



SONDY POPE-ROBERTS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Late in the 90's I was given the opportunity to run for a seat in the legislature because of my activism on education issues in my home school district. I won that seat in 2002 and my priority and sole focus has been education issues - school funding in particular.

Many of us claim that education is our priority but considering where we are today, it is obvious that the word "priority" might need a tighter definition for some. If anyone is to blame for the continued struggles our failed education funding system presents it is the collective Legislature. It is the people under the dome in Madison. They gave you this failed formula and it is theirs to fix.

More than fifteen years of revenue caps preventing school boards from meeting the cost of inflation resulting in endless cuts to programs, staff and services has finally led the Legislature to understand that the funding system is broken. They have been hearing it from school boards, teachers, parents, businesses and property taxpayers.

Most Legislators do not have a clue as to what to do to fix the problem even though many have finally come to recognize that the formula is broken. In the past the Legislature has lacked the political will to act. Funding plans have come and gone and still nothing was done.

You and the public in general have allowed it to be too easy to ignore this very complicated problem. But today I am pleased to report that most of them finally "get it". Coming off this fall's campaign season, Legislators have heard the message and are accepting the fact that the current formula is not working and they are the ones who must fix it. With the changes made during the November 4th election come new opportunities and new possibilities.

Now that I am chairing the Assembly Education Committee Legislators are going to hear a lot more about the School Finance Network plan. I will hold an informational hearing to allow a thorough presentation of the plan and opportunities to questions and understand it. Lawmakers are not going to be able to claim ignorance or lack of information.

I'm going to make sure that there will be plenty of opportunities to know what needs to be done and how to do it. In the past the out-staters have been able to say that too much money is being sent to Milwaukee and other big cities while small rural districts suffer from their own unique challenges. Milwaukee has complained that they aren't getting

enough to meet their unique needs and challenges. Both sides are right. The state has been divided on the issue and Legislators took cover behind the great divide.

However, this will not be the case if you all hold together and remember that we must educate every child in Wisconsin regardless of where they live or what their challenges happen to be.

And Legislators are not going to be able to continue hiding behind the big stakeholder groups like WEAC or WASBA because these folks have come together and are offering the solution. All the Legislature has to do is act. The hard work has been done by those very stakeholders.

The plan you are going to have presented to you tonight is a good solution that addresses the needs of all children.

The School Finance Network has worked long and hard on this plan and it has my full support. It meets the need, it helps all children, and it is brought to us by all of the groups that are crucial in moving any new plan forward.

The SFN plan isn't so radical that those Legislators vaguely familiar with the current formula can reject it out of hand. It is my belief that now is the time and this is the vehicle.

Yesterday I spoke with the Speaker's office and have every reason to believe that Governor Doyle remains optimistic. He does not see this as an impossible dream. There are huge efforts being made to craft a good budget out of this difficult economy and I remind you that this Governor has always put education at the top of his priority list.

It is time that for elected officials to remember that the Constitution of Wisconsin charges us with the task of educating every child in Wisconsin and that means that fixing the failed formula is not just our job, it is our sworn duty. Hold our feet to the fire!

Every Legislator should hear the message that this plan needs to be put into law as quickly as possible. The education of our children is an economic investment in Wisconsin's future, not a line item to continue to slash.

There is no moral defense for continuing to do nothing and continuing to praise the problem. It is your job to deliver that message. We need to hear your voice.

I will have the door open but you must do your part to come united in your message loudly demanding the best for all of Wisconsin's children.

Representative Sony Pope-Roberts
79th Assembly District
Wisconsin State Legislature