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Senator David Pearce – Serving Bates, Cass, Johnson and Vernon counties

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## Leveling the Playing Field for Need-Based College Scholarships

Making the decision to receive a college education is one of the most important steps a person can take to expand the opportunities they will have in the future. However, for many Missourians, the significant costs of higher education may stand in the way of their college degree. Thankfully, students can receive some financial assistance in the form of the Access Missouri scholarship program, which has helped make college a more feasible option for people across the state.

Our state has expanded this scholarship program from \$24 million to \$96 million in the past three years. Although many students in our public universities receive a scholarship, a disproportionate share is going to private schools. It doesn't seem fair that the students who choose to attend one of Missouri's excellent public colleges or universities receive less financial aid through Access Missouri than those attending a private school.

[Senate Bill 390](#), which I am co-sponsoring with Senator Kurt Schaefer of Columbia, proposes scholarship levels for public two-year and four-year institutions and equalizes the scholarship amounts so that public school students are eligible to receive the same as those attending private schools.

Under the current system, we are penalizing those who choose to attend a public Missouri college or university, which is detrimental to our goal of making college affordable for all students. Missouri ranks 47<sup>th</sup> in per-capita support for public higher education, yet the state ranks fourth in the percentage of state need-based aid that is provided to students attending private institutions. Senate Bill 390 calls for an equitable distribution of Access Missouri funds, making higher education accessible and affordable for those who need financial assistance the most.

If this legislation passes, it will also mean increased aid amounts for University of Central Missouri students. For this school year, 2,581 UCM students have benefited from more than \$4.2 million in Access Missouri scholarship funds. The average award for those students was \$1,651. UCM officials estimate that approximately 2,700 students would receive as much as \$6.1 million in scholarship money through SB 390.

The bill would continue to provide scholarships for students attending public two-year institutions in the annual amount of \$1,000 maximum and \$300 minimum. It would reduce the scholarship amount in the coming academic year for students attending private four-year colleges from a \$4,600 maximum and \$2,000 minimum, to match the current level students who attend public four-year colleges receive (\$2,150 maximum; \$1,000 minimum). In 2010–2011, it would increase scholarships for students attending public or private colleges and universities from a \$2,150 maximum and a \$1,000 minimum, to a maximum of \$2,850 and a minimum of \$1,500.

I signed on to co-sponsor this legislation because it is important to level the playing field for all students, regardless of whether they are considering a public or private education. Our students should have equal access to available scholarship opportunities, and we should not penalize those who choose to attend one of Missouri's many fine public universities or colleges.

Senate Bill 390 was recently referred to the Senate Education Committee, on which I serve as vice-chair. I expect we will schedule a hearing soon, where people will have an opportunity to voice their support or concerns about the bill. I will keep you updated as the bill works its way through committee and onto the Senate floor.

As always, please feel free to contact me or my staff with any questions or concerns at any time. Because we are here to serve you, we look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions and trying to answer any questions you may have. You can reach us by phone at 866-277-0882 (toll-free) or 573-751-2272, or by fax at 573-526-7381.

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