

# SPECIAL

# WINDOM GALLIHER

## MONTGOMERY UPDATE

AUGUST 11, 2015

## Special Session ends with resounding thud

*"What a long, strange trip it's been." – The Grateful Dead.*

So, it ends where we started. No General Fund budget. Déjà vu all over again, said noted American philosopher Yogi Berra.

The Special Session sputtered to an end Tuesday with the House of Representatives finally and formally finishing off what it started Monday afternoon by indefinitely postponing the proposed General Fund budget.

Earlier Monday, General Fund budget chair Sen. Arthur Orr (R-Decatur) offered a new version of the plan that was different than the one offered in the regular session. The Orr version – which we hesitate to call it that since he voted against it – fully funded the prison reform effort by level-funding Corrections and providing extra funds for that agency, Pardons and Paroles, and the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency.

Under the Orr budget, Medicaid was subject to a 4 percent cut, or \$31 million. Mental Health and Human Resources was subject to a 5 percent cut. The courts would have been cut by 6 percent. Senior Services, Commerce, ADEM and the state Military Department were subject to a 9 percent cut. All other agencies were subject to a 18.5 percent cut.

"What I heard from members is that they wanted the prison reform fully funded," Sen. Orr said.

After a protracted debate, the Senate barely passed the budget on a 19-15 vote sending it to the House.

There was an effort to convince Republicans in the House to fulfill their constitutional responsibility to send a budget to Gov. Robert Bentley, but with time running out in the session – it had to end by midnight tonight – there was no appetite to sign onto the Senate version and no



**SENATE BUDGET CHAIR ARTHUR ORR (R-DECATUR) OFFERED A BUDGET THAT WOULD PAY FOR PRISON REFORM, BUT CUT EVERYTHING ELSE**

desire for a conference committee.

House General Fund budget chair Rep. Steve Clouse (R-Ozark) reluctantly carried the budget to the floor, but voted for it. He didn't have many friends. In fact, House Pro Tem Rep. Victor Gaston (R-Mobile) was Rep. Clouse's lone ally. Rep. Gaston spoke early in the debate, and said he would vote yes.

When the votes were counted, the House overwhelmingly rejected the Senate budget by an 82-2 vote – surely, a first in Alabama legislative history. In the legislative lingo, that's known as a "stampede" – when legislators realize that the vote margin could be large in one direction and they hustle to vote with the prevailing side.

When the House returned to session Tuesday, Rep. Clouse quickly moved to indefinitely postpone the budget bill and the motion was approved by voice vote, killing the budget.

The House slogged along for three and half hours, debating a handful of bills – one requiring non-profits with state tax exemptions to reapply each year, which passed after a long filibuster. A handful of other bills – housekeeping measures – passed.

The Senate spent nearly the entire day in recess, waiting to see if the House would pass any bills. Once the House finished its work, the Senate met briefly and adjourned as well.

When Gov. Bentley will call for the second Special Session is unknown. Since he caught legislators and everyone else off guard with his July 13 call, the "guesses" are all over the board. The most likely guesses are later this week, the last week of the month or the Wednesday after Labor Day.

Regardless of the date, you can bet that nerves will be frayed and Oct. 1 will be fast approaching.