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A SUMMER SESSION FOR SENATE

SCHOOL FUNDING BEFORE VACATION

ED RENDELL WAS elected governor under an education reform platform. Somehow, that fact keeps getting missed - even by Rendell, it seems.

Faced with a big deficit, dwindling revenue and a Legislature which would rather pass kidney stones than a tax hike, Rendell has proposed paying for better schools through gambling.

But tying his education reform agenda to slot machines was like tying them to an anchor and throwing them over the Delaware River. They soon disappeared from sight in the swirling acrimony and politics of gambling.

After deep-sixing a slots bill, the state Senate promptly passed a status-quo budget that added a few extra dollars for schools, but no extra money for smaller class sizes or full-day kindergarten. Left with a Senate bill that Rendell already promised to veto, the House shot it dead.

So this leave state funding for schools...absolutely nowhere.

Which in a way is a good thing.

Senators leaving for the summer shouldn't be too quick to pack their bags: Rendell should call a special session and force Harrisburg to confront some uncomfortable truths.

The disparity between rich and poor school districts is growing in the commonwealth, and even the well-off districts aren't doing as well as school districts across the country: 41 states fund prekindergarten programs and 25 have full-day kindergarten. Pennsylvania is not on those lists.

According to a study presented by the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children and funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Pennsylvania's education funding formula ranks 47th worst in the nation.

Rendell promised to change that. His solution - gambling - wasn't perfect.

While this page has historically opposed gambling as a form of state revenue, we gave slots a nod of approval because it seemed to be the only way to get the education reforms Rendell promised. Now that the Senate has rejected slots, the burden is now on Senate leaders like Republican Chip Brightbill to come up with a a better answer.

Summer school is reserved for those who didn't complete their work during the normal school year. That sounds like Harrisburg to us.

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