

## “There Will Be Another Tomorrow Unless Jesus Comes Back Tonight”

(Disclaimer: this is one man’s opinion. It does not reflect the stance of Henry County government.)

The federal funds began flowing about three years ago – not long after we were introduced to COVID-19. ‘Manna from Heaven’...lots of it from ‘Big Brother’ in Washington. It sounded good – until we began to understand all the strings attached...all the restrictions...all the red tape. Even Henry County got \$3.4M. And that was just a drop in the bucket to the amounts funneled to larger counties (for example, Madison County received over \$70M.) But we weren’t allowed to pave roads with it. We couldn’t hire workers with it. We couldn’t even bank it in a ‘rainy day’ fund to meet other needs that are sure to come. Most of ours is being spent to renovate a sub-standard, 75-year-old jail just to ensure it meets the minimum requirements. Our choices were (a) be proactive now and do it at a semi-reasonable price or (b) wait until the ‘powers that be’ force us to spend twice that amount and leave it up to us to find some way to pay for it. What we’ve pledged to this project is about a third of what it will cost to complete it.

The State of Alabama received \$3.7 billion. The legislature used part of the last few days of the session that just ended to determine how to spend the balance. Two of the bills that were passed (HB479 and SB86) sounded good on the surface but what happens when it comes time to ‘pay the piper.’ What happens down the road when the federal money is gone and the general fund is in need of an influx of cash? HB479 reduces the state sales tax on food from 4% to 3% (effective 09-01-23) and then to 2% (effective 09-01-25.) The estimated cost in tax revenue will be \$152M in FY2024 and \$318M beginning in FY2025 and each year thereafter. SB86 gives a tax ‘rebate’ of \$150 per individual or \$300 for couples filing jointly. The estimated cost to the state: approximately \$393M.

I’m sure we all like the idea of saving one or two percent at the grocery store. But will we actually realize the savings? How long will it take for some stores to quietly increase their margin by that amount or more?

And we certainly won’t refuse a \$150 tax rebate. That’s maybe half the price of a room for one night at the beach. And then it’s gone. Forever.

This is an example of ‘living for today and not worrying about tomorrow’. Could it have been spent differently? Certainly. What are our most pressing needs? What could have been another alternative? It may have taken some innovative thinking but why try not something like this: take the \$545M that will vanish in FY 2023/2024 (and the \$318M in FY2025) and create a ‘Here at Home’ infrastructure fund. Then give cities and counties – governments closest to the people - the opportunity to apply for a 50/50 matching grant to help meet critical infrastructure needs. We would jump at the chance to borrow \$5M if we were assured of getting an additional \$5M match. Think of what we could do for Henry County roads with \$10M.

Why are we not planning more for tomorrow...for next year...for the next 20 years? What about our children...and their children? The prevailing thought seems to have been, “let’s give it to those who paid it in.” That’s understandable...but was it the right decision for the long term? We’ve always been told to leave it better than we find it. Are we doing that? I guess none of this really matters if Jesus comes back soon. But what if He doesn’t? Just something to think about.

### Thirty Day Review:

- Probate activity for April: three wills probated, three administrations, two final settlements, eight miscellaneous hearings, five involuntary commitments, four name changes and eight marriage certificates recorded.
- If your last name begins with 'M' or 'I', June is your month to renew your tags.
- May 11 – May Administrative meeting – Herndon Building
- May 16 – May Commission meeting – Annex Building
- May 16 – Met with JMR+H regarding jail upgrades
- May 18 – Attended the Jimmy Rane Foundation Scholarship event – Montgomery
- May 22 – HCHR board meeting
- May 29 – Memorial Day holiday
- May 31 – Alabama Probate Judges Association legislative webinar
- May 31 – Spoke at a men's bible study at Baker's Landing
- June 1 – Abbeville Chamber luncheon
- June 5 – Jefferson Davis's birthday (state holiday)
- June 5/6 – Served as a panelist at a local government conference in Atmore
- June 6 – Wallace College Foundation board meeting

### Dates to Remember:

- June 8 – Southeast Alabama Regional Planning Commission board meeting - Dothan
- June 15 – June Administrative meeting – 10:00 – Herndon Building
- June 15 – Henry County Industry Workforce Summit – Ravenwood
- June 20 – June Commission meeting – 10:00 – Annex Building
- June 26/28 – Alabama Probate Judges Summer Conference – Gulf Shores
- June 27 – Henry County employees health screening – Herndon Building
- June 29 – HCEDA board meeting – Abbeville
- June 29 – Hudson-Alpha reception – Dothan
- July 4 – Independence Day holiday