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## ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES SHOULD DECIDE HOW TO SPEND EDUCATION DOLLARS

One of the most contentious issues of this session promises to be the battle over how to fairly distribute our education budget among all the school districts in the state as required by the Missouri Constitution. Currently, a complex and outdated formula determines how these tax dollars are allotted. In the last few months many school districts have joined together and have sued the state, arguing that the current system is fundamentally unfair.

The concerns brought by these schools have not gone unnoticed. The current formula is in need of revision. Just last month, the General Assembly formed a special legislative panel that is charged with coming up with a plan to fix the current education funding system. Governor Blunt has stated strongly that he wants the school funding formula rewritten this year. As one of the members of this panel, I recognize the difficult task that lies ahead. But, I firmly believe it is the duty of the legislature and the Governor to resolve these funding challenges.

For this reason, I filed a joint resolution this week placing the power to determine public school funding squarely with the people's elected representatives in the general assembly and their governor, not within the judiciary. This amendment to the Constitution of Missouri would be put to the vote of the people at the next general election held in November of 2006. I was joined by Senate Majority Floor Leader Charles Shields, and Education Committee Chairman Gary Nodler in this effort. Both of these Senators also sit on the panel to revise our current formula.

I filed this resolution because I believe that the current court challenges are not part of the solution. At a time when our schools need every penny we can find, the state is having to pay tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees. Not only do Missouri taxpayers provide the funding for school districts that are suing, but we also pick up the cost of the Attorney General who must defend against the suit.

Missourians deserve better than to watch hundreds of thousands of their tax dollars funneled away to pay for these ongoing court challenges. With each passing month this cost will grow dramatically. The only ones that are benefiting from this current situation are the lawyers. Meanwhile the children in our schools will continue to see thousands of dollars from general revenue siphoned away.

The solution resides with the elected representatives of the people, who will be held accountable for the decisions they make. This accountability is crucial when the State of Missouri will spend \$2.18 billion on elementary and secondary education this year alone. An unelected judiciary will never have to pass such demanding scrutiny that an election provides so it only makes sense that this highly important decision involving funding for education remain in the hands of the legislature. A fundamental constitutional precept is

that the power to make appropriation decisions has to be with branches of government that are accountable to the people in an election.

Another reason this bill is needed is that when the Attorney General asked for a stay in the lawsuit, the plaintiffs refused. They were unwilling to even give the legislature a chance in correcting the problem. Regardless of what kind of formula the legislature eventually writes, if we do not amend our constitution, these suits are likely to go on and on.

Ultimately, the seven members of the Missouri Supreme Court could make the education spending decisions rather than the 197 members of the General Assembly. I believe we should give the voters an opportunity to pass judgment on the decisions we make. This opportunity is lost when the judiciary calls all the shots.

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](mailto:matt_bartle@senate.state.mo.us) or by phone at (888) 711-9278.