

Missouri GOP senator slams party leaders for forcing vote on bills without allowing debate

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Sen. Lincoln Hough, R-Springfield, on the first day of the 2024 legislative session (Annelise Hanshaw/Missouri Independent).

The Missouri Senate died at 1:42 p.m. Friday afternoon when Republican leaders refused to allow debate on a [measure weakening the initiative petition process](#), GOP state Sen. Lincoln Hough said in an interview with The Independent.

A two-week special session to gerrymander Missouri's congressional map and make it virtually impossible for voters to amend the state constitution ended Friday when Senate Republicans voted to cut off debate and steamroll both bills across the finish line.

Hough was one of only two Republicans who opposed every motion to cut off debate and voted against the bills.

About 20 minutes after the Senate adjourned, Hough said Senate President Pro Tem Cindy O’Laughlin visited his office and removed him as chairman of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee. Hough has been chairman or vice chairman of the committee since he joined the Senate in 2019.

“She said, ‘we are tired of fighting with you,’” Hough said. “To which my response was, ‘did you fight with me this week, or did I just go out here and vote no on something that was handed down to the Missouri Senate and a bunch of elected members who are not allowed to talk?’”

It was the second time Hough has bucked his party this year when it sought to deploy procedural maneuvers to shut down debate. The first came in near the end of the 2025 session in May on bills repealing voter-approved laws expanding sick leave and protecting abortion rights.

“What I’ve seen at the end of last session, and what I saw this week, is a dismantling of what the Senate is supposed to be,” Hough said.

O’Laughlin did not respond to text messages seeking comment on Hough’s removal as chairman or his description of how it occurred. As of Saturday morning, the change in the committee line-up [had not been posted](#) to the Senate website.

Hough said he is not sure if he is still a member of the committee.

“I’ll be honest with you,” he said. “When the news was delivered to me, I didn’t ask a lot of follow up questions.”

The other Republican who broke with his party on Friday was state Sen Mike Moon of Ash Grove. Reached by text message Saturday, Moon said he had not been told of any changes in his committee assignments. He chairs the Veterans and Military Affairs Committee and the Select Committee on Equal Protection and DEI.

Moon, who has been punished by Senate Republican leadership in the past for some of his actions, declined to comment on the removal of Hough as Appropriations Committee chairman.

Lawmakers were meeting in their second special session of the year to do the [bidding of President Donald Trump](#) and gerrymander the 5th Congressional District to unseat U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, a Kansas City Democrat. The Senate passed the new map first, shutting off debate after letting Democrats speak against it for about four hours.

Next came the proposal added to the agenda by Kehoe to require both a majority of statewide votes and a majority of the votes in all eight of the state’s congressional districts to pass constitutional amendments proposed by initiative petition.

But along with the motion to take up the measure, state Sen. Brad Hudson, a Republican from Cape Fair, sent the motion to cut off debate before it began.

“My understanding of how this process is supposed to work is, if someone brings a bill before the body, then members are given the opportunity to have a conversation about it,” Hough said. “Maybe, I mean, call me crazy, but maybe even draft amendments and think about ways to improve something or change something.”

Republicans used several unprecedented maneuvers to muscle the two measures to final passage. The steps were orchestrated from the start to get the bills finished by Friday afternoon.



Then-Senate Majority Leader Cindy O'Laughlin of Shelbina speaks in May 2023 after passage of a \$51.7 billion state budget as Sen. Lincoln Hough of Springfield waits for his turn to speak (Rudi Keller/Missouri Independent).

When the Senate convened, O'Laughlin presented a new set of rules intended to sidestep every opportunity Democrats could use to stall proceedings.

As a result, no senator was allowed to introduce a bill during the special session, the daily journal was never presented to the body for approval and House-passed legislation became the chamber's top official priority for the first time in its existence.

The procedural step to shut off debate, called the previous question, is commonly used by the majority in the 163-member Missouri House, where no member can speak for more than 15 minutes on a topic, to move priority legislation.

But until this year, it was a rare move in the Senate, where the rules allow a member to speak as long as they like on any subject once they have the floor. Invoking the rule requires a motion signed by 10 senators.

The previous question has been used to move four bills this year, twice in the regular session and twice in the special session. It was also used to implement the new Senate rules.

But it had never before been used to pass a bill without any debate at all.

“It’s pretty easy to pass legislation in the Missouri Senate if you don’t have to talk about it, and you can just bring it before the body and say, we’re not, we’re not going to have any discussion whatsoever,” Hough said.

The Republican Party, he said, is suppressing every element that doesn’t walk in lockstep with the Trump White House.

“It seems that if you have any independent thought, or even just raise a question, you have a problem with this Republican Party,” Hough said. “And that is not the Republican Party that, 15 years ago when I first ran for the House, that I was part of.”

His disagreement with the procedures used to pass the legislation didn’t upset the progress of the bills. Shutting off debate requires 18 votes, and the fewest on any motion was 19.

“This is a dark day in the Missouri Senate,” Hough said. “It is a dark day when policy differences lead to the dismantling of the institution and the removal of individuals from chairmanships.”

In his seven years on the appropriations committee, Hough has shown himself as detail-oriented and able to build consensus while taking a tough negotiating position during final budget talks with the House.

With one more legislative session in his term-limited tenure, Hough won’t have to worry about pleasing leadership.

The upcoming budget could prove to be the most difficult to write in many years. When Kehoe [vetoed \\$300 million in spending items](#) in June, the news release accompanying the action said the state budget office was forecasting a general revenue shortfall of nearly \$1 billion in the coming fiscal year.

“We’re definitely,” Hough said, “going to have some conversations about the direction of the state’s finances next year.”

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