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Alabama tax system holding state back

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According to a recent national study, the state that usually ranks at the bottom of the list nationally actually tops one list.

Unfortunately, it's a list of states that place high tax burdens on their poorest citizens.

The study conducted by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities shows Alabama requires families living in poverty to pay higher income taxes than any other state does.

The non-partisan center's report states a family of three in Alabama earning at the federal poverty level, which is just over \$17,000, pays \$333 — “the highest tax rate in the country.”

The report should come as little surprise — for years we had the lowest threshold in the country for taxing the poor. While some of that was addressed a couple of years ago, pushing Alabama to No. 3 in the nation, our state has been steadily backsliding and has already re-crossed that disgraceful threshold in several categories.

Only 16 other states tax people living at or below the poverty level, but apparently none of them do it better than Alabama.

Aside from being morally reprehensible, the practice is a huge impediment to Alabama's growth and perpetuates the national image that we live in a backward, regressive state.

And, at least where our tax system is concerned, that stereotype is right on the money.

Adding to the insult, such an unbalanced tax system creates an unstable financial base for essential government services — especially education, which compounds the problem of moving the state forward.

Likewise, officials are quick to point out high taxes on the poor pose a particularly difficult problem during this recession, since so many families are struggling just to keep food on the table and every penny counts.

That not only means lean times for these families, but also for the companies and businesses that depend on them as customers.

Every election cycle, we hear the same old rhetoric from politicians that they are going to address the issue, and just about every time something is proposed, it is either defeated in the Legislature or by the voters.

Alabamians have only themselves to blame for this problem — next time you go to the polls, use your vote to send a message to Montgomery that it's time for real tax reform in our state.