

THE PEOPLE'S BALLOT

A Missouri 2026 election guide in a time of fascism.

AUG 4 • NOV 3 • EVERYTHING ON YOUR BALLOT. EVERYTHING BEHIND IT.

■ THE WORD

Missouri is where America rehearses. Before this country decided what a Black life was worth, it asked a St. Louis courtroom, and the courtroom answered with Dred Scott. Before the movement of our generation had a name, it had a street in Ferguson. Whatever America intends to do to itself, it practices here first, where it believes no one is watching. No one is watching now. That is the plan.

This year, the most important election in America has no famous names on it. It is a fight over the machinery itself. They have asked to repeal the reproductive freedom we voted into the constitution two years ago. They have asked to break the citizen initiative, the tool our organizing used to win Medicaid, the minimum wage, and our bodies back from the legislature. They have redrawn the Fifth Congressional District so that its western border is Troost Avenue. They took the oldest redline in Kansas City and made it a wall around our representation. Our grandparents had a name for this: after Reconstruction, when Black people voted and won, the answer was confiscation. They called it Redemption, and it is running again, here, first.

Let us be honest with you. Voting will not free us; organizing frees us: the tenant union, the food program, the coalition. But voting is harm reduction, and harm reduction is not nothing when the harm is aimed at you. So we vote to reduce the harm, and we organize to end it, and we refuse to mistake one for the other. In 1963, when Mississippi swore Black people would never vote, eighty thousand cast Freedom Ballots anyway and shook the country loose. This paper stands in that lineage. Read it. Carry it. Vote twice this year, like the country is watching. Because it is. It always starts here.

AUGUST 4

Four amendments, five KC questions, and the primaries that decide the county. The quiet ballot is the trap.

NOVEMBER 3

The abortion ban repeal attempt, and possibly the gerrymander itself. Registration open until early October.

■ THE AMENDMENTS, WITH OUR POSITIONS STAMPED

On ballot measures, the law permits a nonprofit newsroom to speak plainly, so we will. Read each line of your ballot; not every amendment deserves the same answer.

AMENDMENT 1

The Parks & Conservation Tax

On your ballot: Renews the existing one-tenth-of-one-percent sales tax for state parks and conservation.

The one measure that is not a trap. This tax keeps state park admission free for everybody. First passed 1984, renewed every decade since. Do not let a no-on-everything mood kill the one good thing on the page.

VOTE YES

AMENDMENT 2

The Assessor Takeover

On your ballot: Requires charter counties, including Jackson County, to elect the county assessor.

Jackson County voters already made the assessor elected through their own charter, which they can amend again. This lifts that local decision into the state constitution, where this county alone can never touch it again. The question is who owns Jackson County's charter: its voters, or Jefferson City.

VOTE NO

AMENDMENT 4

The Plan to Take Your Ballot Away

On your ballot: Changes the statewide-majority rule: citizen amendments would need a majority in every congressional district.

One district could veto the whole state, on a map gerrymandered last year for exactly this purpose, and the legislature exempted its own amendments. Everything the initiative ever won, Medicaid, the minimum wage, reproductive freedom, dies under this rule. First they drew the districts. Then they made the districts the judge of your petitions.

VOTE NO

AMENDMENT 5

The Tax Cut You Pay For

On your ballot: Phases out the income tax; authorizes expanded sales and use taxes to replace the revenue.

The income tax scales with what you earn; the sales tax takes the same cut from everyone at the register. This moves the cost of the state off wealth and onto working people, written into the constitution where it cannot easily be undone. Kansas ran this experiment in 2012 and it broke the state. Paired with Amendment 4: lock the door, set the fire.

VOTE NO

■ KANSAS CITY'S FIVE QUESTIONS

Kansas City votes on \$1.7 billion of its own. Every one of these questions touches the east side of Troost whether it says so or not. City Hall says none raises the tax rate; the plainer sentence is that the water and sewer bonds are repaid through your utility rates, and rates are a tax by another name.

QUESTION 1 • Housing Trust Fund bond, \$100M

VOTE YES

Real money for affordable homes through the fund that has backed nearly 3,000 units since 2018. Needs a four-sevenths majority, so it needs you specifically.

QUESTION 2 • Convention & civic buildings bond, \$100M

YOUR CALL

Renovations for Municipal Auditorium, the Music Hall, Bartle Hall, and City Hall. Historic public buildings, and the question with the least to say to a family fighting a rent increase. We give you the facts and leave this one to you.

QUESTION 3 • Central City development tax renewal

VOTE YES

The one-eighth-cent tax funding development inside the historic Black core, roughly \$10 million a year since 2017. Renew the fund, then watch the board that spends it like it answers to you, because it does.

QUESTION 4 • Waterworks bond, \$750M

VOTE YES

Your rates repay it either way; the bond is the cheaper financing, and rejection means rates climb faster.

QUESTION 5 • Sanitary sewer bond, \$750M

VOTE YES

Work ordered by a 2010 federal consent decree, so it happens regardless. Cheaper money, slower rate hikes.

■ HOW TO READ THE RACE PAGES

On candidates, we publish records only: votes, donors, dollars, dates. No endorsements, no scores, no adjectives. The facts are arranged; the judgment is yours. That is the law for a nonprofit newsroom, and it is also the Ida B. Wells method.

The pages that follow cover the races decided in the August 4 primary. Fuller dossiers, the money files, and updates through election day live at the hub: kansascitydefender.com/peoples-ballot

■ JACKSON COUNTY EXECUTIVE

First open seat in twenty years, and because one Republican filed, the August 4 Democratic primary effectively decides it. The next executive inherits the 2026 tax bills, the 2027 reassessment, and the aftermath of the assessment crisis that drove the recall of Frank White Jr.

MANNY ABARCA (D)

County legislator for downtown KC since 2022; elected legislature chair in January 2026 and removed by his colleagues July 20, with Donna Peyton elected to replace him. Announced July 16 he was suspending active campaigning amid bribery allegations he raised; his name remains on the ballot. He faces pending criminal cases related to the breakup of his marriage, including a misdemeanor domestic battery charge; all charges are pending, and none has produced a conviction.

BILL BAIRD (D)

Former mayor of Lee's Summit, the county's second-largest city, term-limited after two terms.

STACY LAKE (D)

Attorney. Ran for this office in 2022 and came within roughly six points of Frank White, 53.3 to 46.7, two years before the county recalled him in a landslide. Described in state political coverage as running as the most progressive candidate in this field, and the only Black candidate in a county where the assessment crisis fell hardest on Black homeowners.

RYAN MEYER (D)

Consultant with a background in economics.

HOLMES OSBORNE (D)

Chartered financial analyst; trustee on the Metropolitan Community College board.

DAN TARWATER III (D)

County legislator for 28 years, including service as chairman; lost a Kansas City Council race in 2023. Argues the county needs experience, with a majority of the legislature possibly turning over.

ALAN ROHLFING (R)

Military background; unopposed in the Republican primary and advances to November regardless.

■ JACKSON COUNTY LEGISLATURE

A majority of the nine seats could be new in January, with only a handful of incumbents seeking reelection. This body approves the county budget and confirms appointments, and in July it removed its own chair, an ending that tells you why these quiet seats matter. Find your district on your sample ballot; the district-by-district files live at the hub.

■ BELL VS. BUSH: THE REMATCH

Five Democrats are on the August 4 ballot in the 1st, Missouri's only heavily Democratic seat, so the primary is the race. In 2024, Wesley Bell defeated Cori Bush 51.1 to 45.6 in one of the most expensive House primaries in American history. A February 2026 poll showed Bell ahead 44 to 40. Both leading candidates' careers trace to Ferguson, which makes this primary, among other things, a referendum on what the movement's political inheritance becomes.

FOLLOW THE MONEY

In 2024, the United Democracy Project, the super PAC affiliated with AIPAC, the israel lobby's largest organization, spent \$9.3 million against Bush or for Bell, the heaviest outside intervention in the race and among the heaviest in House primary history. Bell has raised over \$1.9 million through March 2026 and holds the fundraising lead this cycle. Current filings are tracked at the hub.

WESLEY BELL (D, INCUMBENT)

Elected to the Ferguson City Council in 2015, in the elections that followed the uprising. St. Louis County Prosecuting Attorney, 2019 to 2025; cites a diversion program he says cut the county jail population for low-level nonviolent offenses by 30 percent. In Congress since 2025; cites \$46 million in community project funding. His 2024 victory was backed by the \$9.3 million documented above.

CORI BUSH (D)

Organizer in the streets of Ferguson from 2014. Nurse and pastor. Represented the 1st from 2021 to 2025, the first Black woman to represent Missouri in Congress, unseated in 2024 in the race that drew the \$9.3 million documented above. Announced her comeback in October 2025. Her campaign has centered Bell's record regarding israel and the war on Gaza, which she, alongside leading human rights organizations, names as a genocide.

ALSO ON THE BALLOT

Alissa Murphy, Carl E. Harris Sr., and Carl Earnest Henderson (D). Documented profiles publish at the hub as verified. Republicans Paul Berry III and Andrew Jones compete in their primary.

■ THE MAP TRAP

The supermajority's 2025 map preserved the 1st as the state's lone Democratic stronghold while diluting it with largely white suburbs, prompting questions over whether the state's first Black-plurality district still is one. Whether the map survives is itself pending: a statewide referendum awaits certification, and lawsuits continue.

■ THE 5TH DISTRICT: THE SEAT THEY REDREW AT TROOST

In 2025, at the Trump administration's demand, the legislature redrew the 5th, setting its western border at Troost Avenue, the oldest racial boundary in Kansas City, and stretching it roughly 200 miles east. The Missouri Supreme Court let the map stand for this primary. The referendum, if certified, would put the map itself before every Missouri voter in November, the only direct popular vote on a mid-decade gerrymander anywhere in the country.

EMANUEL CLEAVER II (D, INCUMBENT)

In Congress since 2005. Kansas City's first Black mayor, 1991 to 1999, after twelve years on the City Council. United Methodist pastor, St. James UMC, 1973 to 2009. Senior member, House Financial Services Committee. Unopposed in this primary.

THE REPUBLICAN PRIMARY

Six candidates compete, including Sean Smith, the Jackson County legislator who took just under 35 percent against Cleaver in 2024. The certified roster and one documented paragraph per candidate live at the hub.

■ THE 4TH DISTRICT: THE PRIMARY NOBODY IS COVERING

The 4th wraps the metro's southern and eastern edges. Under the current lines the generals have been lopsided, so the primaries are where voters actually choose, and a seven-way Democratic primary is a live contest almost nobody is covering.

MARK ALFORD (R, INCUMBENT)

In Congress since January 2023; former Kansas City television anchor. House Armed Services, Agriculture, and Small Business committees. His office's own statements describe his votes, including the FY2026 defense authorization, as bolstering what he calls President Trump's peace through strength agenda, as the regime wages open war with Iran. Faces Heather Shelton and Scott Vera in the Republican primary.

THE DEMOCRATIC FIELD

Jeanette Cass, retired postal worker and the 2024 nominee, who took 26.4 percent in that general. Hartzell Gray, organizer, podcast host, and progressive activist whose stated platform includes reparations and Medicare for All. Jordan Herrera, attorney and Air Force veteran. Randy Miller, radio host. Ashleigh Rogers, HR consultant. Wayne Russell, nurse and Army veteran. G. Rick. Platform summaries for every candidate, drawn equally from questionnaires and campaign materials, live at the hub.

■ STATE AUDITOR: THE ONLY STATEWIDE RACE

The winner audits every public dollar in the state for four years, including whatever becomes of the budget if Amendment 5 passes, and the office has reported the state drawing down its general revenue fund by roughly \$1.4 billion across two fiscal years. Quiet office, loud consequences. This is the race everyone skips at the bottom of the ballot. Do not skip it.

SCOTT FITZPATRICK (R, INCUMBENT)

State auditor since 2023; previously state treasurer and a state representative.

JERRY WISTRAND JR. (R)

IT auditor and consultant, Oak Grove.

QUENTIN WILSON (D)

St. Louis; former director of the Missouri Department of Revenue.

GREGORY UPCHURCH (D)

St. Charles; business owner and 2022 state house candidate.

■ NOVEMBER IS COMING

The August ballot is the ambush. The November ballot is the war they announced, and two fights headline it.

AMENDMENT 3: THE REPEAL

The attempt to overturn the reproductive freedom Missourians wrote into their own constitution in 2024, bundled with a ban on healthcare for trans youth. The first test in the nation of whether a ballot-box victory is allowed to be permanent.

THE REFERENDUM ON THE MAP

If certified, Missouri voters become the only people in America with a direct vote to overturn a mid-decade gerrymander. The line they drew at Troost goes on your ballot.

Registration for November closes in early October. If you missed August, November is wide open. Register now and be ready.

■ HOW TO VOTE, AUGUST 4

ELECTION DAY

Polls are open 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., Tuesday, August 4. If you are in line by 7, you vote, and they cannot turn you away.

PHOTO ID

Accepted: a qualifying Missouri driver or nondriver license, a U.S. passport, a military or veteran ID, or another qualifying photo ID issued by Missouri or the federal government. Registered but without one? You can still cast a provisional ballot. Do not let a missing card turn you around.

OPEN PRIMARY

Missouri does not register you by party. You choose one party's ballot when you arrive. You get one, so choose the ballot where your choices live.

VOTE EARLY

No-excuse absentee voting in person runs through election eve at your election board. Kansas City residents in Jackson County use the Kansas City Election Board; the rest of the county uses the Jackson County board; Clay, Platte, and Cass use their county boards.

■ WHAT YOU CAN DO

The most radical instruction on this page is the simplest: do not go alone. Bring three people. Drive an elder. Text your group chat your polling place. August turnout runs so low that a church van is a political machine. And because the ballot shrinks the boot but organizing removes it: plug into a tenant union, a food program, a coalition. The vote takes ten minutes. The power-building is the rest of the year.

■ GET PLUGGED IN

Every amendment, every race, and every record in full, updated through election day:

kansascitydefender.com/peoples-ballot

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