



CLARE NGUYEN/Missourian

Missouri Auditor Scott Fitzpatrick walks out of his office on Oct. 20 at the Missouri State Capitol in Jefferson City. Fitzpatrick attended the swearing in ceremony for Attorney General Catherine Hanaway before going to his office.

State auditor takes a nonpartisan approach

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Rieman said Fitzpatrick's team comes to their annual training and works with them, discussing things they have seen on routine audits. He also praised Fitzpatrick for not sticking too closely to political party lines.

"I think (Fitzpatrick) tries to take a very fair, fairly nonpartisan approach," Rieman said. "I think a lot of county auditors do, you know, we're not really into the partisan aspect."

"We have to run as a party, but our job primarily is kind of calling balls fair and calling balls foul," Rieman said.

On the state level, Fitzpatrick's team handles a lot of what he calls "quick and dirty audits," but if he is especially interested in an audit, he gets involved and surveys things deeper than he otherwise would.

"There are some audits where I have some personal interest that I want to make sure, hey, this is going to be a high-profile audit, and I want to make sure we do a good job on it," he said.

A common issue, Fitzpatrick said, is money being inappropriately used to make contributions or donations to nonprofits.

His office recently published a report detailing an audit done on the Randolph County Sheriff's Department that uncovered over \$222,000 that had been misused.

Some of the money was used to buy toys to donate to kids. Over \$9,500 was used for lodging at a Margaritaville Resort.

"As an elected official, if I want to give money to a cause, a church or a food bank, or a pregnancy care center or whatever, that's something I can either do from my own personal funds or I can do it from my campaign funds that I fundraise with," Fitzpatrick said. "You can't use public money to just do charitable stuff."

"I think there's potentially criminal charges coming on that one," he said.

Fitzpatrick said he will probably record a podcast episode about the audit of the Randolph County Sheriff's department.

Prior audits, he said, can help inform his team on what to look at next. Besides that, the auditors also receive whistleblower tips or follow

the agenda that Fitzpatrick ran for office on.

One of the priorities during Fitzpatrick's campaign for auditor in 2022 was to figure out a successful way to audit Missouri's public schools.

"We spent a lot of money on schools, and we were not auditing any of them," Fitzpatrick said. "We're trying to build a school audit program, basically, and kind of figuring out the best way to audit a school district and what to look at so that you can make sure that the time we're spending there is actually having a positive effect on the kids."

The auditing team doesn't have the power to come in and overhaul how a system works or give an operation a new set of guidelines to run things profitably.

"We're not going to be the ones to be able to tell them how they're going to solve their budget problem. The board is going to have to do that," Fitzpatrick said.

"We identify: here's the problem. This is how long you have before you run out of money. The recommendation we have is for you to start planning immediately," he added.

Fitzpatrick won the election for auditor in 2022 against Alan Green and replaced Nicole Galloway, the last state level Democrat in office.

Speaking of his predecessor, Fitzpatrick said, "They didn't do any school stuff. Honestly, they weren't doing much at the end because the staffing was so low. When I got here, we had 89 total people. So that was not a good situation. I wouldn't say it was a shift in priorities. It was just more like things were added that were not getting done."

A good amount of his team's energy at the beginning was getting up to pace to where he felt they could be most productive. This included increasing staffing and changing how the team shared files.

"When you go campaigning for a year and a half running for office and you get elected to it and you show up, it's a real frustrating experience to show up and realize that you don't have people here to do what you campaigned on," Fitzpatrick said.

Despite coming from different political parties, Fitzpatrick said he thinks both he and Galloway have the same end goals.



Missouri State Auditor Scott Fitzpatrick works in his office Oct. 20 at the Missouri State Capitol in Jefferson City. Fitzpatrick has been the state auditor since 2023, and previously served four years as the state treasurer.

"We want to make government work more efficient, and we want to identify waste and taxpayer money and fraud where it occurs and hold those people accountable," he said. "I think the way in which we were going about doing that is starkly different."

Fitzpatrick is over halfway through his first term as auditor, following a four-year stint as treasurer.

The current state treasurer, and Fitzpatrick's successor, is Vivek Malek, who was appointed by Republican Gov. Mike Parson after Fitzpatrick's election to auditor. Malek was elected to a full term in November 2024.

In the early days of Fitzpatrick's term, he was tasked with auditing his previous department, the Treasury.

During the audit, Fitzpatrick's

team uncovered almost \$35 million in interest deposited in the wrong account. The money was meant for the general revenue fund but put towards improving Interstate 70.

Despite the two departments butting heads, Fitzpatrick said, "When you're auditing somebody and you put the information out that they may not like, it can probably strain relationships. But so far, I mean, we're fine. We don't have any issues."

"Collaboration between the Treasurer's Office and other state agencies — including the State Auditor's Office — remains open, constructive, and focused on serving the public interest," Malek's communication director said in an email.

Fitzpatrick hasn't formally launched his reelection campaign

but says he plans on running.

"I'd like to have another term to kind of reap the benefits of the work we've done to rebuild the office and use the skill sets that we've built over the last two and a half years to kind of go one more term and have the impact I was hoping to be able to have immediately," he said.

Following the interview Fitzpatrick was preparing to meet with his communications director, Trevor Fox, to record another episode of the agency's podcast.

Fox handles a lot of the production for the show, Fitzpatrick said: "He's like a one man wrecking ball. He does it all, man."

That's some high praise for a producer of what may be the 'World's Greatest Audit Podcast.'

Judge approves ballot summary targeting private school vouchers

BY ANNELINE HANSHAW

Missouri Independent

A ballot summary describing a proposed amendment to Missouri's Constitution as "limiting parental choice in education" is sufficient, a Cole County judge ruled last week.

Secretary of State Denny Hoskins must only correct a drafting error for his description of the initiative petition to be "concise, neutral and sufficient," Judge Cotton Walker wrote.

The lawsuit, filed by attorney Duane Martin of the public education law firm EdCounsel, says the amendment seeks to "prohibit the use of state and local public funds for nonpublic schools for nondisabled students."

Martin argued that Hoskins' ballot summary contained several statements "that are unfair, insufficient or misleading." Specifically, he pointed to the summary's statement that the initiative petition would "eliminate existing programs

that provide direct aid to students with special education needs by prohibiting the use of public funds for educational services provided by nonpublic schools."

This is "misleading at best," Martin wrote, since the amendment states that "public funds or public aid may be used to pay private individuals or entities for educational or other services to be provided to individuals with disabilities."

Hoskins argues that the

amendment is likely to upend MOScholars, the state's K-12 scholarship program.

"Even if the State could find workable statutory amendments or regulations to restrict the MOScholars program to comply with the proposed amendment, the program would be eliminated in its current form and need substantial alterations to comply with the proposed language," wrote Andrew Crane, the deputy chief counsel for the attorney general's office.

Martin also disputes the characterization that the proposed amendment would "limit parental choice."

He wrote that the amendment wouldn't eliminate nonpublic schools, so private education would continue to be available.

"The only thing that would change is that public funds would not be used to pay the tuition of a nondisabled student, if the parent chooses to send their child to an in-person, private school," he wrote. Hoskins argues that limit-

ing education to what parents can afford is indeed "limiting parental choice."

"Limiting parental choice programs is a central aim of the proposed amendment and the first bullet point is necessary to properly inform voters on that point," Crane wrote.

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