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We Need Dads

As we approach Father's Day this weekend, it is fitting that we take a moment to reflect on all that it means to be a dad and to consider the ways the world has been made far better by the active involvement of fathers.

Unfortunately, too often we find dads bearing the brunt of comedians' jokes or being maligned on sitcoms by being made to look like the fool. While the image of a bumbling, Homer Simpson-like character is entertaining, it really doesn't reflect the very important role in our society that dads play. Far from the false image presented in some segments of today's pop culture that dads are at best inept, and at worst useless, I believe we need far more of dads' influence in our homes and communities.

Many of the problems we attempt to deal with in the legislature would be solved, or at least mitigated, if dads were both present and involved. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), more than 28 percent of the families in Missouri do not have fathers in the home, putting us in the top 10 worst states in the country. Nearly a third of all babies in Missouri are born out of wedlock – seventh highest rate in the nation, and about 75 percent of teen births in Missouri are out of wedlock.

Statistics show that nationwide young children living with unmarried mothers were five times as likely to be poor and 10 times likely to be extremely poor as compared to two-parent families. Nearly 75 percent of American children living in single-parent homes will experience poverty before the age of 11. HHS says kids without dads around are also at a dramatically greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse, are four times more likely to smoke, and are more likely to be in trouble with the law. Teenage girls ages 15-19 raised in homes without fathers are much more likely to have premarital sex, leading to more pregnancies, and more births to single-parent households. This is a trend that needs to be stopped.

The first step in stopping this cycle is for men to step up to the plate and be a father to the kids they've brought into the world. Guys, they are your kids; it is time to take the responsibility to become their dads.

For moms who, for a variety of reasons ranging from death to divorce or abandonment, find themselves struggling to raise kids alone, my hat is off to you. Let me suggest that if the actual father to your children is not available that there is help from grandpas, uncles, trusted neighbors,

church members, and organizations such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters. It is important to all of us that we have dad, or a father figure, present - not only when we're small but at all stages in our lives.

This weekend, let's take a moment to appreciate our dads and the important role they play. They share with us their wisdom, their time, and their resources, but more importantly, they give us their love and make our lives so much richer. So to our dads, we wish you the very happiest of Father's Days.

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.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.