



CONTACT US

715 Main Street, Unit C2
Trenton, MO 64683

660-202-8331

EDITORIAL | Gabe Stark

gstark@cherryroad.com

ADVERTISING | Honi Brown

hbrown@cherryroad.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS

620-860-4774

circhelp@cherryroad.com

Trenton's 4th Of July Celebration Brings Community Together



Gabe Stark/Staff Photo

Residents gathered in Eastside Park on July 4 for a full day of food, activities and community fellowship, capped by a fireworks display that began at 9:30 p.m.

Gabe Stark
Reporter

Residents gathered in Eastside Park on July 4 for a full day of food, activities and community fellowship, capped by a fireworks display that began at 9:30 p.m.

Throughout the day, visitors moved among food trucks, booths and activity areas around the park. Families and friends gathered to eat, visit and enjoy the celebration before settling in for the evening fireworks show.

Activities included the relocated Main Street Trenton Farmers Market, a community barbecue,

CELEBRATION
CONTINUED TO PG 3

4 Constitutional Amendments Set For Missouri's August Ballot

Gabe Stark
Reporter

Missouri voters will decide four proposed constitutional amendments during the Tuesday, Aug. 4, primary election. The measures address funding for state parks and soil conservation, the election of county assessors, citizen-led ballot initiatives and the future of Missouri's individual income tax.

The proposals will appear as Amendments 1, 2, 4 and 5.

Amendment 1: Parks And Soils Tax Official Ballot Question Language:

"Shall the Missouri Constitution be amended to continue for 10 years the existing sales and use tax of 1/10th of 1% for soil and water conservation and state parks and historic sites?"

A "yes" vote would continue the tax for another decade and require another statewide vote in 2036. A "no" vote would allow it to expire.

According to the constitutional language, if approved to continue, the revenue would be divided evenly between soil and water conservation and state park funds. Revenue of approximately \$140 million annually is currently dedicated to soil and water conservation and Missouri's state parks and historic sites.

If voters reject continuation, the tax would end after a two-fiscal-year phase out.

Amendment 2: Elected Assessors In Charter Counties Official Ballot Question Language:

"Shall the Missouri Constitution be amended to require that all charter counties elect their county assessor and that such assessors meet qualifications established by law?"

AMENDMENTS
CONTINUED TO PG 2

Exhibit Shares Roots Of Local Bus Legacy

New Notables Display At Grundy County Museum Honors Meeks

Gabe Stark
Reporter

The Grundy County Museum has opened a new group of summer exhibits as part of its annual "Notables of Grundy County" display. The exhibit features five former

Grundy County residents whose lives, work and service left a lasting impact locally and beyond.

One of this year's featured displays honors Verlin and Kathleen Meek, whose transportation business began with a borrowed car and grew into a regional school bus legacy.

The Notables of Grundy County exhibits are expected to remain on display through October. Admission to the Grundy County Museum is free.

MUSEUM
CONTINUED TO PG 3



SUBMITTED

Verlin and Kathleen Meek built a school bus legacy from humble beginnings, with Kathleen keeping the books for the family business.



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Amendments

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Amendment 2 would require every Missouri charter county to elect its county assessor and require those assessors to meet training requirements established by state law.

A “yes” vote would add those requirements to the Missouri Constitution. A “no” vote would retain the current provisions, including an exemption that applies to Jackson County. State and local governmental entities estimate no costs or savings, and the measure would have no direct effect on taxes.

Before the proposed change, Missouri law allowed a population-based exception under which a charter county with more than 600,000 but fewer than 700,000 residents — a category that applies to Jackson County — was not required to elect its county assessor. Instead, that county could continue using its existing method for selecting an assessor.

If approved, the amendment would eliminate that exception. All charter counties, regardless of population, would be required to elect

their county assessors and ensure those assessors meet training requirements established by state law.

The amendment would not change how assessors are selected in Grundy County, which does not operate under a charter form of government.

Amendment 4: Changing Citizen Initiative Requirements Official Ballot Question

Language: “Shall the Missouri Constitution be amended to require that any constitutional amendment proposed by initiative petition receive a majority of votes in each congressional district and that the full text of such proposals be made available to voters?”

Amendment 4 would change the approval process for constitutional amendments placed on the ballot through Missouri’s citizen initiative-petition system.

According to the ballot effort description, a “yes” vote would require citizen-led constitutional amendments to receive majority support in every Missouri congressional district. It would also require the full text of each proposal to be made available to voters with their ballots.

A “no” vote would retain the current system, under which an amendment may pass with a simple majority of votes statewide.

If approved, a proposed amendment could receive more “yes” than “no” votes statewide and still fail if it did not receive majority support in every congressional district.

The original House Committee Substitute for House Joint Resolution 3 contains additional provisions not summarized in the certified ballot question. The resolution, titled the “Protect Missouri Voters” amendment, if passed as part of the vote, would prohibit political committees supporting or opposing statewide ballot measures from knowingly accepting contributions from foreign nationals or foreign adversaries. It would also prohibit those parties from making expenditures related to statewide ballot measures. Violations could result in up to one year in jail, a fine of up to \$1,000, or both, along with a penalty equal to three times the illegal contribution. The attorney general would have exclusive criminal jurisdiction over those violations.

The amendment, if passed, would also establish the crime of petition-signature fraud. Prohibited conduct would include forging

signatures, signing another person’s name, knowingly signing the same petition more than once, submitting signatures known to be false or offering something of value in exchange for a signature. Violations could carry up to one year in jail, a fine of up to \$1,000, or both.

After petition signatures are submitted but before the measure is placed on the ballot, the secretary of state or a designee would be required to conduct at least one in-person or online public hearing. A transcript or summary would have to be published within seven days and before the measure appears on the ballot.

The Department of Corrections estimates increased annual costs of up to \$21,817. The Office of State Public Defender estimates an unknown fiscal impact, while other state and local governmental entities estimate no costs or savings. The measure would not increase or decrease taxes.

Amendment 5: Path To Eliminate Income Tax Official Ballot Question

Language: “Shall the Missouri Constitution be amended to require the General Assembly to phase out and eliminate the individual income tax based on revenue growth and to allow expansion of sales and use taxes to additional goods and services?”

Amendment 5 would direct the Missouri General Assembly to phase out and eventually eliminate the state individual income tax based on revenue growth.

The measure, if passed, would also authorize lawmakers to expand sales and use taxes to additional goods and services as part of legislation intended to eliminate the income tax and reduce local tax rates.

A “yes” vote would establish the constitutional framework for phasing out the individual income tax and expanding the potential sales-tax base. A “no” vote would leave the current constitutional tax provisions unchanged.

The original House Joint Resolutions 173 and 174 would require lawmakers to reduce the top individual income-tax rate as state revenue grows. Once the tax is eliminated, the legislature would be constitutionally prohibited from reinstating it.

Missouri’s Constitution currently restricts state and local sales and use taxes from being expanded to services or transactions that

were not taxable on Jan. 1, 2015. Amendment 5, if passed, would create an exception allowing added taxes on additional goods and services when enacted for the stated purpose of eliminating the individual income tax.

Legislation expanding the sales-tax base or increasing the state sales-tax rate would also have to reduce individual income-tax revenue by an amount equal to the new sales-tax revenue.

Beginning 12 months after an expansion takes effect, local governments collecting additional revenue would be required to make a one-time tax-rate reduction equal to approximately 97% of that additional revenue. Reductions could be made through sales, property or earnings tax rates but could not reduce funding for public schools.

Constitutionally established sales-tax rates would also be adjusted to offset additional revenue produced by taxing more goods and services. The adult-use marijuana tax would be excluded, and the state auditor would calculate the adjusted rates.

If passed, the amendment would not immediately eliminate the income tax or automatically impose new sales taxes. Those changes would require future legislation.

If implemented, state entities anticipate at least \$100,000 in costs and an annual reduction of approximately \$57,000 in voluntary income-tax checkoff donations.

Voters may review certified ballot titles, ballot language, fiscal estimates and the full constitutional documents through the Missouri Secretary of State’s website.

Key election dates

- Voter registration deadline for primary election: July 8
- Absentee voting with an excuse, in-person, begins: June 23
- No-excuse absentee voting: begins July 21
- Absentee ballot request deadline: Application received by July 22
- Absentee ballot return deadline: Aug. 4
- Absentee ballot return deadline for military and those overseas: noon on Aug. 7
- Polls will also be open from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Election Day, Aug. 4, at polling locations.

More election details ahead of the August primary will also be published in coming print editions of the Telegraph and online at trentontelegraph.com.

TRENTON TELEGRAPH

715 Main Street, Unit C2, Trenton, MO 64683

PUBLISHER | Jeremy Gulban
jgulban@cherryroad.com

EDITORIAL | Gabe Stark
gstark@cherryroad.com

ADVERTISING | Honi Brown
hbrown@cherryroad.com

OBITUARIES CLASSIFIEDS & LEGALS

obits@trentontelegraph.com
classifieds@trentontelegraph.com
legals@trentontelegraph.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS

620-860-4774 | circhelp@cherryroad.com

WWW.TRENTONTELEGRAPH.COM

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GABE STARK/STAFF PHOTO

Trenton residents gathered to eat at the various food trucks available in Eastside Park during the celebration.

Celebration

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

children's activities, patriotic music and discounted swimming at the Trenton Family Aquatic Center. The fireworks provided a well-received conclusion to the celebration.

Trenton Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kayla Graham said community support helped make the event successful.

"I think the fourth went very well overall," Graham said. "It was a great community event that brought together people of all ages. The positive community support,

volunteers and local businesses all helped make it successful."

Graham said the cooperation among local groups was one of the day's greatest strengths.

"The biggest success was the community coming together," Graham said. "Families, friends, volunteers, sponsors, vendors and organizations all came together to provide a day of activities. Each organization and business came to the table with great ideas, and because of that, I feel like it was a successful day."

Mayor Jackie Soptic said the activities appeared to be well received by those who attended, adding the city plans to continue supporting



GABE STARK/STAFF PHOTO

Fireworks lit up the night sky over Trenton during the community's Fourth of July celebration. The show began at 9:30 p.m. and provided a bright finale to a full day of local activities.

the annual fireworks display, but public donations will remain important.

"The city will continue to sponsor the fireworks display and will keep donations in an account for future fireworks purchases, but continued community financial donations will still be needed," Soptic said. "... The future of the event will depend on what the community wants and who is willing to volunteer and work together to put together a

community celebration," she said.

Graham said the celebration could continue to grow through partnerships, community feedback and additional activities.

"I believe if we continue building partnerships, listening to community feedback and adding new events, it will continue to grow," Graham said. "It very easily could become a tradition that families will look forward to each year."

Museum

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Early life & career

Verlin Meek was born on a small farm near Brimson and attended Nights Town School during his elementary years. Because Brimson High School had only a three-year program at the time, he chose to attend Trenton High School for his senior year so he could complete a four-year education.

During the Great Depression, paying for school was difficult. Verlin used his father Frank's 1928 Chevy sedan to transport other students to Trenton. Each rider paid 50 cents per week and sometimes had to help push the car through mud or snow.

When Verlin wanted to marry Kathleen Myers of Edinburg, he

needed a way to earn more than farm work provided. He and his family built a school bus on a 1933 Chevy truck chassis. His grandfather, Albert Cross, did the carpentry, and his future father-in-law, Wordson Myers, helped with metal work.

The bus included side benches and a kerosene stove fastened to the floor for warmth. During the 1937-38 school year, Verlin received contracts to transport students from Edinburg, Brimson, Cole and Prairie Chapel districts.

Verlin and Kathleen married Nov. 8, 1937, after driving the bus to Chillicothe. According to the museum display, they celebrated with a can of beans given to them by the minister.

Kathleen kept the business books, even though she had not finished high school or received accounting training. During hard



SUBMITTED

Verlin Meek purchased his first factory-built bus in 1939 as his school transportation business continued to grow.

times, Verlin sometimes accepted feed for cows and chickens as payment from families who could not afford bus fare.

As the business grew, the Meeks added buses, routes, activity trips and charter trips. Verlin



SUBMITTED

Verlin Meek's first "bus" was his father's 1928 Chevy sedan, which he used to transport students to Trenton during the Great Depression.

eventually obtained contracts with 28 school districts.

After 40 years in bus contracting, Verlin retired in 1974. The Trenton R-IX School District held a dinner in his honor at the S.M. Rissler school cafeteria.

Main Street Trenton Earns National Affiliate Designation

Main Street Trenton's continued work to strengthen downtown has earned national recognition. The organization has been designated as a 2026 Affiliate Main Street America program, recognizing its commitment to preservation-based economic development, community involvement and downtown revitalization.

For Main Street Trenton Board President Megan Taul, the designation reflects the efforts of the many people who have supported the organization's work.

"Receiving this designation is an exciting milestone for Main Street Trenton and our community," she said.

"This recognition reflects the dedication of our volunteers, board members, business owners and community partners who believe in the future of downtown Trenton. We are proud of the progress we've made and look forward to building on this momentum to create an even more vibrant and

welcoming downtown for residents, businesses and visitors."

During the past year, Main Street Trenton has worked to increase activity and engagement downtown through events including the Farmers Market, Wine and Beer Walk and seasonal promotions.

Those efforts were designed to bring more people into the district, support local businesses and encourage residents and visitors to spend time downtown.

Volunteer-led beautification projects and community partnerships also contributed to improvements throughout the district, while planning efforts focused on the long-term growth of downtown Trenton.

Main Street America President and CEO Erin Barnes said the designation recognizes the organization's commitment to local revitalization.

"We are proud to recognize Main Street Trenton as a 2026 Affiliate Main Street America

program for your unwavering commitment to grassroots transformation and the extraordinary abilities of your staff, board of directors and volunteers to respond to the needs of their community," Barnes said.

Main Street Trenton is one of 453 organizations nationwide to receive Affiliate designation for 2026. It is also part of a network of more than 1,600 communities working to strengthen commercial districts across the United States.

Main Street America recognizes two designation levels, Accredited and Affiliate. Affiliate status is awarded to communities that demonstrate a strong commitment to the Main Street model and continued progress in their revitalization efforts.

Programs are evaluated in six areas, including community support, leadership, sustainable funding, strategic programming, preservation-based economic

development and demonstrated results.

Main Street Trenton's performance was reviewed through assessments completed by its staff and board of directors, along with Missouri Main Street Connection. The statewide organization works with Main Street America to identify programs that meet national standards.

In 2025, Main Street America programs reported \$9.4 billion in local reinvestment, 6,936 net new businesses, 36,549 net new jobs and 10,623 rehabilitated historic buildings. Volunteers contributed approximately 1.8 million hours nationwide.

For every dollar spent on Main Street program operations, an average of \$23.13 was reinvested in downtown districts.

For Trenton, the designation recognizes both the progress already made and the continued work of local volunteers, businesses and community partners.

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Green Hills Head Start Receives Award of Excellence

Green Hills Head Start has been recognized with the Missouri Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports Tier 3 Award of Excellence, the program's highest level of recognition for schools implementing comprehensive positive behavior support systems.

The award honors schools that demonstrate exemplary implementation of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports, an evidence-based framework that helps improve student behavior through prevention, instruction and early intervention. This year, 217 schools across Missouri received an Award of Excellence for creating safe, supportive and effective learning environments.

Green Hills Head Start earned the Tier 3 Award of Excellence by meeting standards across all three levels of the SW-PBS framework.

"The recognition reflects the



Green Hills Head Start staff is seen here receiving the MO SW-PBS Award of Excellence.

SUBMITTED

program's commitment to teaching and reinforcing positive behavior expectations for all students while providing additional supports and individualized interventions for children

who need them," reads a release about the award.

According to the Missouri Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports program, schools that consistently implement the

framework experience improvements in student behavior, attendance and school climate while reducing disciplinary referrals and out-of-school suspensions. The goal is to create an environment where students feel safe, supported and engaged in learning.

"We are incredibly proud of our staff, students, families, and community partners who work together to make this achievement possible," Jenny Lewis, director of centers and administration for Green Hills Head Start, said. "This award is a testament to our shared commitment to nurturing both academic and social-emotional growth for every child we serve."

Lewis said the recognition reflects the collaborative effort of educators, families and community partners in helping children succeed both academically and socially.

Bright Futures Plans "Stuff The Bus" Supply Drives

Gabe Stark
Reporter

Bright Futures Trenton will partner with First Student Transportation Services throughout July to collect school supplies and personal-care products for Grundy County students preparing for the 2026-27 school year.

The annual "Stuff the Bus" campaign will feature five collection periods at Trenton businesses on three consecutive Saturdays. Donations collected during the campaign will be distributed through the Grundy County Back to School Event, scheduled for Thursday, Aug. 6.

The first collection will take place from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, July 11, at Dollar General, 301 Main St.

Two collections are planned for Saturday, July 18. Volunteers will accept donations from 9 to 11 a.m. at Dollar General, 1844 E. Ninth St., before moving to Dollar General Market, 2717



Meadowlark Lane, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The campaign will conclude Saturday, July 25, with donations collected from 9 to 11 a.m. at Hy-Vee, 1617 E. Ninth St., and from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Hostetler's Market, 2006 E. Ninth St.

Residents are encouraged to shop locally and purchase one or more requested items while visiting the participating stores.

Requested personal-care and household products include laundry detergent; family-size bottles of body wash, shampoo and conditioner; disinfecting wipes; baby wipes; and facial tissues.

School supplies being collected include backpacks, glue sticks, one-subject college-ruled spiral notebooks, 24-count

boxes of Crayola crayons and No. 2 pencils in packages of 12, 18, 20 or 24.

The items will help Bright Futures Trenton provide resources during the Aug. 6 back-to-school event. Information shared by the organization indicates the event is expected to offer school supplies, backpacks, new shoes and haircuts for area students in need.

The community has provided

strong support for previous Stuff the Bus campaigns. In 2024, Bright Futures Trenton reported collecting more than 380 items during its first two July collection events. The organization also received more than \$4,500 raised through the Wheels and Wine Car Show that year.

Additional information about the Grundy County Back to School Event is expected to be released closer to Aug. 6.

Advance Auction Notice
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 10 a.m. Saturday, July 25th, 2026

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Trenton Players Part Of All-Stars' Perfect District Run

The Harrison County All-Stars 12U softball team completed an undefeated run through the Little League Missouri District 1 Tournament, earning a spot in the state tournament.

The team includes players from six teams across northwest Missouri, including Trenton players Rose Ortega, Harper Ferguson and Pyper Raines. Jordan Ferguson of Trenton is also among the team's coaches.

Harrison County

capped the district tournament with a 12-2 victory over LaCoMo East at Cargill Field in the Lyon Bowl at Indian Foothills Park in Marshall.

The All-Stars won all three of their tournament games, while LaCoMo East finished the four-team event with a 2-2 record.

Harrison County will next compete in the Little League Missouri State Tournament, scheduled for July 9-12 in the St. Louis area.



Submitted

Pictured in the front row: Rose Ortega (Trenton), Kasey Hulett (Gilman City), Gwen Youtsey (Gallatin), Emery Houck (Princeton); and back row: Coach Amanda Riley (Gallatin), Tikka Perkins (North Mercer), Rylee Stevenson (North Mercer), Sarinah Vanhorn (North Mercer), Molly Riley (Gallatin), McKenna Sticken (Princeton), Linley Hunt (Bethany), Harper Ferguson (Trenton), Pyper Raines (Trenton), Coach Keri Youtsey (Gallatin) and Coach Jordan Ferguson (Trenton).

Jessica Maye Joins College Women's Basketball Coaching Staff

North Central Missouri College hired Jessica Maye as assistant coach for the Lady Pirates basketball program for the 2026-27 season.

Maye will work alongside first-year head coach Arielle Houston as the program prepares for the upcoming season.

"We are very excited to add Jessica as the women's assistant basketball coach," NCMC Athletic

Director Nate Gamet said. "Her playing experience and coaching experience will be a big asset to the program and should be a great fit with new head coach Arielle Houston."

Houston said Maye's energy, work ethic and commitment to student-athletes will benefit the program.

"Jessica is a tremendous addition to our program," Houston said.

"She brings great energy, a strong work ethic, and a passion for helping student-athletes succeed. I am excited to have her join the NCMC family and looking forward to the impact she will have on our players and the future of our program."

Maye said she is eager to begin working with the team and campus community.

"I'm so elated to be here,"

Maye said. "Since day one, everyone has made me feel so welcome, and I'm thankful to be a part of this program. I'm looking forward to working with our campus community and student-athletes and to seeing what we accomplish this year on and off the court."

Maye will assist with recruiting, player development, scouting, practice planning and day-



to-day operations for the NCMC women's basketball program.

Taylor Francis To Lead College Cross Country And Track & Field Programs

North Central Missouri College Athletics promoted Taylor Francis to head coach of the Pirates' men's and women's cross country and track and field programs.

Francis steps into the role after serving as an assistant coach during the program's inaugural year, where she helped establish its foundation alongside outgoing coach Mike Witten. Her responsibilities included recruiting student-athletes,

assisting with daily operations, planning practices, preparing for meets and supporting athlete development.

Over the past year, Francis has been active in recruiting, building relationships with high school coaches and identifying student-athletes who align with the program's culture.

According to a college release, her efforts have contributed to a strong incoming recruiting

class expected to add depth across multiple events.

"As an assistant, Taylor did a great job in helping get the new track and field programs jump started," said NCMC Athletic Director Nate Gamet. "She has proven this year that she can run a program and earned the opportunity to be our next head coach for men's and women's cross country/track and field."

During the inaugural season, Francis helped guide the Pirates as they

competed across the region and established a presence in both cross country and track and field. Several athletes qualified for national championship competition, signaling early success for the new program.

"Her familiarity with the current roster and recruiting network provides continuity as the Pirates prepare for the upcoming season," reads the release. "With a strong returning core and a promising recruiting class, NCMC aims to continue



building its cross country and track and field programs while competing at the conference, regional, and national levels."

Proposed Amendments to the Constitution of Missouri

To be submitted to the qualified voters of the State of Missouri at the Special Election to be held on Tuesday, the 4th day of August, 2026.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT NO. 1

[Proposed by Article IV, Section 47(c), Missouri Constitution (SJR 1, 2005)]

OFFICIAL BALLOT TITLE:

Shall Missouri continue for 10 years the one-tenth of one percent sales/ use tax that is used for soil and water conservation and for state parks and historic sites, and resubmit this tax to the voters for approval in 10 years?

The measure allows continued collection of the existing sales and use tax, which generates revenue of approximately \$140 million annually.

Article IV, Section 47(c) of the Missouri Constitution:

Section 47(c). Provisions self-enforcing, exception—not part of general revenue or expense of state—effective and expiration dates.—[The effective date of this amendment shall be November 8, 1998.] All laws inconsistent with this amendment shall no longer remain in full force and effect after the effective date of this section. All of the provisions of Sections 47(a), 47(b) and 47(c) shall be self-enforcing except that the General Assembly shall adjust brackets for the collection of the sales and use taxes. The additional revenue provided by Sections 47(a), 47(b) and 47(c) shall not be part of the “total state revenue” within the meaning of Sections 17 and 18 of Article X of this Constitution. The expenditure of this additional revenue shall not be an “expense of state government” under Section 20 of Article X of this Constitution. [This Section 47(a), 47(b) and 47(c) shall terminate after ten years following the effective date of this amendment.] **Upon voter approval of this measure in a general election held in 2006, or at a special election to be called by the governor for that purpose, the provisions of this section, 47(b), and 47(a) shall be reauthorized and continue until a general election is held in 2016 or at a special election to be called by the governor for that purpose. Every ten years thereafter, the issue of whether to continue to impose the sales and use tax described in this section shall be resubmitted to the voters for approval. If a majority of the voters fail to approve the continuance of such sales and use tax, Section 47(a), 47(b), and 47(c) shall terminate at the end of the second fiscal year after the last election was held.**

STATE OF MISSOURI }
Secretary of State } ss

I, Denny Hoskins, Secretary of State of the State of Missouri, hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and complete copy of Constitutional Amendment No. 1, to be submitted to the qualified voters of the State of Missouri at the Special Election to be held the fourth day of August, 2026.

In TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I hereunto set my hand and affix the Great Seal of the State of Missouri, done at the City of Jefferson, this 26th day of May, 2026.



Denny Hoskins
DENNY HOSKINS, CPA
Secretary of State

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT NO. 2

[Proposed by 103rd General Assembly (First Regular Session) HCS HJR 23 & 3]

OFFICIAL BALLOT TITLE:

Shall the Missouri Constitution be amended to:

- require all charter counties, including Jackson County, to provide for the election of a county assessor; and
 - require assessors in all charter counties to comply with any training requirements established by general law?
- State and local governmental entities estimate no costs or savings.

Submitting to the qualified voters of Missouri an amendment repealing Section 18(b) of Article VI of the Constitution of Missouri, and adopting one new section in lieu thereof relating to assessors.

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives, the Senate concurring therein:

That at the next general election to be held in the state of Missouri, on Tuesday next following the first Monday in November, 2026, or at a special election to be called by the governor for that purpose, there is hereby submitted to the qualified voters of this state, for adoption or rejection, the following amendment to Article VI of the Constitution of the state of Missouri:

Section A. Section 18(b), Article VI, Constitution of Missouri, is repealed and one new section adopted in lieu thereof, to be known as Section 18(b), to read as follows:

Section 18(b). The charter shall provide for its amendment[.]; for the form of the county government[.]; for the number, kinds, manner of selection, terms of office, and salaries of the county officers[.]; and for the exercise of all powers and duties of counties and county officers prescribed by the constitution and laws of the state[.]. However, such charter shall[, except for the charter of any county with a charter form of government and with more than six hundred thousand but fewer than seven hundred thousand inhabitants.] require the assessor of the county to be an elected officer **and to comply with all training provisions required by general law.**

EXPLANATION—Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted from the law. Matter in **bold-face** type in the above bill is proposed language.

STATE OF MISSOURI }
Secretary of State } ss

I, Denny Hoskins, Secretary of State of the State of Missouri, hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and complete copy of Constitutional Amendment No. 2, to be submitted to the qualified voters of the State of Missouri at the Special Election to be held the fourth day of August, 2026.

In TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I hereunto set my hand and affix the Great Seal of the State of Missouri, done at the City of Jefferson, this 26th day of May, 2026.



Denny Hoskins
DENNY HOSKINS, CPA
Secretary of State

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT NO. 4

[Proposed by 103rd General Assembly (Second Extraordinary Session)
HCS HJR 3]

OFFICIAL BALLOT TITLE:

Shall the Missouri Constitution be amended to:

- Modify current requirements that a statewide majority of voters may approve initiative petitions to amend the constitution;
- Require a majority of voters in each congressional district to approve initiative petitions to amend the constitution; and
- Make available to each voter the full text of initiative petitions with their ballot?

The Department of Corrections estimates increased annual costs of up to \$21,817. The Office of State Public Defender estimates an unknown fiscal impact. Other state governmental entities estimate no costs or savings. Local governmental entities estimate no costs or savings.

Submitting to the qualified voters of Missouri an amendment to Article III of the Constitution of Missouri, by adopting one new section relating to ballot measures, with penalty provisions.

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives, the Senate concurring therein:

That at the next general election to be held in the state of Missouri, on Tuesday next following the first Monday in November, 2026, or at a special election to be called by the governor for that purpose, there is hereby submitted to the qualified voters of this state, for adoption or rejection, the following amendment to Article III of the Constitution of the state of Missouri:

Section A. Article III, Constitution of Missouri, is amended by adopting one new section, to be known as Section 54, to read as follows:

Section 54. 1. This section shall be known as the “Protect Missouri Voters” amendment.

2. For purposes of this section, a statewide ballot measure shall mean any measure submitted or proposed to be submitted to the voters of the state under articles III or XII of this constitution.

3. (1) No political committee that makes expenditures or contributions in support of or in opposition to a statewide ballot measure shall knowingly or willfully receive, solicit, or accept, whether directly or indirectly, contributions from a foreign adversary of the United States or a foreign national. No foreign adversary of the United States or a foreign national shall make any contribution or expenditure in support of or in opposition to a statewide ballot measure.

(2) For purposes of this section:

(a) A foreign adversary of the United States shall be defined as:

a. Any national, provincial, or local government or any entity that is directly or indirectly controlled or owned by a government or that directly or indirectly controls a government or a political party of a foreign country designated as a foreign adversary by the United States Secretary of State from the time such designation is published in the Federal Register until revoked; or

b. Any individual who is a citizen of a foreign country meeting the requirements of subparagraph a of paragraph (a) subdivision (2) of subsection 3 of this section and who is not a United States citizen or lawful permanent resident;

(b) A foreign national shall be defined as any individual who is not a citizen or lawful permanent resident of the United States of America.

(3) Any violation of this subsection shall be punishable by imprisonment for up to one year or a fine of up to one thousand dollars or both, plus an amount equal to three times the illegal contributions. The attorney general shall have exclusive criminal jurisdiction.

(4) The general assembly may by law:

(a) Enact laws to implement the restrictions of this subsection, or enact further restrictions to implement this subsection;

(b) Enact restrictions on foreign support for or opposition to Missouri ballot measures;

(c) Enact reporting requirements regarding foreign support for persons or committees that oppose or support ballot measures; and

(d) Provide for the investigation and enforcement of the provisions of any such enactments, or of this subsection including, but not limited to, criminal penalties or civil remedies.

4. (1) Any person who commits any of the following acts with respect to a petition on a statewide ballot measure is guilty of the crime of petition signature fraud:

(a) Signs any name other than his or her own to any petition, or who knowingly signs his or her name more than once for the same measure for the same election, or who knows he or she is not at the time of signing or circulating the same a Missouri registered voter and a resident of this state;

(b) Intentionally submits petition signature sheets with the knowledge that the person whose name appears on the signature sheet did not actually sign the petition;

(c) Causes a voter to sign a petition other than the one the voter intended to sign;

(d) Forges or falsifies signatures; or

(e) Knowingly accepts or offers money or anything of value to another person in exchange for a signature on a petition.

(2) Any person who knowingly causes a petition circulator’s signatures to be submitted for counting, and who either knows that such circulator has violated subsection 1 of this section or, after receiving notice of facts indicating that such person may have violated subsection 1 of this section, causes the signatures to be submitted with reckless indifference as to whether such circulator has complied with subsection 1 of this section, shall also be deemed to have committed the crime of petition signature fraud.

(3) The crime of petition signature fraud shall be punishable by imprisonment for up to one year or a fine of up to one thousand dollars or both. The attorney general shall have exclusive criminal jurisdiction to prosecute under this section.

5. At a reasonable time and place after an initiative petition is submitted with signatures and before a petition is placed on a ballot, the secretary of state or the secretary’s designee shall conduct one or more in-person or web-based hearings to receive additional public comment regarding the purpose and effect of the proposed measure. Transcripts or summaries of the hearings shall be made available to the public no later than seven days after the hearing is conducted and before the petition is placed on the ballot.

6. Notwithstanding Sections 51 and 52(b) of this article and Article XII, Section 2 (b) of this constitution, statewide ballot measures to amend the constitution that are proposed by initiative petition are approved only if affirmative votes are cast by a majority of voters in each congressional district in effect at the time of the vote.

7. The full text of any statewide ballot measure proposed by the initiative shall be made available to each voter, either legibly printed on paper or in digital format, at the time a ballot is made available to the voter for voting. This requirement is in addition to, and does not replace, all other printings and displays of the full text and the ballot title required under this constitution or by law. The secretary of state is expressly authorized to promulgate rules consistent with rule making authority under Missouri law to implement and administer the provisions of this subsection.

8. The provisions of this section are self-executing. All of the provisions of this section are severable. If any provision of this section is found by a court of competent jurisdiction to be unconstitutional or unconstitutionally enacted, the remaining provisions of this section shall be and remain valid.

Section B. Pursuant to chapter 116, and other applicable constitutional provisions and laws of this state allowing the general assembly to adopt ballot language for the submission of this joint resolution to the voters of this state, the official summary statement of this resolution shall be as follows:

“Shall the Missouri Constitution be amended to:

- Stop foreign nationals and foreign adversaries of the United States from providing funding to influence ballot measure elections, and allow criminal prosecution of violators;
- Punish initiative petition signature fraud as a crime;
- Require public hearings be held to get public comment before initiative petitions are placed on the ballot;
- Require a majority of voters in each congressional district to approve initiative petitions to amend the constitution; and
- Make available to each voter the full text of initiative petitions with their ballot?”

EXPLANATION—Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted from the law. Matter in bold-face type in the above bill is proposed language.

STATE OF MISSOURI }
Secretary of State } ss

I, Denny Hoskins, Secretary of State of the State of Missouri, hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and complete copy of Constitutional Amendment No. 4, to be submitted to the qualified voters of the State of Missouri at the Special Election to be held the fourth day of August, 2026.

In TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I hereunto set my hand and affix the Great Seal of the State of Missouri, done at the City of Jefferson, this 26th day of May, 2026.



Denny Hoskins
DENNY HOSKINS, CPA
Secretary of State

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT NO. 5

[Proposed by 103rd General Assembly (Second Regular Session) SS SCS HCS HJR 173 & 174]

OFFICIAL BALLOT TITLE:

Shall the Missouri Constitution be amended to:

- Require legislative phase-out of the individual state income tax based on revenue growth, and authorize the expansion of sales and use taxes;
- Curtail constitutional limits on taxing goods and services; and
- Require local tax rate cuts without reducing school funding if local sales tax revenue increases?

The proposal has no direct impact on state or local tax revenue. If passed, implementing legislation will have an unknown impact to state and local tax revenue. If implemented, state government entities expect a reduction of \$57,000 annually in income tax check-off donations and implementation costs of at least \$100,000.

Submitting to the qualified voters of Missouri an amendment repealing Sections 4(d) and 26 of Article X of the Constitution of Missouri, and adopting two new sections in lieu thereof relating to taxation.

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives, the Senate concurring therein:

That at the next general election to be held in the state of Missouri, on Tuesday next following the first Monday in November, 2026, or at a special election to be called by the governor for that purpose, there is hereby submitted to the qualified voters of this state, for adoption or rejection, the following amendment to Article X of the Constitution of the state of Missouri:

Section A. Sections 4(d) and 26, Article X, Constitution of Missouri, are repealed and two new sections adopted in lieu thereof, to be known as Sections 4(d) and 26, to read as follows:

Section 4(d). 1. In enacting any law imposing a tax on or measured by income, the general assembly may define income by reference to provisions of the laws of the United States as they may be or become effective at any time or from time to time, whether retrospective or prospective in their operation. The general assembly shall in any such law set the rate or rates of such tax. The general assembly may in so defining income make exceptions, additions, or modifications to any provisions of the laws of the United States so referred to and for retrospective exceptions or modifications to those provisions which are retrospective.

2. Notwithstanding any provision of this constitution to the contrary, the general assembly shall enact legislation to reduce and eliminate the state individual income tax by requiring reductions to the top rate of the individual income tax based on revenue growth until such tax is eliminated. Upon the elimination of the individual income tax, the general assembly shall be prohibited from enacting or imposing any state individual income tax.

Section 26. 1. In order to prohibit an increase in the tax burden on the citizens of Missouri, state and local sales and use taxes (or any similar transaction-based tax) shall not be expanded to impose taxes on any service or transaction that was not subject to sales, use or similar transaction-based tax on January 1, 2015.

2. (1) Notwithstanding any provision of this constitution to the contrary, including subsection 1 of this section, for the purpose of reducing and eliminating the state individual income tax and reducing local tax rates, state and local sales and use taxes (or any similar transaction-based tax) may be expanded by legislation to impose taxes on transactions involving any goods and services. For the purposes of this section, the phrase "for the purpose of reducing and eliminating the state individual income tax and reducing local tax rates", with respect to legislation enacted by the general assembly,

means that the legislation expressly states the general assembly's finding that such legislation will directly lead to the reduction and elimination of the state individual income tax as provided in subdivision (2) of this subsection, and will directly or indirectly lead to the reduction of local tax rates as provided in subsection 3 of this section.

(2) Any expansion of the sales and use tax base or increase in the state sales and use tax rate enacted for the purpose of reducing and eliminating the state individual income tax and reducing local tax rates shall be offset in the same legislation by a reduction in the top rate of individual income tax that reduces such tax revenues, less refunds, by an amount that is at least substantially equal to revenues generated by such expansion of the sales and use tax base or increase in the state sales and use tax rate, and, if such legislation is enacted within five years of the effective date of this amendment, shall not be considered new annual revenue for the purposes of Section 18 (e) of this Article and shall be exempt from the provisions of Article IV, Sections 30(b), 30(c), and 30(d) of this Constitution.

3. (1) Notwithstanding any provision of this constitution to the contrary, beginning twelve months from the effective date for legislation in which the general assembly expands the sales and use tax base pursuant to subsection 2 of this section, any political subdivision that imposes a sales or use tax shall, in the manner provided by law enacted by the general assembly, make a one-time adjustment to one or more of the following rates of tax imposed by the political subdivision to reduce the amount of revenue generated thereby in an amount that is substantially equal to ninety-seven percent of the additional revenue produced by any expansion of the sales and use tax base authorized by this section:

- (a) The sales and use tax rate;
- (b) The levy imposed on property in class 2;
- (c) The levy imposed on property in subclass (1) of class 1;
- (d) The levy imposed on all class 1 property if such political subdivision imposes a single rate of levy on all such property; or
- (e) The rate of any tax imposed on earnings.

(2) Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision (1) of this subsection to the contrary, no political subdivision shall adjust its local tax rates in a manner that results in any reduction in funding to any public schools within, or serving, such political subdivision.

4. Notwithstanding any provision of this constitution to the contrary, beginning twelve months from the effective date for legislation in which the general assembly expands the sales and use tax base pursuant to subsection 2 of this section, each sales and use tax rate imposed directly by this constitution, with the exception of the rate imposed under Article XIV of this Constitution, shall, in the manner provided by law enacted by the general assembly, be adjusted in order to reduce the amount of tax in an amount substantially equal to the amount of tax produced by any sales and use tax base expansion authorized by this section. The state auditor shall be responsible for calculating the reduced rates that will go into effect as provided in this subsection.

Section B. Pursuant to chapter 116, and other applicable constitutional provisions and laws of this state allowing the general assembly to adopt ballot language for the submission of this joint resolution to the voters of this state, the official summary statement of this resolution shall be as follows:

- "Shall the Missouri Constitution be amended to:
- Phase-out the individual income tax based on revenue growth;
 - Reduce personal property and other local taxes when local revenues increase;
 - Modify the sales and use tax to eliminate income tax and reduce local taxes; and
 - Protect local funding for public schools and other purposes?"

EXPLANATION—Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted from the law. Matter in bold-face type in the above bill is proposed language.

STATE OF MISSOURI }
Secretary of State } ss

I, Denny Hoskins, Secretary of State of the State of Missouri, hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and complete copy of Constitutional Amendment No. 5, to be submitted to the qualified voters of the State of Missouri at the Special Election to be held the fourth day of August, 2026.

In TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I hereunto set my hand and affix the Great Seal of the State of Missouri, done at the City of Jefferson, this 26th day of May, 2026.



Denny Hoskins
DENNY HOSKINS, CPA
Secretary of State

Apply Online For Managed Hunts In July

The Missouri Department of Conservation reminds deer hunters to apply online from July 1 to 31 for a shot at more than 140 managed deer hunts throughout the state, according to a MDC press release.

There are hunts for archery, muzzleloader, shotgun, and modern firearms from mid-September through mid-January at designated conservation areas, parks, national wildlife refuges, and other public areas.

Some managed deer hunts are offered specifically for youth, beginner hunters, or people with disabilities. Hunters are selected by a weighted random drawing.

Get more information on managed deer hunts, preview hunt details, and apply starting July 1 at mdc.mo.gov/managedhunt.

Draw results will be available online starting Aug. 15. Applicants who are drawn will receive area maps and other hunt information by email or mail.

Details about managed deer hunts can also be found in MDC's 2026 Fall Deer & Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information booklet available starting in early July at MDC offices and nature centers, from permit vendors around the state, and online at mdc.mo.gov.



METRO CREATIVE

Details about managed deer hunts can also be found in MDC's 2026 Fall Deer & Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information booklet available starting in early July at MDC offices and nature centers, from permit vendors around the state, and online at mdc.mo.gov.

USDA Conservation Survey Aims to Measure Impact of Farm Practices

By Jason Vance
Contributor

Farmers across the country may soon receive a visit from a field representative as part of an important nationwide effort to better understand how conservation practices are working on America's farms.

The survey is part of USDA's Conservation Effects Assessment Project, a joint initiative between the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. According to USDA NASS Director of Census and Survey Operations Lance Honig, the project

is designed to gather real-world information about conservation practices and evaluate how effective they are in protecting natural resources.

Honig said the CEAP survey has been conducted periodically since it was established in 2002 as a long-term, multi-year effort. The current survey marks the third round of data collection in the project's history.

Unlike most NASS surveys, CEAP relies exclusively on trained, in-person field enumerators rather than mail, phone or online responses. NASS contracts with the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture to provide the enumerators

who visit selected farms.

The survey is being conducted in two phases. From June through August, NASDA enumerators are visiting farms selected for the project to determine whether they meet the eligibility requirements. During this initial screening, enumerators verify that participants are landowners and meet the criteria necessary to provide the information needed for the study.

Farmers who qualify during the first phase may be contacted again between November and March 2027 for the detailed portion of the survey. During that second visit, enumerators will collect comprehensive information about conservation practices being used on the operation.

After the data collection is complete, NASS will provide the information to NRCS for analysis. NRCS will then use the survey data in future Conservation Effects Assessment Project reports, which evaluate how conservation practices are performing across the nation's agricultural landscapes.

The information



METRO CREATIVE

Farmers across the country may soon receive a visit from a field representative as part of an important nationwide effort to better understand how conservation practices are working on America's farms.

gathered through the survey helps USDA ensure that conservation programs are grounded in science and focused on practices that deliver measurable environmental benefits. By using data collected directly from producers, the agency can better evaluate existing programs and guide future conservation investments.

Honig emphasized that the project provides

real-world information from farms across the country, allowing USDA to make informed decisions about conservation programs based on actual farming practices rather than assumptions. The resulting assessments help ensure conservation efforts remain effective while supporting producers and protecting natural resources for future generations.

Public Notices

Public Notices

CUSTOMER NOTIFICATION

Effective July 1, 2026, the amount of the Federal Universal Service Charge (FUSC) appearing on your bill each month will increase as a result of an increase in the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC's) universal service fund contribution factor from 37.0% to 38.8%.

The new FUSC amount is calculated by multiplying the FCC's universal service contribution factor against your interstate access service charges. The federal universal service fund program is designed to help keep local telephone service rates affordable for all customers, in all areas of the United States.



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PUZZLES

THE Daily Commuter Puzzle by Stella Zawistowski

- ACROSS**
- 1 Head coverings
 - 5 Do a pub crawl
 - 11 Current unit, for short
 - 14 Boo-boo
 - 15 Totally relaxed: 2 wds.
 - 16 Summer star sign
 - 17 Elite competition for athletes with disabilities
 - 19 ___ way or another
 - 20 Look over
 - 21 Tummy muscles
 - 22 Betrays: 2 wds.
 - 24 ___ Elton John
 - 25 Word before "league" or "room"
 - 26 City areas
 - 32 Housing payments
 - 36 Peak
 - 37 Tavern game
 - 39 Wyle of "The Pitt"
 - 40 Clutter-free
 - 41 Be boastful
 - 42 As well
 - 43 Road vehicles
 - 44 Mexican corn dish
 - 45 Evaluate
 - 46 Highly praise
 - 48 Mountain range in Italy
 - 50 DC MLB player, for short
 - 52 Business bigwig: Abbr.
 - 53 Orchestra leader
 - 57 Bowling target
 - 58 Comedian Wong
 - 61 Pitching stat: abbr.
 - 62 Air circulation
 - 65 "Wait just a ___"
 - 66 Quantity eaten
 - 67 Anvil metal
 - 68 "Yeah right!"
 - 69 Really loved
 - 70 Inquires

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9	10		11	12	13
14					15								16	
17				18									19	
20				21			22					23		
			24					25						
26	27	28				29	30	31		32		33	34	35
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43					44							45		
46					47		48					49		
				50		51			52					
53	54	55				56			57			58	59	60
61					62			63				64		
65					66							67		
68					69							70		

Created by Stella Zawistowski 7/10/26

- 2 Not at home
- 3 Become fatigued
- 4 Narwhal's home
- 5 SF-Oakland connector: 2 wds.
- 6 Cash access points: Abbr.
- 7 Agent, for short
- 8 Scalp covering
- 9 Movie award
- 10 Harass
- 11 ___ gobi
- 12 List of choices
- 13 Verse writer
- 18 Animal den
- 23 Best-case ___
- 24 Texas toppers
- 26 Samba or salsa, e.g.
- 27 Mountaineer's tool: Abbr.
- 28 Intelligent
- 29 Funnel-shaped lily
- 30 Group of soldiers
- 31 New Jersey, e.g.
- 33 Ryan of baseball

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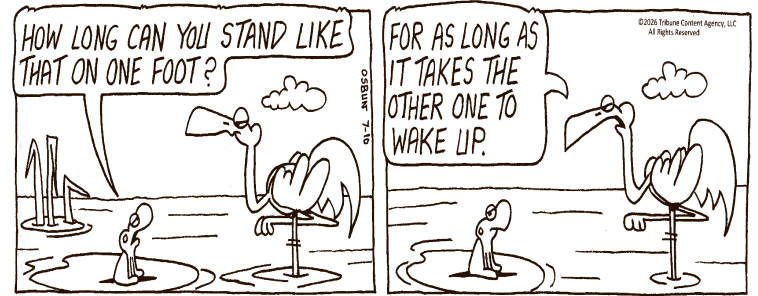
S	K	S	V		D	R	O	D		V	H	H		
N	O	I	R		E	I	N	T	A	K	E	S	E	C
N	O	I	A	T	I	L	I	N	T	I	V	E	R	A
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Friday's Puzzle Solved

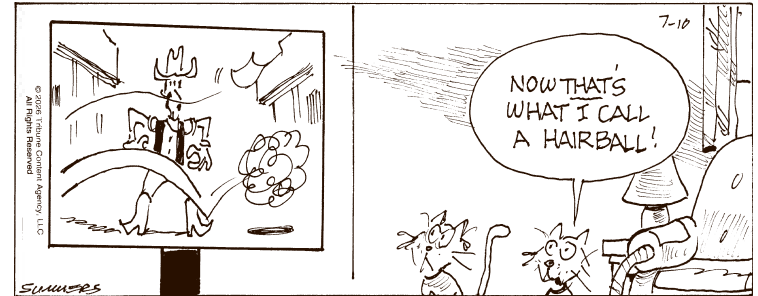
- 34 Take a sip of
- 35 Paired footwear
- 38 Wrote with a template
- 47 Riga's land
- 49 "99 Luftballons" singer
- 51 Latest fashion
- 53 Muscle-tee fabric
- 54 Region
- 55 Apiece
- 56 "I'm ___ you!"
- 57 Pointy weapon
- 58 Makes public
- 59 Take a peek
- 60 Rustic lodges
- 63 Sticky black stuff
- 64 Actress Carrere

- DOWN**
- 1 Optimism

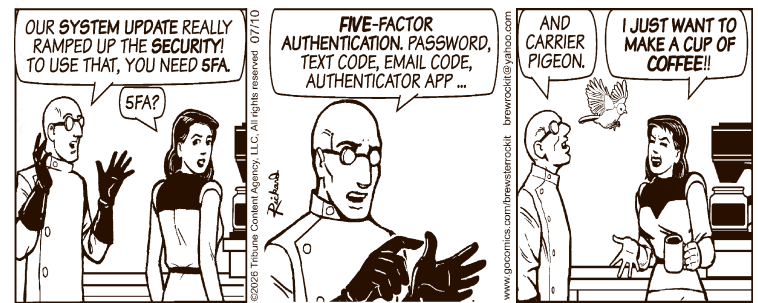
ANIMAL CRACKERS



BOUND & GAGGED



BREWSTER ROCKIT



SUDOKU

THE SAMURAI OF PUZZLES By The Mepham Group

Level **1** 2 3 4

1			6		3			2
	7		2		1			
							9	5
8	5							
		9				3		
							4	8
7	4				9		5	
			8		6		7	
6			5					1

7/10/26

1	3	6	7	9	2	8	9
2	7	2	9	1	8	5	6
3	4	9	4	7	5	3	6
4	8	5	7	9	6	1	2
5	7	3	5	8	1	6	4
6	1	6	2	3	4	7	8
7	6	1	8	4	7	9	3
8	9	4	1	6	2	8	5
9	2	8	7	5	3	4	6

Complete the grid so each row, column and 3-by-3 box (in bold borders) contains every digit, 1 to 9. For strategies on how to solve Sudoku, visit sudoku.org.uk

Solution to Friday's puzzle

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Beyond Reason: Dear Julia



By Rob
Perez
Columnist

Dear Julia, This, I understand, is your final year at Camp Huckins. Your farewell tour. Your last lap. Your swan song. The final installment in an impressive streak of disappearing into the woods.

On purpose. Some say two weeks at Camp Huckins is an idyllic setting to make memories that last a lifetime. Others think it's a great place to get Lyme disease. It could be both.

As your godfather, I offer spiritual guidance. I also offer lifestyle guidance. You're welcome. So, before we begin, I have to tell you something.

Your parents are in Paris. Without you.

I'm not kidding. They saw an opening and took it. They're

sitting at some French café or bistro or pâtisserie, being looked down upon by a French waiter who serves them only because he needs money.

This is why you can never leave parents unattended. They can't be trusted. You can't trust parents any farther than you can throw them. And I know your parents. They're very difficult to throw.

Had you not been so preoccupied with the rumored nuptials of Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce, you might have seen the signs. Your mother spends twenty minutes a day on Duolingo mispronouncing French. Your father now wears a beret. This didn't happen overnight.

The question, of course, is: what's to be done about it? Well, since you're at Camp Huckins, I'm afraid your options are limited. You can get in a canoe or you can go on a hike.

Let's consider the canoe. Have you ever carried one on your shoulders? It looks cool but it feels very, very bad. Also, the second you balance that canoe, every mosquito somehow knows your hands are busy and chooses that moment

to feast on you. Have you ever tried swatting mosquitoes, plural, while balancing a canoe on your shoulders? It's no bueno. Once you're on the water, should you have a seven-year-old aboard who keeps leaning over this side... that side... you don't wonder if you're going to capsize but when. Finally, if you're in the back of the canoe, you'll be expected to steer. Nobody explains how. You will simply be expected to know. Then you'll be yelled at for steering poorly. So maybe skip the canoe.

So I suppose you're going on a hike. I should tell you - a hike is not ideal.

Unlike a trip, it begins at Point A... and, if all goes according to plan, concludes several hours later at Point A. They say it's about the journey. Admiring nature. But I just went on a hike and spent most of the time looking down, trying not to trip on roots, loose gravel, rocks, trees that were once vertical but are now horizontal. I almost tripped on a grouse. I'm telling you, nature wants to take you down.

You know who else enjoys the great outdoors? The creatures. A bear wants your lunch. A wolf

wants your heart. A moose wants your hat. Mosquitos want your blood. Gnats want to enter your body via your eyes, nose, mouth, and for reasons unknown, your ears.

Also, many people enter the woods with an encyclopedic knowledge of the great outdoors. You'll hear them using words like deciduous and coniferous when they're really just talking about a tree. I am unburdened by such knowledge. Thus, when I go on a hike, I can point out to our seven-year-old, "That, over there, is some kind of water. That, up there, is a tree. This, right here, is a rock. Nope. It jumped. That means it's a frog. Probably."

So perhaps the best thing I can say about a hike is that you don't do it in a canoe. Which brings me back to your parents. They're still in Paris. Without you. I don't want to tell you how to live your life but they now owe you one. A big one. Wield this leverage with dignity. And start thinking about where they can take you next. Asia, maybe?

Love,
Your favorite Godfather

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