

OUR VIEW | McCleary also an education for voters

POSTED: 9:41 PM, Sep 13, 2014

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In wake of the Supreme Court's Thursday decision to hold the Legislature in contempt over its lack of progress to fund education, one of our board members quipped that the justices didn't do anything groundbreaking — they just joined teachers, parents and voters in the opinion.

Jokes aside, funding education is something our board has discussed with all legislative candidates that we've interviewed this election cycle. It was clear to everyone that finding the money to fund an outlined plan for basic education in the coming biennium is the No. 1 goal for those in Olympia next session; now there may be some teeth behind the order handed down a few years ago.

What those consequences will be remains to be seen, and it's a little difficult to see how justices will cleanly involve themselves in a very complicated state budgeting process when the session ends, should they decide the progress isn't adequate. Holding legislators in Olympia past the session's deadline, one option, is unlikely to be enough — after all, they've done that to themselves with some regularity lately. And taking over the budget process itself isn't realistic for the court, nor does that feel right given the separation of powers our state Constitution outlines.

A third suggestion in the initial reporting would be a court action to eliminate all tax incentives given by the Legislature over the years, a notion that candidates have suggested in more measured tones during our interviews. Candidates have provided a range of estimates on the money such a move "could" bring it, just as others counter with ballpark figures of what cutting those breaks would do to certain industries that create tax revenue and jobs themselves. It's a tough number to pin down and undoubtedly full of special interests — but maybe the Supreme Court's threat is the incentive to get serious about such options. That and tax reform, the other political third rail some candidates like to mention but as a collective body never take the initiative to seriously debate.

Not knowing the Supreme Court's consequences, we can hold out hope that whoever is representing Kitsap and Mason counties come January will be a leader in his or her caucus to push in the direction, and show the "bipartisanship" we heard many crow about in the campaign. One step citizens can take immediately is to learn more about the issue — and the League of Women Voters is here to help.

On Wednesday, Sept. 17, the League is sponsoring a forum titled "State School Funding and McCleary: A Local Perspective," from 6 to 8:30 p.m. at the Bremerton High School Performing Arts Center, 1500 13th St.

Tom Ahearne, counsel for the plaintiffs in the McCleary vs. State of Washington case, will open with a presentation about the lawsuit that led to the Supreme Court's ruling that the state was not fully funding basic education, the precursor to last week's announcement about the Legislature's lack of progress.

The event will also include a local perspective, helping voters understand what local districts have experienced with the current levels of state funding, and their expectations for the coming state budget cycle. Each local school district superintendent will participate — they are Dr. Aaron Leavell, Bremerton; Faith Chapel, Bainbridge Island; Dr. Michelle Reid, South Kitsap; David McVicker, Central Kitsap; and Patty Page, North Kitsap. Moderating the discussion will be Catherine Ahl, a former North Kitsap school board member and current education specialist for the League's lobby team in Olympia. For more information about this program, call Sharon Shrader with the League of Women Voters at 360-373-9608.

The entire equation is complicated, and legislators have a tough task ahead of them. That's what they've signed up for by running, of course. Our part in that solution is to understand the issue before casting ballots — and we encourage you to learn more and take part in the process by attending the League of Women Voters meeting on Wednesday night.

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