**It’s Time to Change the Conversation**

As the Missouri legislative session heads into the final weeks, budget issues are going to loom large in the deliberations. The lack of money is stifling the state of Missouri and the (insert your school district). This year, our district is receiving about (amount) less than we should be receiving from the foundation formula. The prospects for next year are no better. We have eliminated the Career Ladder program in our district. The state has cut our transportation funding by (amount) during the last year, even with the recent withholding releases. We have seen the funding for parents as teachers cut in half. We are treading water, but our students deserve better and you should expect better as well.

We don’t need a tax increase in Missouri to fix this problem. We don’t need to take money from higher education, roads and bridges, or social services to fund K-12 education. We don’t need a cigarette tax or more casinos to fund education. We need to stop the backdoor loss of state revenues that is occurring as the result of corporate welfare programs that are stifling our state.

Corporate welfare or tax credits are a dollar for dollar reduction in state taxes. Missouri currently has over 60 different tax credits. Some of these tax credits can be sold and redeemed by individuals or corporations that have no interest or stake in the project for which the tax credits were issued. All of the tax credits are outside of the appropriation oversight and control.

Last year, there were over $540 million dollars of state tax credits redeemed in the state of Missouri. It is being project that this number will increase to over $600 million this fiscal year. At the same time, we can not afford to fund our schools, our colleges and university and fix our roads. Our priorities are completely backwards. Historic tax credits return 21 cents on every dollar invested. Low income housing tax credits return 11 cents on every one dollar invested. Early childhood education returns $7 on every one dollar invested. Why does the state continue to make such bad investments with your tax dollars?

Only nine states contribute less to their K-12 public schools than Missouri. Our state is 32nd in per capita funding for K-12 schools and 45th in per capita funding for higher education. At the same time, we are first in the nation in Historic Preservation Tax Credits and Missouri is second in the nation for Low-Income housing tax credits.

It is time to change the conversation. We need to talk about the needs of our students, not the needs of developers. We need to challenge our elected officials to stop the backdoor loss of state revenue that is occurring as a result of the corporate welfare bonanza. There is legislation proposed that will put a sunset on all tax credits and is estimated to save the state $1.7 billion during the next 15 years. That is $1.7 billion the state can spend educating children, lower college tuition or building roads. And it can be done without a single dollar in tax increases.