



Missouri Senate moves to speed up Greitens ethics inquiry

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Missouri’s understaffed Ethics Commission can’t currently take action on a complaint against embattled Republican Gov. Eric Greitens. A bill endorsed Thursday by state senators would change that, but it would require the governor’s permission to do so.

The legislation given initial Senate approval would immediately reduce the number of positions on the Missouri Ethics Commission from six to four, effectively restoring a quorum to conduct business that has been lacking for three weeks because of three vacancies.

Pending before the commission is a complaint alleging Greitens’ gubernatorial campaign falsely reported how it obtained a donor list in 2015 of a charity Greitens founded. The complaint also alleges the campaign failed to disclose that it got the charity’s email list.

Republican Sen. Bob Dixon, of Springfield, who introduced the proposal, said the change would “ensure the credibility of the process going forward.”

The legislation needs a second Senate vote to go to the House and would also require Greitens’ signature to become law.

Under current law, it would be Greitens’ responsibility to appoint three new ethics commissioners, who would be subject to Senate confirmation.

Greitens’ spokesman Parker Briden declined to comment on the proposed legislation, but wrote in an email that the governor’s office was still waiting to hear back from two committees that submit candidates for the commission. Briden said he expected the governor to be able to submit names to the Senate next week. The ethics commission’s next meeting is on April 25.

Dixon said previously that the governor’s ability to appoint the people who will investigate him is a potential “constitutional crisis.”

Lingering vacancies are important because state law says the commission has 90 days after a complaint is filed to decide whether to dismiss it or refer it to its counsel for further investigation. The complaint against Greitens was filed in mid-March.

University of Missouri political science professor Peverill Squire said a smaller commission could run the risk of allowing one or two strong personalities to dominate.

But, he added: “It might be a reasonable response to a highly unusual set of circumstances.”

Dixon’s proposal would expand the Ethics Commission’s membership to a total of eight by 2021. The additions would be staggered to limit the number of vacancies at any given time.

No senators spoke against the proposal Thursday.

Greitens also faces a felony invasion-of-privacy charge for allegedly taking a nude or partially nude photograph of a woman without her consent and transmitting it in a way that could be accessed by a computer. He has admitted to having an affair with the woman before he became governor, but denied that he broke any laws. A trial is scheduled for next month in St. Louis.

A House committee that’s also investigating that incident is expected to release a report summarizing its findings next week