

# THE NEWS-PRESS

---

St. Joseph News-Press  
January 9, 2008 Wednesday

## **EDITORIAL: Great plan can improve: Lawmakers want to tweak the state's process for selecting many judges**

**BYLINE:** St. Joseph News-Press, Mo.

**SECTION:** COMMENTARY

**LENGTH:** 403 words

Jan. 9--Missourians should be proud of the way it selects the state's top judges. The Missouri Plan has been the gold standard since adopted in 1940.

The plan took the selection process out of the hands of corrupt political bosses who loved to work in smoky backrooms. A seven-member commission, instead, reviews the nominees and makes a recommendation to the governor.

But the plan attracted fire last year when a seven-member Judicial Appellate Commission met privately to interview candidates for a Supreme Court opening without giving specific public notice. Critics argued the commission had violated the Missouri Sunshine Law.

Commissioners contend they are subject to Supreme Court rules, which prohibit them from releasing candidate names and require the interview meetings to be confidential.

Now a couple of lawmakers (both Republicans) want to give voters a chance to make some changes in the Missouri Plan. First, the lawmakers want to add the state's open meeting law to the plan.

That makes sense. The world has changed dramatically since 1940. Thanks to the Internet and an almost omnipresent army of reporters, the names of most nominees are already known across the state. Releasing the names of the nominees fits modern Missourians who are used to a higher standard of open government.

One lawmaker also wants to reconfigure the commission that makes the recommendation to the governor. The existing commission is made up of the Supreme Court chief justice, three lawyers elected by the Missouri Bar Association, and three governor-appointed citizens. The proposed change would add two governor-appointed citizens to a 10-member panel that would submit five nominees to the governor.

Again, the world has changed. Reality or not, the attorneys are now considered an arm of the Democrats. Add in a chief justice, and the legal profession (if not Democrats) enjoys a strong voice when it comes controlling appointments.

Voters deserve a chance to make a call on both proposed changes.