



Robert Bentley: I expect legislative leaders to step up, fund services for people of Alabama

Robert Bentley

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley proposes new taxes and budget reforms to solve what's ailing Alabama's General Fund. (Albert Cesare/The Montgomery Advertiser via AP) (Albert Cesare) (*Albert Cesare*)

Guest opinion By **Guest opinion**

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By Robert Bentley, *governor of Alabama*

Alabama state government cannot fund the essential needed level of services of government without new revenue.

The General Fund supports most non-education related functions of state government. For decades, problems have existed in the way crucial services have been funded because no growth taxes were available to support the budget. A temporary solution for many years has been to support the ailing fund with one-time revenue and push the problem down the road for future leaders to solve. With mounting debts that state government owes dating back to 2005 and no one-time revenue available, we are at a critical point where we cannot continue to operate government without more revenue or unacceptable cuts in services.

During the 2015 regular session, there was a proposal to drastically cut services Alabamians expect. These services affect all of us who depend on state troopers to respond to the scene of an accident, the court system to resolve criminal and civil matters and those who need mental health services. We have reformed our Medicaid Agency to help sustain hospitals and nursing homes. The Alabama Department of Corrections is operating more effectively and efficiently. Any major cut will significantly hurt the progress we have made with both agencies.

Many ideas have been circulated about how to solve the budget crisis. For several months, my administration has heard and researched many of these proposals. I have proposed a strong, yet simple, plan that will provide not only revenue for the General Fund during the 2016 fiscal year but will also fundamentally change the way the state budgets and solve this problem for the long-term.

My plan is aimed at protecting against significant cuts in services in the General Fund through a combined approach of budget reforms and revenue increases. Neither is a drastic approach, and a majority of Alabamians will not be significantly impacted. I have spent the last few months meeting with legislative leadership and individual legislators discussing the importance of new revenue. I believe the vast majority of the Alabama legislature is ready to be problem solvers.

The most conservative citizens of Alabama are opposed to drastic cuts to important services and programs. This was clearly seen in a 65 percent vote of the people in September 2012. This vote allowed Alabama to borrow money out

of the Alabama Trust Fund to keep the state from making drastic cuts to public safety, mental health, state parks, Medicaid, corrections and other important agencies. Borrowing money is less conservative than the small, fair taxes I have proposed.

You elected me to make difficult decisions and solve problems. You also elected your legislators to do the same. I take my responsibility seriously, and I know the Legislature does as well. Alabama's future depends on strong leadership.

When lawmakers return Monday to Montgomery to continue the special session, there is a critical choice they will have to make. I believe they will take a bold leadership step and properly fund the services Alabamians expect. By working together, we can make Alabama a great place to live, work and raise a family.

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