

The number of initiative petitions filed for state reviews before their circulation has increased by more than 600 percent since 2004. The legislature being asked to control that growth. Only five of the 71 petitions submitted to the Secretary of State for review before circulation got on the ballot in 2004 and 2008. So far in this election cycle, 23 of 98 petitions submitted have been cleared for circulation. One petition campaign organizer thinks fewer than a handful seem to have the financing to be voted on in November. Senator Joan Bray says every proposed petition consumes time and resources in the review process. Every petition goes through a lengthy 30-day process involving the Secretary of State, who writes a legal title for the proposal, and the Auditor, who calculates the fiscal impact of the proposal upon the state. She suggests that anyone submitting an initiative petition have to submit signatures of one-to-two-thousand people who support the effort to show the proposal has some public support to begin with. Under her bill (SB796), the signatures would have to be gathered before the review by the Secretary of State and the Auditor. Her proposal also bans the payment of circulators on the basis of the number of signatures they get. It bans people who've been involved in any kind of forgery. Critics think they see flaws in her bill, one being private property rights advocate Ron Calzone, who says, "This process is the people's process," and who maintains Bray's bill places barriers in the way of those wanting to circulate petitions. He says it would be better to improve the certification process than to place an additional burden on the circulators. A senate committee is looking at Bray's bill, and at some alternative proposals.

Leaders in the Missouri House defend their decision to spend a lot of time this session sending messages to Washington. One resolution, HCR 34&35, urges Congress to send to the states a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution. Another, HCR 38, calls on Congress to end unfunded mandates. House Budget Committee Chairman Allen Icet, sponsors both, saying he pushed the measures after his constituents complained to him about spending in Washington. "If we do not communicate what our constituents feel strongly about, then I think we could be accused of not doing our job," Icet says. "This is a chance for us, elected officials in the state of Missouri, to communicate to our federal colleagues that inside the Beltway you may not hear this message loud and clear, but back home we do. Another resolution, HCR 18, passed earlier by the House, asks the Missouri Congressional delegation to vote against the federal health care overhaul bill.