

Missouri lawmakers return for special session on abortion

June 12 2017, by Summer Ballentine

Missouri lawmakers will return to the Capitol on Monday after Republican Gov. Eric Greitens called for a special session aimed at imposing more abortion restrictions and undoing a St. Louis ordinance that bans discrimination over abortion and pregnancies.

Greitens, an abortion opponent, announced last week he was bringing legislators back to work, the second time he's done so in less than a month. At issue now are a federal judge's ruling striking down some state laws on abortion and the St. Louis ordinance, which prohibits discrimination in housing and employment based on "reproductive health decisions."

While largely symbolic, the St. Louis ordinance bans employers from firing, refusing to hire or disciplining women because they have an abortion, take contraception, use artificial insemination or become pregnant while unmarried. The ordinance, which also bans such discrimination in housing, was approved in the heavily Democratic city to pre-empt anti-abortion measures during the regular legislative session.

Greitens, in calling for the special session last week, said he wants the local ordinance undone, saying it makes St. Louis "an abortion sanctuary city."

The first-time governor also said more regulations were needed in response to a ruling in May by U.S. District Judge Howard F. Sachs. The ruling invalidated requirements that doctors who perform abortions have

admitting privileges at nearby hospitals and that clinics meet hospital-like standards for outpatient surgery. The state has appealed the ruling.

The regular legislative session ended on May 12. Greitens first called lawmakers back to work to consider proposals allowing metal manufacturers to negotiate lower rates for utilities with large utilities companies, such as Ameren. The bill passed, but it has not yet been signed into law.

That special session cost taxpayers more than \$66,000, and some critics have said the session starting late Monday afternoon could be expensive. Special sessions can cost as much as \$28,000 a week in the Senate and between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in the House, depending on how many lawmakers attend.

But it could also mean another success for Greitens, who held anti-[abortion](#) rallies last week in the St. Louis area, Joplin and Springfield to boost support for this agenda.

Sen. Bob Onder, a Republican from Lake St. Louis, said the Republican majorities in the House and Senate likely will send the governor legislation addressing his call to action. Onder said he plans to sponsor a Senate bill.

"No one is eager to come back over the summer for a special session," he said. "But really no issue is more important than life, and I don't think there's any issue that our Republican caucus is more unified on than the issue of life."

On Wednesday, when the governor announced the special session, Missouri Democratic Party Chairman Stephen Webber called it a costly decision and "an unnecessary government intrusion into private sexual and reproductive health decisions." The governor's decision was also

criticized by the American Civil Liberties Union in Missouri and Planned Parenthood Advocates in Missouri.

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