

# Tucson Citizen



Guest opinion: Kimberly Ferreira

## Guest opinion: Public education as political football - a constitutional crime

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I moved to Arizona for health reasons 1 1/2 years ago with my daughter, who was receiving a private education, to Catalina Foothills School District in Tucson.

I am shocked that Arizona legislators are playing political football with public education.

No game time was necessary as lawmakers gave an "oath of office" to the Arizona Constitution, which mandates they balance the budget and fund public education.

Says Article 11, Section 10, "the legislature shall make such appropriations, to be met by taxation, as shall insure the proper maintenance of all state educational institutions, and shall make such special appropriations as shall provide for their development and improvement." Figures support the charge that Arizona's constitutional obligations to "develop and improve" public education are falling abysmally short.

Since the 1986-1987 school year, Arizona's per-pupil expenditures have actually declined by \$61, according to the conservative American Legislative Exchange Council.

The latest figures, for the 2006-2007 school year, show the per-pupil expenditure of \$6,248 at 50th place among the states.

In 1986-87, the \$6,309 expenditure ranked 31st.

The \$1.6 billion budget reduction for 2009, which left deep cuts to education, was unconstitutional.

The recent Basic Joint Draft Budget proposals dismantle the stability and viability of public education.

It cripples districts' cash flow by taking \$300 million that is necessary for their solvent operation, reducing transportation funding from \$110 million to \$8 million and slashing \$175 million from basic K-12 funding.

Obviously, Proposition 301's requirement to increase public educational expenditures above the constitutional aggregate limit is being ignored.

To complicate matters further, 39 Republican legislators signed a pledge by the Washington, D.C., special interest lobbying group Americans for Tax Reform. It says the elected official will "oppose any and all efforts to increase taxes."

These legislators are putting this pledge before their oath of office. They should strip their names from this no-tax pledge; otherwise, immediate voter recall should be considered.

In the Senate, they are: Sylvia Allen, Bob Burns, Pamela Gorman, Ron Gould, Chuck Gray, Linda Gray, Jack Harper, John Huppenthal, Barbara Leff, Al Melvin, Russell Pearce, Steve Pierce, Jay Tibshraeny and Thayer Verschoor.

In the House: Kirk Adams, Frank Antenori, Cecil Ash, Ray Barnes, Nancy Barto, Andy Biggs, Tom Boone, Judy Burges, Sam Crump, Adam Driggs, David Gowan, Laurin Hendrix, John Kavanagh, Bill Konopnicki, Debbie Lesko, Steve Montenegro, Rick Murphy, Warde Nichols, Doug Quelland, Carl Seel, David Stevens, Andy Tobin, Jerry Weiers, Jim Weiers and Steve Yarbrough.

To make progress toward a better Arizona, public education funding needs to be addressed, first and foremost, as a statewide issue.

Gov. Jan Brewer recommends a tax increase to fund public education. Recent polling shows support for this.

The Legislature is obligated to increase appropriations to improve public education. This action would be a strong statement that Arizona will not stand in 50th place and understands that education fuels economic development.

Please contact your legislators and let them know you will hold them accountable to their constitutional obligations to fund, develop and improve public education.

If you aren't sure who your representatives are, check [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org) and enter your zip code.

*Kimberly Ferreira is a freelance project manager, education advocate and the mother of a 7-year-old daughter in public school and a 14-year-old son in private school.*