



MOBILIZE MISSOURI

State House of Representatives Candidate Survey 2018
Joseph Widner – District 42

HEALTHCARE

1. How would you protect and/or expand health care access for Missourians?

I believe Missouri *can* and *should* ensure quality health care access and coverage to every Missourian, without exception. Not only do I believe it's the morally correct thing to do, but I also think it makes sense from a fiscal perspective – in that providing access to preventative care and maintenance (in lieu of more expensive emergency treatment) will lessen the burden long term on tax-payers and the otherwise insured. When we compare the United States (and the individual states) to other industrialized countries which provide for the healthcare of all of their citizens, we see that we're spending much more per capita and leaving millions uninsured. *There is a better way to do this.*

While I would be hesitant to completely rule out a private option for health insurance, I do believe that a "Medicare-for-All" or "Single-Payer" system would certainly be an improvement upon our current situation. Such a system would allow us to provide quality health coverage and access to all Missourians while also spending less per capita. I'll also add that not expanding Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act was a mistake, and not at all in the best interest of the average Missourian. At the very least, that decision should be reversed.

2. What can the Missouri legislature can do to combat the opioid crisis?

The opioid crisis is one of the single most pressing issues currently facing not only Missouri, but our country as a whole. I believe that it's an extraordinarily complex issue with a multitude of root causes, culminating in a devastating epidemic. I'm of the mind that the solution to this problem must be equally complex. Many facets of the solution may indeed be beyond the reach of the Missouri legislature; that said, I do believe it has a role to play.

First and foremost, I think an appropriate response must be data and research driven. In short, I think the available resources should be allocated where the available data indicates that they will do the most good. As more data is analyzed, the allocation of those resources should be adjusted as indicated.

Some of the steps I'm convinced are necessary at this time include: (1) making the removal of heroin and fentanyl from our streets a top priority; (2) working with law enforcement, ensuring that we are using the most effective tactics, and making sure they have the funding needed to carry out those tactics; (3) making sure our newly minted prescription drug monitoring program is tailored to achieve our specific goals; (4) treating opioid addiction as a disease that requires long term medical treatment and recovery resources instead of focusing on incarceration; and, last but certainly not least, (5) curbing the over prescription of opioids in this state.

Yes or no:

3. Do you support using state funds for addiction and recovery resources?

Yes No

4. Would you support a bill to apply for an Affordable Care Act Reinsurance waiver?

Yes No

5. Do you support Medicare for All legislation (public health insurance)?

Yes No

ENVIRONMENT

6. What type of legislation do you believe the Missouri legislature could pass to have a significant impact on combating climate change?

While the opioid crisis may be “one of the single most pressing issues” we face today, climate change may be *the* single most pressing issue we face – not as a state or nation, but as a global community. The entire scientific community is in agreement that climate change is real, that the human race is contributing to it, and that time is running out.

One step that the Missouri legislature could take in the right direction is to join the United States Climate Alliance (<https://www.usclimatealliance.org/>). While from what I can tell the individual states which have joined thus far have all done so through their executive branch, I assume the organization would allow membership via legislation.

One of the great things about the American Experiment is that we don’t have to reinvent the wheel – states around the country are already taking steps to combat climate change, and we can see tangible results. Not only can we align ourselves with these states, as mentioned above, but we can borrow from them – enact similar laws and achieve similar results. This isn’t to say, however, that Missouri can’t be a trend-setter, as well – there are new and creative solutions waiting to be developed.

I think the main policy goals here should be to dramatically reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, reduce carbon commissions across the board, and turn to clean renewable energy sources. At the outset, I think that means investing in and incentivizing both new and existing companies that are ready and willing to seriously pursue and develop green energy options. I’m of the mind that there is a way to do exactly this while also bringing new jobs into this state and stimulating our economy. In short, this is the type of legislation I would like the Missouri legislature to pursue.

Yes or no:

7. Do you support states tax credits and or/exemptions for businesses and private citizens investing in renewable energy?

Yes No

8. Do you support a state buyout for residents near the West Lake Landfill?

Yes No

9. Do you support selling state park land to private entities for economic development?

Yes No

10. Do you believe local municipalities should have more say over regulating Concentration Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and agriculture growing near state waterways than the EPA?

Yes No (I think the EPA should set the minimums, and states and or local municipalities should enact further measures as they see appropriate).

ECONOMIC & LABOR POLICY

11. In your view, what role can the state legislature play in attracting and retaining jobs in Missouri?

“Providing tax-incentives” is an answer I commonly hear when politicians are asked this answer – and I do think providing tax incentives is certainly a handy tool in the economic development tool-kit. That said, I think we have to be careful in competing with other states in attracting businesses that we don’t have a race-to-the-bottom – corporate tax-breaks in Kansas, for example, led to a mass-exodus of Kansan teachers and a declaration by the Kansas Supreme Court that the State’s educational funding was at unconstitutionally low levels.

An article entitled “6 Ways States are Luring Small Business” lists a well-educated labor pool, entrepreneur-friendly universities, a friendly legal climate, and a solid infrastructure as some of those attractive qualities, among others (<https://www.cnbc.com/2015/06/24/6-ways-states-are-luring-small-business.html>). At least based on this article, it seems that investing heavily in education and infrastructure is part of the formula. The article does credit Missouri (Kansas City in particular) with offering early-access to Google Fiber in order to provide business friendly infrastructure. And there are plenty of other states’ enacting business friendly policies which we can learn from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kurtbadenhausen/2017/11/28/north-carolina-heads-the-best-states-for-business-2017/#1870fa34571e>.

12. Would you support the development of worker-owned businesses and cooperatives, where business decisions and distribution of profits can be democratically decided by their employees? If so, what kinds of incentives and/or legislation would ideally aid these businesses?

In short, yes. Incentivizing the creation of businesses that put stakeholders on equal footing with shareholders would be among the legislative endeavors I would support. To do more research and come up with ways to go about this, I would look to see what other States have done to achieve these goals (and what has worked) and also to Academia. One Law Review Article in particular comes to mind Tyler, John E. and Absher, Evan and Garman, Kathleen and Luppino, Anthony J., Purposes, Priorities and Accountability Under Social Business Structures: Resolving Ambiguities and Enhancing Adoption (December 16, 2017). *Advances in Entrepreneurship, Firm Emergence, and Growth*, Volume 19. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3142324>

Yes or no:

13. Do you support an increase to the state minimum wage? If so, what dollar amount?

Yes No \$ \$12.00-\$15.00

14. Do you support right to work legislation?

Yes No

15. Will you vote for the state to commit to using union businesses to fulfill state contracts?

Yes No

16. Would you vote to consolidate the current state tax brackets into 2 brackets?

Yes No

17. Do you support low income housing credits?

Yes No

POLICING/JUSTICE

18. What can the state legislature do to improve law enforcement relationships with disenfranchised communities?

This is a complex issue with a complex solution. I think much of this work must be done on the local level, but perhaps a usable model approach can be found. I also think both transparency and communication are essential elements here. In approaching this issue I would welcome input from any and all who claim to have a workable solution. As with most other issues, I would also take a good look at what the data and statistic show. I was able to find some information on the subject put out by the U.S. Department of Justice: <https://www.justice.gov/crs/file/836486/download>. I think that would be a good starting point.

19. What do you see as the most effective way to reduce crime?

I think one sure way to combat crime is by providing economic opportunity to high crime areas. That means investing in these communities and providing tangible and legitimate alternatives to crime. Providing afterschool programs as well as numerous, robust extracurriculars would also be beneficial.

20. Do you support marijuana legalization? If so, what level of access would you propose?

I believe marijuana should be legalized for both medical and recreational purposes. I think it makes sense from an individual liberty perspective, from a fiscal perspective, and from a moral perspective. For one thing, as a state with a largely agriculture-based economy, Missouri is turning its back on enormous profits: in 2017 alone, Colorado saw *\$1.5 Billion* dollars in marijuana sales and nearly *\$250 Million* in marijuana tax, license, and fee revenue. Furthermore, the data shows that opioid related deaths, rates of opioid addiction, and opioid prescriptions are lower in states which have legalized marijuana than those that haven't.

- <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/revenue/colorado-marijuana-tax-data>;
- <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/revenue/colorado-marijuana-sales-reports>;
- <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2018/04/02/598787768/opioid-use-lower-in-states-that-eased-marijuana-laws>;
- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/workday/2018/04/18/an-inside-look-at-the-workday-green-team-leadership-program/#16dd67a97f98>;
- <https://drugabuse.com/legalizing-marijuana-decreases-fatal-opiate-overdoses/>.

Yes or no:

21. Are you in favor of involving state troopers in crime prevention/hot spot policing beyond traffic violations ?

Yes No (<https://www.npr.org/2017/11/09/562876139/studies-show-proactive-policing-works-but-social-cost-less-clear>)

22. Do you support appointing a special prosecutor for officer involved shootings?

Yes No

23. Do you support "Blue Lives Matter" legislation proposing an increase in penalties for crimes against police officers?

Yes No

24. Do you support ending the death penalty?

Yes No

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS & GENDER ISSUES

25. How would you explain your views on reproductive issues? How do you explain these views to groups with differing opinions in Missouri?

I believe that every woman should be free to make choices about her own health care, and about her own body. Both individual liberty and religious freedom are foundational principles upon which our Country was founded, and these decisions especially are of a deeply personal nature and often informed by deeply held religious beliefs.

26. What measures will you take to ensure that perpetrators of sexual harassment, including those in elected positions, are held accountable for their actions? What will you do to ensure women feel safe reporting these?

In the wake of the #metoo movement, it's more clear than ever that we must reevaluate these issues. I look forward to being a part of the national discussion on this issue and examining various policy proposals in order to determine which ones will most effectively and adequately both punish harassers and protect the safety of women. I think strengthening harassment and discrimination laws, strengthening punishments, and reevaluating reporting laws are some of the necessary first steps. I think that it's also clear we must consider the role Non-Disclosure Agreements have played in getting us to this point, and seeing how NDA policies and laws can change to better protect women.

Although there's not a question specifically addressing it in this section, I also want to note that the gender pay gap *must* be closed. This is high on my legislative priority list - there's absolutely no reason women shouldn't receive equal pay for equal work. We also have to reevaluate how we handle paid parental leave in this country. Capable, hard-working women can no longer be disadvantaged in the workplace for also becoming capable, hard-working mothers. Paternity leave is also being drastically undervalued, and a legislative intervention shouldn't be out of the question.

Yes or no:

27. Will you protect access to contraception and support mandated insurance coverage, state or private?

Yes No

28. Do you support repealing restrictions against abortion providers and hospitals, including doctor/hospital privileges and the 72 hour waiting period?

Yes No

29. Will you support removing state tax credits for crisis pregnancy centers?

Yes No

30. Do you support mandating that medically accurate sex education be taught in every public school district?

Yes No

31. Will you support legislation that specifically protects the rights and safety of transgender individuals?

Yes No

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

32. Outline your top three priorities for infrastructure expansion or improvement in the state. (Expanding public transportation in cities or rural areas, maintaining state highways and bridges, etc)

As noted above, investing in Missouri’s infrastructure will be a key component of making our State an attractive local for businesses. Not only maintaining, but also improving Missouri’s highways and bridges will necessarily make up a portion of that investment. Implementing and upgrading our technological infrastructure will also be an important step in that investment. To be more specific and before elaborating, I’d like to look more into the needs of businesses looking to relocate, hear from experts in the industries that help Missouri flourish, and also hear from local officials and average Missourians.

33. Do you support electrical grid modernization? If yes, do you believe funding for these projects should be partially funded through an increase in utility billing rates?

At this juncture, I’m not as knowledgeable on this particular issue as I would need to be in order to make a fully informed decision. My instinct from what I’ve read this far is that yes, the electrical grid should be modernized, and any correlating increase in utility billing rates should be capped at a certain percentage.

Yes or no:

34. Do you support transferring funding, upkeep, and control from the state to counties on secondary state highways? Should any funding or responsibility for state highways be shifted from the state to the county level?

Yes ___ No X

35. Do you support an increase in the fuel tax in order to enable more infrastructure investment?

Yes ___ No X

36. Do you support the addition of tolls to increase infrastructure spending?

Yes ___ No X

GOVERNANCE

37. Would you support HB 1301, which bans certain lobbyist expenditures to state public officials and removes reporting requirements? Why or why not?

From what I can tell, HB 1301, sponsored by Representative Conway, deals with the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund, which I'm not sure is the bill considered in the question above. What I'll say is that without reading the specific bill, and without doing more research, there may be elements of the bill I agree with, and there may be elements I disagree with. The removal of reporting requirements, on its face, seems problematic to me in that it does away with governmental transparency – something I place a high value on. Restricting lobbyist expenditures sounds like a positive, on its face – we need to get Big Money out of politics.

38. What should the state do to help enable legally registered voters to participate in elections?

In any democracy, representative or otherwise, the right of the citizens to have their voices heard is paramount. According to data gathered by the United States Election Project, only 59.5% of Voting-Aged Missourians showed up to the polls during the 2016 General – just over half, even in a Presidential election year, when voter turnout is generally higher. I believe that's unacceptable.

One measure I would support is either automatic or mandatory voter registration upon turning eighteen, or perhaps upon graduating high school. We must also work to repeal overly restrictive Voter ID laws. The data shows not only that incidences of voter fraud across the nation are astronomically low, but also that the Republican-led effort to enact these laws is disproportionately suppressing the votes of minorities – and tipping the scales towards Republicans.

Another hurdle that must be overcome is apathy towards voting and the election process. A campaign to increase voter turnout at the polls – and live up to our democratic ideals – is also called for.

Yes or no:

39. Do you support state intervention to make a decision on the possible merger of St. Louis City and St. Louis County?

Yes ___ No X

40. Do you support repealing Missouri's voter ID law?

Yes X No ___

EDUCATION

41. What do you believe would improve Missouri public schools, to make them a better option than private schools?

In a word – FUNDING. We *must* adequately fund our public schools. We *must* raise the salaries of Missouri teachers, who now make in well below the national average, and we *must* ensure that they have an adequate retirement. We *must* allow teachers to buy necessary classroom supplies with public education funding – and not out of their own pockets. We *must* increase the public-school transportation budget. Not only do we have a moral obligation to our children, but by doing all of these things - and many more - we'll be investing not only in Missouri's teachers and children, but Missouri's future. As mentioned above, a well-educated work force is a key component of job growth and retention. I absolutely stand with Missouri's teachers.

Yes or no:

42. Do you support public funding for school vouchers for private and charter schools?

Yes ___ No X

43. Do you support the election of school boards by voters of the local school district?

Yes X No ___

44. Do you approve of the process Governor Greitens used to appoint state education board members?

Yes ___ No X

45. Should teachers be allowed to carry firearms in public schools?

Yes X No ___

GENERAL

46. Why are you seeking the endorsement of Mobilize Missouri?

I believe in the values which your organization seeks to promote. The fight to end socioeconomic and racial injustice are paramount to protecting our democracy. As a candidate for State Representative, a “politician” – a term I’m still somewhat uncomfortable with being referred to – I also believe my duty, should I be elected, is to serve *the people*, and not Big Money interests which have bought their way into the American political system. As a grassroots, member-driven political and activist organization which works to further progressive causes, an endorsement from you organization will be paramount to my success. It will provide my campaign with a certain legitimacy, and it will broaden my reach to voters who share my values.

47. What are your top three legislative goals when elected?

At this point, my top three legislative priorities are: (1) making sure Missouri’s public schools have the resources they need to set the bar nationally; (2) standing up for Missouri’s working families by fighting against so called “Right-to-Work” legislation, the attempted repeal of Missouri’s Prevailing Wage Law, and whatever the next Big Money corporate interest attack on Missouri’s Unions happens to be; and (3) finding new and more effective ways to combat the Opioid Crisis.

48. If elected, how would you foster inclusivity of viewpoints based on race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation in the state legislature?

I suppose I’ll need to shop around for some ‘best practices’ as I go about my campaign. I will say that I plan on reaching out to my constituents and hearing their voices. Their interests, and the interests of all Missourians, will be my highest priorities as a legislator.

49. Where do you stand on “clean bills” – one bill, one subject?

Theoretically, clean bills are absolutely the way to go. From a pragmatic standpoint, politics and political change takes compromise. I think that as issues are addressed and bills are put together, “one bill, one subject” should always be kept in mind, but I would rather add something perhaps only somewhat palatable to a bill in order to accomplish a goal then to stop short due to an unwillingness to compromise. I absolutely believe that omnibus bills, however, are no way to legislate.

Yes or no/fill in the blank:

50. Do you have a committee formed?

Yes No

51. Do you have a fundraising plan?

Yes No

52. Have you raised money/gotten commitments already?

Yes No

53. Do you have a campaign manager?

Yes No

54. What amount of time per week do you envision dedicating to campaigning and call time?

20-40 Hrs

55. Do you have access to or plan to access VAN or some other voter information/address list?

Yes No

56. Do you know the size of your universe?

/26,000

57. What is your goal number of votes needed to win?

/7,000

58. Do you have someone organizing volunteers for your campaign?

Yes No

59. List any relevant networks are you a part of or targeting in order to broaden your reach.

I'm working to target both every network I'm a part of, and every network I have an opportunity to become involved with.

60. Please use this last opportunity to discuss anything else about your issues, principles, or differentiating factors from opponents that you want your constituents to know:

My goal, first and foremost, is, and has always been, to serve the communities I've belonged to. I am a life-long Missourian, and I have long known that I would like to serve the public of this great State in some capacity. The ability to represent the 42nd District within the General Assembly would be an opportunity to give back in a real and meaningful way to this great State of ours, and to the communities that I care about.