



GOVERNMENT &amp; POLITICS

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## Analysis: Gov. Eric Greitens' first session undercut by ethics questions

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JEFFERSON CITY — Eric Greitens gave himself pretty high marks for his first legislative session as Missouri's governor.

"We've won round one in this fight for the people of Missouri," Greitens said, "and we're ready for round two."

The reality is more complicated.

ADVERTISING

Greitens certainly had his fair share of victories, most notably signing a right-to-work law in February, a goal Missouri Republicans had sought for decades. But he also saw his signature campaign pledge — ethics reform that included a ban on lobbyist gifts — collapse under the weight of increasing criticism of his own ethics.

He earned praise from lawmakers for being willing to engage in the legislative process, a sharp departure from his predecessor, Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon. Yet he faced frequent criticism for what some lawmakers deemed a needlessly aggressive approach, such as when he told a state senator he could see in his "beady little eyes that you're afraid of me," or when his political allies ran ads giving out a Republican lawmaker's private cellphone number.

His advisers formed a nonprofit to raise money to advance Greitens' legislative agenda, a novelty in Missouri politics. But the nonprofit's tactics often did more harm to that agenda than good, with critics complaining that the governor never stopped campaigning long enough to actually govern.

“He and his team have been in nonstop campaign mode,” said Sen. Jason Holsman, a Kansas City Democrat. “There are multiple examples all session where the photo op and the campaign was more important than building relationships needed to govern.”

But Greitens, a first-term Republican governor, didn’t make room for that sort of nuance when he addressed the Capitol press shortly after the 2017 legislative session adjourned last Friday. He had a successful session, he boasted, and any failings lay squarely at the feet of the Missouri General Assembly.

“Career politicians are going to make a lot of excuses,” he said. “They’ll find lots of ways to cast blame. What we do is, we take responsibility for the things that we’ve done. And the fact is, we’re off to the most successful start of any conservative administration in a generation.”

Asked what grade he’d give the legislature for its work this year, Greitens said, “Frankly, sometimes it looked like third grade.”



## Missouri Auditor Nicole Galloway issues a subpoena

The state auditor issued a subpoena April 19, 2017, demanding Gov. Eric Greitens' administration turn over documents pertaining to tax refunds.

Jason Hancock - The Kansas City Star

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### Ethics questions

The governor’s sometimes topsy-turvy relationship with lawmakers is best illustrated on the issue of ethics reform.

Greitens made cleaning up Missouri politics the centerpiece of his 2016 campaign, and moments after becoming the state’s 56th governor in January, he signed an executive order banning every employee in his administration from accepting gifts from lobbyists.

Just a few hours later, Greitens danced “The Missouri Waltz” at an inaugural ball paid for by lobbyists and corporations — many of whom have state contracts or legislation on Greitens’ desk. He has repeatedly refused to disclose how much those lobbyists and corporations donated, drawing criticism from both Republican and Democratic lawmakers for a lack of transparency.

During his first State of the State address, Greitens demanded lawmakers get serious about ethics reform to “restore our people’s trust in their government.”

Three weeks later his political advisers filed paperwork to set up a nonprofit called A New Missouri Inc., which doesn't have to abide by voter-imposed campaign contribution limits and isn't required to disclose where its money comes from. It's housed in a building that was purchased by one of Greitens' campaign donors.

On the legislative session's final day, Greitens was seen wandering the Capitol and the floor of the Missouri House with Austin Chambers, his senior adviser who is running A New Missouri Inc. Moments later, the governor repeatedly told reporters that he had no day-to-day role with A New Missouri Inc. He declined to answer several questions trying to clarify his role with the organization or whether it had accepted any donations from lobbyists.

"Gov. Greitens campaigned on draining the swamp in Jefferson City, but instead chose to swim in the swamp," said House Minority Leader Gail McCann Beatty, a Kansas City Democrat, later adding: "The governor's inability to practice what he preached caused even the modest ethics legislation under consideration by lawmakers to fail."

Greitens dismissed any suggestion that he played a role in the failure of ethics reform, saying last Friday that he "set the example on ethics."

But even his legislative allies admit that while he may not have personally sunk ethics reform legislation, his behavior complicated an already thorny issue.

That became clear after A New Missouri launched attack ads against Republican senators who had been critical of the governor, specifically Sen. Rob Schaaf of St. Joseph. The series of digital ads, radio ads and robo calls gave out Schaaf's personal cellphone number, causing him to be inundated with calls.

Rep. Justin Alferman, a Gasconade County Republican who sponsored the bill banning lobbyist gifts, told The Associated Press that those attack ads contributed to ethics reform's failure.

"Unfortunately anytime anyone wants to bring up ethics," Alferman said, "that comes up and it muddies the water."

Making matters even more complicated, just as the Senate was preparing to finally debate ethics reform in late April, Greitens admitted to the Missouri Ethics Commission that he'd violated campaign finance law by failing to disclose that he raised millions of dollars for his campaign by using a donor list from the veterans charity he used to run, The Mission Continues.

Greitens has refused to say how he came into possession of the donor list, although The Mission Continues insists it didn't give it to him or any member of his campaign team.





## Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens gives his first State of the State address

In his first address to a joint session of the Missouri General Assembly, Gov. Eric Greitens on Tuesday night urged lawmakers to overcome years of gridlock and finally ban lawmakers from accepting gifts from lobbyists. The new governor took office Jan. 9.

Eric Greitens - Facebook

### 'Learning experience'

Before taking the oath of office Jan. 9, Greitens had never before held elected office. Lawmakers said they expect the dynamic between the legislative and executive branches to evolve as he grows into the job.

"He's a nice guy," said Senate President Pro Tem Ron Richard, a Joplin Republican. "I do believe his first year was a learning experience, and I think we'll all do better at getting our plans together."

Sen. Ryan Silvey, a Kansas City Republican, said he hasn't had much luck reaching out to the governor so far. But he remains optimistic that will change.

"It's his first year. I've got three more. He's got three more," Silvey said. "Hopefully we can build a relationship."

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Missouri legislators did the traditional paper toss to end the last day of the 2017 legislative session on Friday, May 12. Asked what grade he would give the legislature for its work this year, Gov. Eric Greitens said, "Frankly, sometimes it looked like third grade." **Christian Gooden** - AP



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