

# The Anniston Star

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## Paying for the government you want



By the editorial board of The Anniston Star Aug 23, 2017

Since the Alabama Legislature has proven it can't solve budget crises for a host of critical state programs and departments, don't be surprised that one lawmaker is advocating a form of *a-la-carte* government.

Lawmakers can't fix things. Their ineptitude is legendary. So get taxpayers to do it.

That's one take on state Rep. Tommy Hanes' pre-filed bill for 2018 that would add check-boxes to Alabamians' state income-tax returns. If the bill becomes law, willing taxpayers could fork over additional money specifically for the cash-strapped state parks, Alabama's Medicaid program or the Department of Mental Health.

"If they want to help keep the parks going, they'll donate," Hanes, R-Bryant, told The Star.

But why stop there?

If Alabamians want to keep the prisons going, they'll donate. Don't want dangerous felons set free.

If Alabamians want to keep state troopers on the highways, they'll donate.

If Alabamians want to keep the state courts system going, they'll donate.

If Alabamians want to keep the state's economic developers working, they'll donate.

If Alabamians want to keep legislators paid and state government going, they'll donate.



But if they don't?

Lawmakers don't have an answer for that, either.

We'll cut Rep. Hanes a bit of slack — but only a bit. Check-boxes aren't a new phenomena; they're like donation boxes at gas-station checkouts that collect coins for ill children or local charities. They're often ignored. And, granted, if voluntary donations added a few thousand dollars to the coffers of state parks or Medicaid, administrators would undoubtedly cash that check, small as it may be in the grand scheme of things.

The truth, however, hurts Alabama's lawmakers. Check-off boxes are confessions of inability. Alabama's a low-tax, low-wage state with a historic fear of tax increases. Progressive states with quality public education use modest property-tax rates to fund programs that pay undeniable dividends. It's not money squandered. It's money invested.

Alabama, however, doesn't do that. It operates state government on the cheap, state education on the cheap, state prisons on the cheap. Lawmakers tremble at the notion of creating new revenue to solve their budget woes. And why? Because there's always another election day, and they know that not even a Republican Party label next to their name can help them if they're branded a tax-increaser.

This equates to elected leadership at the state Capitol. Legislators are flummoxed and out of new ideas. The 2018 session will surely be more of the same, men and women arguing about the General Fund's woes and offering ideas on what to cut, not what to improve. It's political survival at the state's expense. Next time you're in Montgomery, drive by the Statehouse and throw a few coins in the kitty. Rep. Hanes will take care of the rest.

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