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## **A misnomer if ever there was one**

If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, it's probably....

You guessed it.

Yet sponsors of House Joint Resolution 48, filed earlier this month in the Missouri Legislature, argue the constitutional amendment they propose is not like the TABOR legislation suspended by Colorado voters last November.

TABOR is an acronym for Taxpayer's Bill of Rights. Like TABOR, the measure sponsored by Carl Bearden and supported by House leadership, makes Missouri's Hancock Amendment look like a license to spend. The new amendment calls for an "appropriations growth limit" -- surely a misnomer if ever there was one -- that ties state spending to a formula based on the rate of inflation and the annual percentage change in state population.

In fact, if the amendment were in place today, even Governor Matt Blunt's squeaky tight budget proposal with its very mild increase for higher education would be \$150 million over the limit.

The reason Colorado voters suspended similar legislation is that the state was being strangled. One Colorado lawmaker predicted that if TABOR wasn't changed, his might become the first state in the union to stop funding education.

To be sure, Representative Bearden's version contains an emergency contingency so the formula could be shelved in the case of an economic downturn. But if it's not a good idea when times are bad, why would it be helpful when times are good?

We already are in the midst of a major brouhaha over the fate of MOHELA, the state agency that oversees student loans. The governor proposes selling MOHELA's assets to fund biotech research and higher education capital improvements.

The state roads chief just suggested tolls to finance much-needed improvements to Interstate 70.

Whether it's selling assets or taxing drivers, our state is searching for new revenue. It seems incongruent to propose an even more restrictive budget formula at this time.

This is not an argument for higher taxes. We believe the democratic process (small "d") provides for strong representation, people like Carl Bearden who believe in responsible government. We elect them to make the right decisions regarding our pocket books and our future. If fiscal responsibility is left up to a formula, the role of the Legislature, and also the electorate, will be diminished.