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Bussman talks HB 24 in Chamber of Commerce speech

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Sen. Paul Bussman laughs as he talks with Ray Campbell following a talk he gave at the Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce monthly luncheon at Caddo Cafeteria on Tuesday, June 27.

Posted: Thursday, June 29, 2017 6:00 am

By Jeff Edwards Staff Writer | [0 comments](#)

Alabama Senator Paul Bussman said he is willing to let the two sides on the opposite side of the House Bill 24 debate work out their disagreements in court before putting forth another bill that would repeal the controversial law.

Bussman spoke on Friday afternoon at the monthly meeting of the Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce, which took place at Caddo Cafeteria.

Bussman touched on a number of topics, but the one that meant the most to citizens of the county were his thoughts on the law, which shifts about two-thirds of funding of the revenue commissioner's \$652,000 budget to the entities receiving money from the office.

The law requires that entities receiving funds from the revenue commissioner office's collection of ad valorem taxes split the cost of the office's budget. The school system now pays 31.47 percent of the budget, and the county 23.18 percent. Lawrence County Medical Center pays 12.98 percent. Moulton is to pay 2.63 percent. The law provides the county's general fund about \$420,000 more to pay for services and salaries.

Bussman, R-Cullman, introduced Senate Bill 384 in late April in an effort to repeal the law, but it failed because of the lack of support from the other members of the Lawrence County legislative delegation.

Lawrence County Board of Education attorney Michael Terry filed a lawsuit in Lawrence County Circuit Court on Friday, March 17, contending the law unconstitutionally diverts money from the school system, the Lawrence

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County Medical Center and the county's municipalities to help it avoid its legal responsibility to adequately fund the Revenue Commissioner's office.

The board is asking the circuit court to declare the act unconstitutional, and to order the County Commission and the revenue commissioner to refund any money that has been withheld from county schools by the commission under the new law.

On Friday, Bussman said he hoped the two sides would work out their differences.

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Humidity: 79%
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Today	High 83°/Low 70° Afternoon showers and thunderstorms	Tomorrow	High 84°/Low 72° A few thunderstorms possible
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"As (the lawsuit) gets closer to a hearing, I hope there will be a compromise," Bussman said. "We will let the legal system handle it. I'm not mad at anyone. We just disagree about some things. But that's OK, because if everyone agreed all the time, you could get going the wrong way on some things."

Bussman said the next legislative session isn't scheduled until January 2018, and he hopes the issue is settled by then and another repeal bill won't have to be introduced.

"I'm going to let that play out a little bit," Bussman said. "We've got five or six months to see if a compromise can be reached. If there is, then we can put forth a bill that would change the law. As things get closer to a decision, people tend to work together more."

Other issues Bussman discussed during his talk were prison reform, funding education and the gasoline tax that failed in the latest legislative session.

Bussman said he was against a gasoline tax.

"I was against a gas tax because we take \$60 million out of (the Alabama Department of Transportation) and give it to other agencies," Bussman said. "Some of us tried to get a bill passed that would put that money back, but it didn't pass. To tell people we need a gas tax to fix roads and bridges when we are taking \$60 million out to give to other agencies isn't telling people the whole truth."

Bussman said the prison population is 180 percent of capacity, which he called "basically inhumane."

"We've got to treat (prisoners) better," he said. "I know they've done terrible things to be put there, but they should be treated fairly."

Bussman said the mental health system in Alabama needed to be improved as many people in prisons suffer from mental health problems that haven't been treated. He also said sentencing guidelines for non-violent drug offenders also needed revision.

"If we keep building prisons, that won't fix the problems," Bussman said. "We'll just keep filling up those prisons too."

Bussman also said he feels K-12 schools are getting the short end of the stick compared to colleges and universities.

He said he goes to colleges and sees new buildings and construction all the time while he visits K-12 schools in his district and sees crumbling buildings with issues such as mold.

"That needs to be rectified," he said.

Bussman also touched on the recent scandals that have caused turmoil in Montgomery, including the resignation of Gov. Robert Bentley.

"Over the last several years, there has been a void in leadership," Bussman said. "It seems like government breeds corruption. Good people go in there and it shreds them like a tree shredder. It's not a Democrat or Republican issue. It is a problem with everyone and we've got to clean it up."

Bussman complimented Gov. Kay Ivey for taking over and keeping a steady hand in the wake of Bentley's resignation.

"Gov. Ivey has done a tremendous job stepping in," he said. "She has righted the ship and can focus on building jobs and opportunities for the people of Alabama."

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