



*Senator  
Bill Stouffer*

**DISTRICT 21**

Senator Bill Stouffer – Cultivating Rural Missouri.

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## **The Stouffer Report: Rebuilding Levees without Draining Your Pocketbook**

Last year's floods served as a reminder of how vulnerable our Missouri farmland continues to be due to inadequate levees. In fact, some levees that were washed away by the floods of 1993 and '95 have not been replaced. [Senate Bill 939](#) could start to change things.

Building a new levee or consolidating existing districts costs a lot of money. Before starting the physical work, there are engineering, surveying, and attorney fees. These costs add up in a hurry. At the current assessment limit to cover these costs, it would be nearly impossible to attract the above services to be able to move on to construction.

As it stands now, a levee district may charge a \$1 per acre or mile of right-of-way to establish a new levy district. That amount was established in 1959 and could not begin to pay for the engineering and consulting work needed if districts were to consolidate today.

This idea was brought to me by farmers in Ray and Carroll Counties. Consolidating the patchwork of small districts there would help protect thousands of acres right through our part of the state, protecting our resources in a more efficient and effective way.

Senate Bill 939 would provide the opportunity for levee districts to propose a uniform tax to voters of up to \$8 to pay for the consulting and engineering fees it would take to consolidate into a more efficient system. The same holds true drainage district as well. The increase would be up to the district and the voters therein.

In addition, only owners of 25 percent of the property in certain drainage districts can petition a court for readjustment of the

assessment of benefits for the property in the district. This act allows the district board of supervisors to petition for readjustment for some or all of the property in the district as identified in the petition. The act also specifies property owners or the board of supervisors in levee districts can petition a court for readjustment of the assessment of benefits for just a particular part of the property in the district as identified in the petition. All drainage districts are authorized to adopt an alternative procedure for the apportionment of installment taxes after a readjustment of the assessment of benefits.

State Representative Steven Tilley of Perryville has a similar bill in the House. [House Bill 1782](#) also addresses drainage districts and provides for more efficient ways to adequately assess values within the districts as well.

The \$1 limit has been in place since 1959. That is almost 50 years ago. Before that, the levy limit was 25 cents. That was put into law back in 1913 and remained unchanged for 46 years. Realistically, factoring in today's costs and buying power, increasing the levy limit to \$18 would get a lot more levees built and repaired faster, but such a jump would hardly be a good way to do business with hardworking taxpayers.

Both the Senate and the House have passed SB 939. I feel confident HB 1782 will make its way through both chambers and onto the governor's desk as well, so we can start fixing levees before the next big flood comes.

*Senator Stouffer serves the counties of Carroll, Chariton, Cooper, Howard, Lafayette, Macon, Ray, Saline, and a part of Clay.*

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by e-mail at [bstouffer@senate.mo.gov](mailto:bstouffer@senate.mo.gov).

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