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Alabama's proration crisis is one more wake-up call about the weakness of our tax system.

First, it should help more people understand the fact that our funding for education is inadequate. If kids have no worksheets because there is no paper for the copier, and schools are having to cut out preparation sessions for the graduation exam, we clearly do not have sufficient funding for our children's education.

Second, this crisis shows that we depend far too much on revenue sources that fluctuate with the economy and not enough on more stable bases of revenue. And there are viable proposals on the table to turn this around.

We depend too much on sales taxes and not enough on property taxes. Something is wrong in a state where most families pay more for sales taxes on groceries than they pay in property taxes on their homes. Sen. Hank Sanders has a bill to turn that equation around, by removing the grocery tax and replacing the revenue with a modest property tax increase. The vast majority of Alabamians would come out ahead, and our schools would be on more stable financial footing.

We depend too much on state funding and not enough on local revenue. Alabama's state-level funding for education is on a par with other states. What sets our schools back is the paltry tax support from over three-fourths of the local school districts. Rep. Nelson Starkey has a bill to turn this around, requiring every local system to provide at least 20 mills of property tax for education. That is a mere \$200 a year for schools from a family with a \$100,000 house.

We depend too much on taxing low-income families whose jobs are the first to be cut in a downturn, and too little on high-income families whose incomes are stable and growing. Alabama taxes low-income families at three times the rate of upper-income families. Alabama Arise has a bill to turn this around, cutting taxes for 70% of taxpayers, while shifting the tax burden modestly to upper-income taxpayers.

All three of these proposals can be crafted to fit the governor's no-new-taxes pledge, while putting our children's education on sounder footing. Each could also be crafted to provide more money for Alabama classrooms and their critical needs.

Either way, our leaders must play the vital role of educating citizens on the realities of our tax system. Our property taxes are *not* too high, as anyone who has lived in other states knows. It is *not* a fair system. It offers giant breaks to high-income families while imposing the heaviest tax burden in the nation on low-wage workers who work full-time.

Without the facts, citizens cannot make informed decisions. When they learn that their tax rates are higher than those of the neighbor who makes more money, they will demand a change. When they realize how hard a 6.2 % proration falls on our schools, they will ask why our leaders

didn't save for a rainy day -- and why our state is living so close to the edge.