

# MISSOURIAN

## Small tax breaks add up to big losses in vital services

By: David Rosman  
June 4, 2014

While I was away in New York this spring, Missouri legislators decided to sneak through [special interest tax breaks](#) to the tune of over \$775 million, and they overrode Gov. Jay Nixon's veto of the income-tax-reduction bill without figuring out a way to pay for the reduction in revenue.

This is very typical of the GOP — to court friendship and votes with seemingly important tax-reduction legislation, only to fool the public into thinking that they are getting a deal. The tax-reduction deal in this case will average less than \$35 per person, and it will adversely affect the bottom line of an already austere state budget.

This is not being done "in defense of the taxpayers," as Speaker Tim Jones, R-Eureka, wants us to believe. Jones seems to forget that the reason for a strong central state government is to provide services that individuals, corporations, and city and county governments cannot afford.

When new tax reductions and incentives are imposed on a state level, the shortfalls must be made up by local governments — either by increasing property taxes or sales taxes or both, and then only with the approval of the citizenry. Increases are further limited under the Hancock amendment and other statutes.

Then again, our Republican-led legislature has found ways to ignore those laws over the years. In 1994, the [CATO Institute](#) reported: "Since (1980), the effectiveness of that amendment has been eroded as legislators have discovered ways to evade its restrictions by exempting certain revenues from the cap. Those evasions have cost Missourians \$5 billion in higher taxes" — mostly increased taxes for middle- and lower- income citizens.

Yet in 2013, state Auditor Tom Schweich reported that Missouri's revenues have not met the triggers of the Hancock Amendment and that, [as reported in the St. Louis Beacon](#), "Missouri could increase its general revenue income by almost 40 percent without having to send money back."

Still, in their zeal to show that they are adverse to any tax, our legislators are leaving our citizens with crumbling buildings and roads, and an underfunded education system. We are giving breaks to upper-income brackets while punishing our working middle class and poor.

It is about here that I will be characterized as a big fan of tax-big government, but I am not. I hate to pay my taxes as much as anyone. But I do know that, for the most part, my tax dollars are being used to care for the highways I drive on daily, the education for my grandkids and the safety nets our poorer citizens need to survive in an increasingly expensive society.

To subsidize our revenue stream through a “Fair Tax” is, again, threatening our middle- and lower-income classes, especially those on fixed incomes. We are refusing to pay for medical care for these same men, women and children by refusing to expand our Medicaid rolls because our legislators are more interested in giving unsupported tax breaks to “[country club memberships](#), [personal seat licenses](#), [dry cleaners and fast food restaurants](#),” among other special interests, as reported in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and, quite frankly, nonessential groups. I really do not think Ronald McDonald needs another tax break.

Tim Jones is right — the money earned by individuals and corporations does not belong to the government. But there is no such thing as a free lunch, and taxes must be paid to keep the essential services running as expected by our fellow Missouri residents.

It is time to tell the governor to veto these unfunded tax breaks for organizations that simply do not need bigger profits at the expense of minimum-wage employees. A country club membership is not essential for a growing state economy, but better schools and improved roads are. Our legislators need to better prioritize the needs of all of Missouri’s residents, not just those major contributors to their campaigns.

Let’s see some fundamental changes in our state government this November by electing legislators who really do want to help those who work so hard to make ends meet.

Elect representatives who care about what government is supposed to do — take care of those things that individuals, companies and local governments cannot.

Let’s advocate for a progressive government and leave regressive politics on the curb.