

# WINDOM GALLIHER

## MONTGOMERY UPDATE

MARCH 18, 2016

### ***Budget, bingo and 'The Return of The Zapper'***

#### **House makes few changes, sends lean version of GF back to Senate for final vote**

We don't know if House General Fund budget chair Steve Clouse has ever perched himself on a seat in a dunking booth for a charity back home in Ozark. If he has or if that day arrives when he does "take one for the team," we're certain what he'll compare it to.

For the fifth year in a row, Rep. Clouse has stood before the body with the unenviable task of explaining a proposed General Fund budget that is light on cash and heavy on needs.

On Tuesday, Rep. Clouse once again tethered himself to the microphone to deal with the litany of questions, suggestions and complaints. For the better part of four hours, the barrage ensued – primarily from Democrats worried about Medicaid. It wasn't particularly testy, except when the debate detoured into discussion of media reports regarding pay increases for members of Gov. Robert Bentley's cabinet.

Rep. Clouse took his repeated "dunking" good-naturedly, but reminded members that without additional revenue there was little that could be done. The \$1.83 billion budget finally passed 65-35. The bill went back to the Senate where it sits in the basket waiting for a vote of concurrence.

Despite the pleas of Democrats and those advocating for health care interests, the Legislature seems more settled on passing the bare-bones budget. Gov. Bentley will likely veto the budget as he has before, but an override of that veto is also likely.

The House wrapped up its week, passing a series of bills proposed by the Alabama Law Institute related to family law



**REP. JOHN ROGERS (D-BIRMINGHAM) SAYS IT'S TIME TO SLOW THINGS DOWN IN THE HOUSE AFTER BILL INTRODUCED TO WHICH HE'S VEHEMENTLY OPPOSED**

before adjourning by lunchtime Thursday.

As for the Senate, the "Zapper" returned Thursday as the Republican supermajority clotured Democrats on four straight bills. There was an attempt on a fifth piece of legislation, but it fell one vote short. Sen. Rodger Smitherman (D-Birmingham) told the body he would begin a session-long filibuster in retaliation for the quick votes on bills. Interestingly enough, another Jefferson County Democrat, Rep. John Rogers (D-Birmingham), says he will start slowing things down in the House, but for another reason. Rep. Rogers is upset at the introduction of a bill that alters how appointments to the Birmingham Water Works Board are made.

Perhaps the most impactful action in

the Senate this week was in the Finance & Taxation-General Fund Committee where Gov. Bentley earned an important victory. After two committee meetings and a handful of amendments, the Governor's plan to borrow \$800 million to replace several men's prisons and Tutwiler Women's Prison cleared the committee.

Outside of the legislative sessions, one of the more significant items of interest was the work of the Joint Public Pension Committee, which is taking an extremely deep dive into the status and future of the Retirement Systems of Alabama.

It is clear that many legislators are looking heavily toward transforming the state pension plans by creating an additional

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## Bingo

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program to move away from a singularly defined-benefit program to possibly a hybrid approach – a defined benefit program and a defined contribution program. While this might be the overarching aim, the political might of Dr. David Bronner and his legions of RSA members will have something to say about it.

If and when the Legislature pushes forward with changes, it will certainly be

high political theater. It's worth staying tuned.

Next week, the Legislature has decided to meet Tuesday and Wednesdays (its 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> legislative days) before taking off one week for spring break. The House has committed to finishing off two somewhat non-controversial calendars, but Rep. Rogers' threatened filibuster could slow things down. In the Senate, one of the top items expected to be on tap is Rep. Mac McCutcheon's "Alabama Renewal Act," which will aid the state's ports and provide other economic incentives.

Another subject to watch concerns identical local constitutional amendments for Greene County, which would tie the law governing Greenetrack to the federal Indian gaming act. Sen. Bobby Singleton (D-Greensboro) moved his version out of the Senate Tourism Committee, while Rep. A.J. McCampbell (D-Demopolis) has a public hearing in the House Tourism Committee on Wednesday.

Sen. Singleton's bill requires 21 votes for passage, and it will be interesting to see how many Senators attempt to block the bill.

**Note:** The Windom Galliher Montgomery Update publishes weekly during the legislative session, monthly in the off-season, and as events warrant otherwise.