Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

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The Crisis of Missouri’s Polity: How Privileged Interest Groups Influenced the Development of Missouri’s 2014 Tax Reform Law

Date: July 18, 2023
Time: 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Place: 331 SSB

Abstract
Increasing wealth inequality has created a public discourse concerning its societal impact and the government’s role in its regulation. Should the government regulate and redistribute wealth through taxes and government programs, or should the market regulate it? To this end, one concern that has not been discussed is to what extent wealthy individuals have manipulated our government institutions to ensure their preference of market regulation of wealth distribution. Scholarly research has been conducted at the national level to determine the networks who are altering our political institutions to enable wealthy, minority interests’ access to our legislative process. Due to our federalist style of democracy, similar alterations are occurring at the state-level with little academic focus. This dissertation seeks to answer how strong are Missouri’s legislative institutions and to what extent have wealthy individuals gained points of access into Missouri’s legislative process to promote a market-based management of wealth distribution through its passage of the 2014 Tax Reform Act, SB 509. This dissertation uses a multi-method research design, while borrowing theories and models utilized at the national level, to illustrate to what degree interest groups representing the wealthy were engaged with SB 509’s development and enactment into law. This study finds that Missouri’s legislative institution has weakened over the last 40 years, and there is a regional and Republican party-bias favoring Missouri’s weakened legislative institution. This study also finds circumstantial evidence that wealthy individuals and interest groups who support a more market-based redistribution of wealth gained access to Missouri’s legislative process through campaign donations and lobbying to influence SB 509’s development. This research illustrates a link between weak political institutions and the ability of groups representing wealthy and conservative interests to significantly influence tax legislation that ensures a market-based management of wealth distribution.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
David Kimball, Ph.D. - Chairperson
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