

What would Jesus do?: Not that

Rep. Craig Ford, Special to the Progress 5:06 p.m. CDT June 2, 2015



(Photo: AP)

We are often reminded that this nation was founded on Christian principles, and certainly a majority of the representatives in the Alabama legislature are Christians. So when the General Fund budget, which finances all government services and agencies outside of education, came up for a vote last week, I couldn't help but think about that popular phrase from the '90s, "What would Jesus do?" The "W.W.J.D." phrase has been used to guide Christians through a lot of tough decisions. So it only makes sense that most members of the state House should have asked themselves that question before they voted on that budget.

But last week, it looks like most House members didn't ask themselves, "What would Jesus do?" Instead, the votes they cast may as well be their signatures on more than a thousand pink slips and death certificates for people throughout Alabama.

If Jesus had been voting on this budget, how would he have voted?

Would Jesus, who said, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me," support a budget that eliminates the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention program, and reduces the enforcement of child support payments?

Would Jesus, who healed the sick and is called the "Great Physician," support a budget that eliminates outpatient dialysis and hospice care?

Would Jesus, who taught us to honor our mothers and fathers and our neighbors as ourselves, support a budget that takes the state's Meals-On-Wheels program, which is the only way many elderly Alabamians are able to eat, and cut that program's funding in half?

Would Jesus, who said, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me," support a budget that cuts Medicaid and the Department of Mental Health by 5 percent?

Philippians 2 reminds us that daily we should "have the attitude within ourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." This chapter tells us to treat the needs of others like they are more important than their own. But by approving this budget, the Alabama House of Representatives has done just the opposite, and chose to disregard the devastating impact these drastic cuts will have on many Alabamians.

Now, the Senate is considering the budget. The law requires that all revenue raising legislation must begin in the House of Representatives, so the Senate cannot do anything to put more money in the budget. But the senators can vote down this budget and force the legislature into a special session this summer. By then, the legislature could negotiate a fair revenue-raising package that raises money through voluntary methods, like a lottery and tobacco tax, instead of higher taxes on businesses, agriculture and families.

Clearly, the consequences of this budget are dire and not in the best interest of the people of Alabama. Legislators have a duty: to be a voice for the people they represent and stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves, just as Jesus would do. It's hard to imagine that the Christ who healed the sick, fed the hungry and taught us to take care of "the least of these," would have voted for a budget that abandons the sick, takes food out of the mouths of our grandparents and forces a thousand Alabamians out of a job.

It's now up to the Senate to either force this budget through or do the right thing and kill it so we can start over. A lot will depend on if the Senators will do what the House members did not do last week: ask themselves, "What would Jesus do? Would Jesus vote for this budget?"

Rep. Craig Ford is a Democrat from Gadsden and the Minority Leader in the Alabama House of Representatives.



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