



State Senator Scott T. Rupp ~ District 2

# The Rupp Report

*Serving Lincoln County & St. Charles County***Column For Week of: November 2, 2009**[Website](#) | [Biography](#) | [Newsroom](#)

## Missouri Should Sprint, Not Walk, Toward 'Race to the Top' Education Funding

With states preparing to vie for \$4.3 billion in federal education money made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's *Race to the Top* program, I fear Missouri will be left at the starting line — and empty handed — if the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education forgoes applying for the first round of funding for this major school reform initiative.

During the recent meeting of the General Assembly's [Joint Committee on Education](#), on which I serve, new Missouri Education Commissioner Chris Nicastro unconvincingly cited time constraints, a lack of funding to pay for the proposal, and the hefty resources needed to write a strong application, including more than 680 hours to prepare the application, as reasons for the delay in vying for the first round of funding — reasons that did not sit well with me.

Although Ms. Nicastro is new to her position, I find it very difficult to believe that the [Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#) (DESE), our state's largest organization with approximately 1,746 full-time employees, believed it couldn't muster enough time, energy and resources to prepare an application for what state education officials acknowledge is a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to help our schools — weakly reasoning that the department had "not initiated a process for developing an application."

Since that time, deadlines for the first and second rounds of *Race to the Top* funding have been moved back, with no official announcement yet of dates. According to the U.S. Department of Education's web site, funding will be distributed in two cycles — one expected in early 2010, following a late fall 2009 deadline, and a second in the fall of 2010, following a late spring 2010 deadline. It's unclear how much money will be distributed in each cycle. The

application package for *Race to the Top* funding is expected to be made available to states very soon.

Based upon our state’s population, there is potentially \$100 million of this federal grant money sitting on the table right in front of us, and a decision not to pursue the *Race to the Top* funding during the first round of funding — for any reason — is unacceptable to me. In a time when Missouri taxpayers are continually being asked to pony up more and more money for our schools, I find it incredible that our state may try to justify potentially losing out on millions in dollars to help our failing schools simply because the application was too “extensive” and required “680 hours of time.”

Commissioner Nicastro has called a statewide meeting of educators, lawmakers and business leaders on Nov. 23 in Jefferson City to discuss the *Race to the Top* application. I hope the group convened realizes the urgency of getting our application in during the first round — and in the best interest of Missouri citizens — makes the right decision to do so.

Only a handful of states may win these highly-sought-after federal education grants. If Missouri doesn’t get it together and act quickly, I believe we can count ourselves among the list of losers in *Race to the Top* funding.

As always, if you have any 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 phone at (866) 271-2844.

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