

# Unearmarking won't solve the revenue problem

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Gov. Robert Bentley will present his proposed General Fund budget when he delivers the State of the State address Feb. 2. His spokeswoman said there will be no proposals for new revenue, unlike last year.

The leadership of the Republican supermajority in the Legislature is toying with the idea of unearmarking \$400 million from various state agencies to cover anticipated gaps in the General Fund. The General Fund for the current year is \$1.7 billion. And there is talk of increasing the gasoline tax to allow the Alabama Department of Transportation to do more than just maintenance on roads and bridges.

What the governor and lawmakers are ignoring is the 500-pound gorilla in the room: the lack of new revenue for the General Fund.

In 2015, a regular session of the Legislature and two special sessions were necessary to adopt the General Fund.

It, too, had gaping holes that were filled by raiding any department or agency that had what lawmakers viewed as disposable income. In the case of the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, its appropriation was slashed and an account funded by fees paid by industries was raided to a total tune of about \$2 million. The board that manages ADEM was forced to increase fees paid by industries discharging treated water by 20 percent.

In 2015, Bentley proposed more than \$500 million in new taxes, but few made it out of legislative committees.

The Legislature continues to ignore the fact more money is needed to operate state government. Agencies have been cut to the bone, money has been borrowed from various funds and is no longer available, and prisons are so crowded that the specter of federal intervention looms. Never mind expanding Medicaid, which the governor estimates would require an additional \$710 million over the next six years.

Lawmakers could begin by closing corporate tax loopholes, and accepting the reality property taxes are criminally low in Alabama.

State government is as lean as it can possibly be.

Now, it's time to accept the responsibility of adequately funding government.