



# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

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## Spencer has cash edge on Jones

**Alderwoman benefits from surge in big donations in St. Louis mayoral race**

**JACOB BARKER**  
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

ST. LOUIS — A surge of big-dollar donations, many of them tied to construction firm Clayco and other developers, pushed Alderwoman Cara Spencer ahead of Mayor Tishaura O. Jones in total fundraising and gave her a comfortable cash advantage as the March 4 election nears.

Spencer and the political action committee supporting her raised over \$677,000 during this past month of fundraising and spent over \$500,000 in that time, accord-

ing to campaign finance reports filed Monday. With a week before the first round of voting, Spencer and her PAC are sitting on over \$430,000.

That was well over Mayor Jones' fundraising totals in the same period, from late January to Monday. The mayor, seeking a second term, raised \$136,000 between her regular campaign account and her PAC, and the two committees spent \$300,000 supporting her campaign. Combined, Jones had \$168,000 left to spend in the final days of the campaign.

In total for this campaign, Spencer and her allied PAC raised nearly \$1.2 million, compared to the over \$1 million Jones and



Spencer



Jones

the PAC supporting the mayor raised.

A third candidate, Recorder of Deeds Michael Butler, raised \$7,200 in the last month, bringing his total to \$62,583. Butler, who has name recognition as both the recorder and a former chair of the Missouri Democratic Party, spent \$5,600 in the last month and had \$11,200 in the bank for the final campaign stretch.

A fourth candidate, Andrew Jones, who has previously run for mayor as a Republican, did not file a campaign finance report.

A large chunk of Spencer's fundraising haul came from Chicago-based construction and development firm Clayco and its

executives, particularly chairman Bob Clark, who founded the firm in the St. Louis area, where it maintains a significant presence.

The political action committee supporting Spencer, A Brighter Future for St. Louis, reported over \$350,000 in donations over the last month, pushing its cash on hand from less than \$20,000 to more than \$330,000. More than a third of that, \$130,000, came from Clayco, including a \$111,000 donation Clark has said was the amount he spent responding to a city request for proposals that was rejected. Clark wanted to move Clayco's concrete business to a site in north St. Louis. St. Louis Development Corp. officials said they wanted retail for the area, prompting the rejection.

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### BELLERIVE PARK

## HABITAT MANAGEMENT

State, local agencies conduct prescribed burn



ZACHARY LINHARES, POST-DISPATCH

Quail Forever Habitat Specialist Kyle Peterson, of St. Charles, uses a drip torch to ignite a hillside prairie on Tuesday, Feb. 25, 2025, during a prescribed burn at Bellerive Park in the Carondelet area of St. Louis. The burn was conducted by the Missouri Department of Conservation, the Green City Coalition, Quail Forever, and the City of St. Louis Forestry Department to improve the prairie habitat and kill off invasive plants.

## Taste of St. Louis is leaving downtown

Festival plans to move to Clayton this summer

**NASSIM BENCHAAABANE**  
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

CLAYTON — Taste of St. Louis expects to move to Clayton this summer and leave downtown St. Louis, citing rising costs and limitations in the city.

Organizers planned to present a plan to Clayton leaders on Tuesday for hosting the 30th annual three-day regional food festival, scheduled to begin Aug. 15.

Chuck Justus, who produces Taste of St. Louis through his production company Taste It Productions, said he couldn't keep the festival free while holding it in downtown St. Louis. It was too difficult to attract new sponsors at Ballpark Village — and too costly to move onto downtown streets, he said.

"What we are looking to do is to make an event that everyone has a good, safe time at and we don't have to write a check to keep it going," he said.

Taste of St. Louis has drawn more than 50,000 attendees to a three-day weekend showcasing dozens of regional restaurants and vendors as well as culinary battles, live music and other activities.

Its departure from downtown comes after the Annie Malone May Day Parade, a 110-year tradition known as one of the largest African-American parades in the country, cancelled its 2025 event, in part citing rising costs to close and secure downtown streets for the event.

This isn't the first time Taste of St. Louis has been held outside of the city proper. The festival moved from Soldiers Memorial to Chesterfield between 2014 and 2018. Organizers at the time cited limited parking in St. Louis and said the suburban city's amphitheater gave it more flexibility to put on cooking displays and other events.

After buying the festival, Taste it Productions moved it back to Soldiers Memorial in 2019. The festival took a hiatus in 2020 during the first weeks of the coronavirus pandemic and moved to Ballpark Village in 2021.

Justus said Tuesday that sponsorship revenue had declined, and the festival was limited in bringing in new sponsors because they might conflict with Ballpark Village's existing sponsors, he said. Meanwhile costs to put on the event had risen.

"It restricts the way we can raise funds to keep the festival free and provide a quality experience," he said. "Be it music on a stage, tents and electricity — all those things all take a lot of money. You have to find new ways to raise revenue, and we're just limited in what you can do."

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## Bill to expand child care in Mo. advances

**KURT ERICKSON**  
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

JEFFERSON CITY — Amid a shakeup in the agency overseeing child care in Missouri, lawmakers moved forward Tuesday on a package of legislation aimed at increasing access to affordable day care facilities.

The House gave initial approval to a package of tax credits that could stabilize the industry and endorsed a separate plan to create a temporary licensing plan in hopes more facilities will open.

"We have a child care crisis in our state. Without child care, our economy cannot grow," said Rep. Brenda Shields, R-St. Joseph, who is sponsoring the plan.

The push comes as business groups argue that Missouri's economy loses an estimated \$1.35 billion annually — including \$280 million in lost tax revenue —

because of a lack of affordable child care.

In addition, a survey by the National Association for the Education of Young Children of more than 10,000 early childhood educators across the country found insufficient public investment in child care, resulting in higher costs for parents and low wages for providers.

"Families can't afford to pay more, and educators can't afford to earn less," said Michelle Kang, an executive with the association. "As costs rise, more early childhood educators will leave the field, and more programs will shut down — deeply impacting communities and threatening the stability of our economy."

Among cost drivers found in the survey are higher rent and higher insurance, resulting in higher tuition.

But, a state program designed to streamline services has been wracked by

delays in providing subsidies to facilities that serve low-income Missourians.

On Monday, the director of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Office of Childhood resigned after a tumultuous tenure. Pam Thomas, who led the four-year-old division had blamed software vendors for failing to properly vet a computer program, leading to payment delays.

Thomas has been replaced by Kelli Jones, a top staffer for former Gov. Mike Parson, who created the office in 2021.

A similar bill was approved in the House last year, but did not advance amid dysfunction in the Missouri Senate.

Some opponents said expanding state involvement in child care may further stretch an already beleaguered agency.

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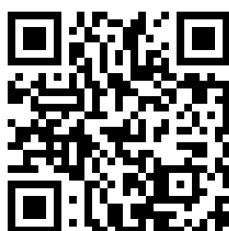
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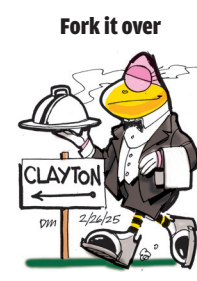
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### Weather

Plan your week: For a 5-day weather forecast for our region as well as the national outlook, please see **PAGE B6**



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