty said that she won't allow VLTs in her bar while they're not legal, but thinks they could help small businesses if legalized.

"(Businesses) are failing right now ... VLT would be a game changer for us. We've been trying to get this (legislation passed) for the past few years and I sincerely think we would've still had a few of the small businesses around if we would've had (VLT)," she said.

The bill provides that VLTs can be placed in fraternal organizations, veterans' organizations, truck stops and other business entities licensed to sell liquor by the drink.

While the bill doesn't explicitly say anything about convenience stores, Missouri

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