

Cut mental health care, because what could go wrong?



By **Clete Wetli**

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All of a sudden, there's a big public outcry about the draconian cuts in mental-health funding and treatment because jails are quickly filling up with the mentally ill and, now, Republicans act shocked because they don't know how to deal with the problem effectively. Well, this is sort of like getting run over and killed by a train that has been traveling at three miles per hour and acting shocked that it didn't make a last-minute turn before impact.

For years, we've been told that the only solutions to any financial problems in Alabama involved cutting budgets and staff to the bone. Any talk of increasing revenue such as fixing the state's broken property taxes or repairing regressive taxation was seen as, well, insane.

Now, everyone is acting surprised because it appears that underfunding and understaffing basic public services wasn't such a brilliant idea after all. Why not cut mental health treatment even more? What could possibly go wrong there?

Republicans, you were warned repeatedly and you still decided to cut mental health hospital beds by two-thirds in the last four years. You courageously demolished mental health care.

Republicans, you were also warned about the dangerous overcrowding in Alabama's jails and prisons that has been getting worse for years, and you still haven't figured out any good way to fix that debacle either. Yet you bravely turned a blind eye until forced to come up with an untenable, half-hearted fix that never quite made it to a vote.

So, who in the world could have foreseen that the problems with jails and the mental health system could be so intertwined? Is it possible that severely underfunding our state's judicial system could also somehow be a contributing factor in this dilly of a pickle?

Some whiny liberals have complained, but things aren't all that bad, are they?

After all, funding has been cut to Alabama's infrastructure and, aside from a few near-death experiences with potholes and shaky bridges on country roads while motoring to the coast, everything seems A-OK. Making Jesus take the wheel is a whole lot easier than taking away corporate welfare.

And sure, there may be long lines at the license department, if there happens to be one open in your county, but at least no one is rushing to pave over the nostalgia of gravel roads. Besides, why would rural Alabama communities with an unemployment rate that's well over twice the national average want modern infrastructure? Crazy talk.

Our rivers still look sort of clean and, besides, where are companies supposed to dump their by-products when making safe chemical products like Teflon? Looks like this mental health funding cut was an awesome idea. Maybe we can find some more ways to save precious state dollars by not testing our water for pollutants. Ask the folks in Morgan County and they'll tell you that nothing could possibly go wrong with that idea.

We've gone this long without inspecting our dams, and we've always heard that if ain't broke don't fix it. Why waste time and money on inspections when we know nothing could possibly go wrong there? We'd be dam crazy to spend money on that.

Yeah, we've seen how the "State House Stormin' Republican" cuts have done nothing but cause other states to drool with envy at our economic genius, so it just stands to reason that cutting mental health will surely make us the brightest crayon in the whole box.

If we keep cutting mental health over and over and over, maybe we'll get a different result.

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