

Eastern Jackson County is a great place to live, work and raise a family. The area is growing and the economy is thriving. However, there is one sector of our population that has indirectly suffered financially from this growth. Senior citizens who have lived in our communities for many years and have now retired on a fixed income are shocked to see their property taxes increase at alarming rates. Too often the cause of this phenomenon is that the rapid growth in the surrounding area has caused corresponding growth in the property value of many senior's homes. While this may sound like a positive development, many seniors become "property rich" but "cash poor." The result is that it becomes very difficult to pay ever escalating property taxes and to pay for other necessities on a fixed income.

Earlier this month, the legislature passed and sent to the governor the Missouri Homestead Preservation Act. This Act would address the problem by giving seniors a tax credit from the State for any property tax increase over 5% in reassessment years (2.5% in non-reassessment years). This tax credit would be offered to citizens who are over 65 years old or, in the case of a married couple, where one spouse is over 65 and the other is over age 60. It also applies to citizens who are disabled.

This credit would not affect those who are currently taking advantage of the circuit breaker provisions in the law that applies to seniors making up to \$27,000 per year. The Homestead Preservation Act is designed to help seniors who make between \$27,000 and \$70,000 per year and whose property taxes go up substantially in a given year.

One of the main reasons that it took the legislature this long to pass the Homestead Preservation Act was the concern that local school districts would be harmed by a reduction in property taxes being paid by senior citizens. The Act guarantees that schools will not lose any money because the State will be required to reimburse the schools for any lost revenue out of the State budget.

Although we are at the beginning of an economic recovery in Missouri, the budget is still challenged. In recognition of this fact, funding for the Homestead Preservation Act will be required to be reviewed by the legislature each year and funding will have to be specifically approved. I, for one, will strongly support efforts to fund this important program to bring much needed property tax relief to Missouri's seniors.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.state.mo.us. Also, you can read any of the bills I file on my website at: www.senate.mo.gov/bartle Thank you again for making it possible for me to serve in the Missouri Senate.