



42 FOR BETTER SCHOOLS

Business leader Jim Barksdale urges vote for Initiative 42 *He rebuffs opponents' claims as 'inaccurate and misleading'*

JACKSON, Miss. (July 26, 2015) – Republican businessman Jim Barksdale of Jackson has endorsed Initiative 42, a citizen-led ballot initiative to fully fund Mississippi's public schools.

In Sunday's Jackson Clarion-Ledger newspaper, Barksdale wrote, "I support 42 and urge that you support it."

On the Nov. 3 ballot, Initiative 42 is a proposed constitutional amendment to require the Legislature to fully fund its part of K-12 schools. In 1997, legislators passed the Mississippi Adequate Education Program to fund schools, but have kept that promise only twice in 18 years.

In the past eight years, the state's 150 school districts have been shortchanged nearly \$1.7 billion, putting pressure on county and city governments to bridge the funding gaps.

Barksdale, a business entrepreneur and former CEO of Netscape Communications Corp., also predicted dire consequences for failing to support public education.

"If we fail to educate the 500,000 children who go to public school every day in Mississippi – roughly 90 percent of all children in the state – we will forever seal our fate," Barksdale wrote.

A good education is required of all successful employees, the 45-year businessman insisted.

"Initiative 42 is a conservative, long-range step in the right direction," he wrote. "I hope that voters will pay attention to the real issues, not the distractions, and vote for 42 in November."

Barksdale rebuffed legislative leaders' claims that passage of Initiative 42 could result in drastic state agency budget cuts and possible new taxes.

"No one should fall for this divide-and-conquer strategy," he wrote in an opinion column. "The initiative does not contemplate immediate full-funding in any form or fashion."

Instead, he said, the initiative's petition – signed by nearly 200,000 Mississippians – proposes a gradual phase-in using funds based on the state's general fund increases. He said this process could take about seven years to reach funding levels already called for in state law.

"If in any given year no such increase occurs, education funding would not increase," he noted.

He termed "misleading" opponents claims that education funding would be decided by "a judge in Hinds County," saying any disputes about Initiative 42 eventually will wind up before the state Supreme Court, "an elected, conservative body."

Barksdale said he's been working on education funding for the past 15 years – with Democrats and Republicans – and, "unfortunately, it does not appear that the state's leaders will ever fully fund education unless we amend the state's constitution and force them to do so."

He chided legislators for not fully funding K-12 schools, when they had enough revenues in the past three years to do so.

This chronic underfunding, Barksdale said, has cost teachers their jobs and meant outdated textbooks, unsafe school buses and unrepaired buildings throughout the state's school districts.

But he added that funding alone does not guarantee success.

"Deep, meaningful reform efforts must continue hand-in-hand with the provision of funding to

get us where we need to be,” Barksdale added.

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