

# Don't miss 'Corridor of Shame'

**O**n this page today, a letter writer urges readers to watch the documentary "Corridor of Shame, The Neglect of South Carolina's Rural Schools" that will air statewide on S.C. ETV the next two consecutive Sundays. The letter writer is right. The documentary, produced and directed by Charleston native Bud Ferillo, should be on every South Carolinian's agenda.

Thousands of citizens across the state already have viewed the documentary as a result of preview showings on college campuses and other locations. It made its Charleston debut late last month at the Dock Street Theatre, complete with appearances by its executive producer, businessman John S. Rainey, and a question-and-answer session with Mr. Ferillo, who now heads Ferillo and Associates of Columbia.

The privately funded documentary contains images that won't go away of conditions in schools in some of the state's poorest counties. Indeed, those images and the conversations with those who work in those schools are intended to raise the public consciousness about the need to address the inherent inequities in the way education is funded in this state.

While the documentary obviously is tied to the pending lawsuit by a group of rural school districts challenging the funding system, it is by no means a partisan screed. Its financial sponsors reach across the political spectrum as do those who appear in the documentary. The documentary is introduced by author Pat Conroy, and those interviewed range from Charleston businessman Charles Way to S.C. Sen. Lindsey

Graham. Indeed, Sen. Graham gets to the heart of the problem when he zeroes in — as does our letter writer — on the chief reason for the funding disparity — the reliance on county property taxes to pick up a big chunk of the cost.

Clearly, small rural counties with declining downtowns and virtually no industrial tax base can't provide the kind of funds needed to renovate aging buildings or even, in some instances, provide proper heating. Under the current system, state funding must be augmented by local property tax dollars, even though, constitutionally, education is a state responsibility.

Indeed, even counties with larger tax bases contend that the system is unfair. A complicated formula at the state level forces counties such as Charleston to provide a disproportionately large local match for state-mandated programs. One end result, as our letter writer notes, is a hard hit on elderly homeowners. That is particularly true if those homeowners have long lived in areas where property values have suddenly escalated.

Fortunately, some state lawmakers aren't waiting until the outcome of the lawsuit to try to reform the system. One idea with substantial support in both the House and Senate calls for a two percent increase in the state sales tax, which would allow the state to pick up the total educational tab, eliminating the need for a local property tax for schools.

While "Corridor of Shame" doesn't endorse any particular solution, it does set out to stir a serious public debate about a flawed system. In that it does a substantial public service.