

The PEOPLE'S Voice

WWW.PEOPLESVOICEWEB.COM

VOL II No. 19

© 2005-2007 The People's Voice

P. O. BOX 514, ROANOKE, AL 36274

April 13, 2007 - April 20, 2007

\$.50 Cents

Failing Kidneys Have Not Shaken Lanett Pastor's Faith (A2)



Charlotte A. Clark-Frieson
Associate Editor
Lanett, Alabama

When Reverend Bobby Tucker and his wife, Mary of Lanett learned in January that his kidney's were failing, they both started praying and believing God for a donor.

Tucker says "Over the course of one day, my whole world was shattered and literally came tumbling down around me when I was told by my doctors that my kidneys had "gone to sleep" on me. Miraculously, the doctor was able to "wake them back up" and they flushed me out. But, the doctor says they are still deteriorating."

Reverend Tucker says, "By God's Grace, they are hold-

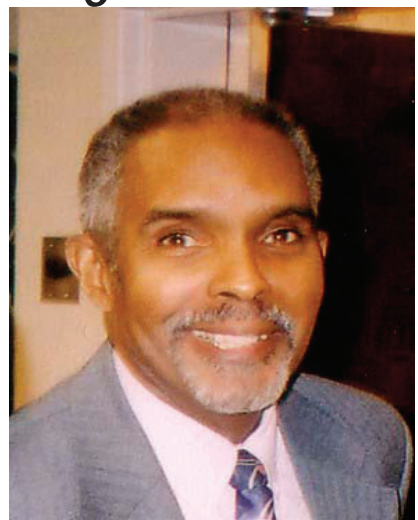
PLEASE SEE "FAILING KIDNESY" (P A14)

Wheel Chair Bound and In The Dark



Cassandra Jones Briskey and her daughter, Kewanna Staples, are upset and frustrated, because Cassandra is confined to a wheel chair and her utility service has been terminated by Lanett City Manager, Joel Holley. Read Full Story On Page A2

Commentary: Jerome Gray, Alabama's Voting Rights Powerhouse, weighs in on Barak Obama (Page A5)



INSIDE: Jerome A. Gray, dubbed by the Birmingham News as Alabama's Voting Rights Powerhouse, has forgotten more about Politics than most could learn in a lifetime.

In a thought-provoking commentary, Gray comments on Barak Obama's strong bid for The Democratic Presidential Nomination. For many black Democrats, making the choice between O'Bama and Clinton, will be tough. Inside, Gray gives us some political food for thought, in "Obama, The Lady Or The Tiger."



THORNTON ANNOUNCES AVAILABILITY OF COLLEGE MONEY FROM RCTS SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION (A2)

WHILE DEBATE CONTINUES, COUNTY JAIL INMATES LIVE UNDER GRAVE CONDITIONS



Shown in this photo, is one of the shower-stalls in Randolph County's jail facility, which is no longer operational. Other jail photos are being posted at our website at www.peoplesvoiceweb.com

Charlotte A. Clark-Frieson, Associate Editor
(Wedowee, Alabama)

Monday, April 9, 2007

The Randolph County Commission met at 9:00 A.M. on Monday morning, April 9, in the Courthouse Annex. Though the Commission discussed several routine matters, much of their talking revolved around the deplorable conditions of Randolph County's jail facility, and the enormous expense of maintaining the jail in its current condition. The building, which was constructed in the early 1980's, is 24 years old, and it's plumbing -- among other things -- is deteriorating, which creates a hazardous environment.

It is quite evident from their discussions in Commission meeting, that they are all moved by a sense of duty, to build a clean, safe, facility in which to house inmates. Commissioner Lathonia Wright expressed most fervently, his desire to build a new jail before a Federal Judge orders the county to build one. Wright says, "If we can go ahead and work out a way to do it, we can build a jail cheaper than if a Federal Judge orders us to do it, and we have to end up building one in a hurry without the time to properly plan for it."

Their goal is to construct a facility that will comfortably accommodate at least 250 inmates. Along with the duty to build a new jail, the Commissioners are also faced with the question of how they will finance the construction of a jail facility that could cost the county as much as 4,000,000.00.

Randolph County already has a 1cent sales tax in place, which the Commission approved four to five years ago, for capital improvements to the schools in the county.

The 1 cent sales tax now generates \$1,800,000.00 a year, and 100% of the funds are used for schools (County and City). But now, in light of the need to construct a new jail they want to change the way the 1 cent sales tax is used.

In its previous meetings and sessions, the Commissioners agreed to pursue a plan whereby (using the same 1 cent sales tax) the money PLEASE SEE "GRAVE CONDITIONS" (P A2)

ROANOKE BOYS & GIRLS CLUB FACING FUNDING CRISIS, PAY CUTS



Photo: The Roanoke Boys and Girls Club of Roanoke, Alabama met on Wednesday morning at The Gally, to finalize plans for upcoming "Guns and Hoses" Basketball Tournament fundraiser. Shown in Photo: Veronica O'Neal, Club Director, Ann Montgomery, Vice President, Mary Baker, President, Antonia Bell, Secretary, and David Denton

Roanoke Boys & Girls Club Facing Funding Crisis, Pay Cuts

Doris Baker of Roanoke is passionate about Roanoke's Boys and Girls Club -- so passionate that she recently resigned from membership on its board. "I had been fighting and fighting for them to put the kids in a decent place. Two months ago, they (the headquarters) said we were going to have to raise several thousands of dollars, in order to keep the club open."

Baker, who migrated South from Philadelphia several years ago, to settle in Roanoke, told The People's Voice, "We have no way of raising money. We are supposed to have yard sales; nobody was trying to help us have fundraisers; I talked to a lot of black officials; I got tired of fighting by myself. I'm too old to be fighting like this by myself; there are

so many empty buildings in Roanoke. Our city councilman Mack Bell, Tammi Holley or the Mayor; could have gotten us a nice little building for nothing; You would really have to be coming in and out of there to see how bad it is. They don't have anything to offer anybody. So people don't send their kids. We

PLEASE SEE "FUNDING CRISIS" (P A2)

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

—The United States Constitution

AS THE DOWN LOW

BROTHA TURNS
By Sheletta Brundige

THE DOWNLOW BROTHA
BY SHELETTA BRUNDIGE

THE FUNNIEST WOMAN
IN THE TWIN CITIES

THE BILL OF RIGHTS
YOUR BASIC CIVIL RIGHTS
SEE PAGE A 4

AN AUBURN ALABAMA WOMAN
LEARNS THE HARD WAY
WORKMAN'S COMP AIN'T WHAT
IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE (A3)

APRIL OBSERVANCES
AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH
CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

THINGS TO LOOK FOR IN
UPCOMING EDITIONS OF
"THE VOICE"
OUR "REPORT CARD"
ON EAST AL/WEST GA
BLACK ELECTED OFFICIALS

Presorted Standard
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID PERMIT NO.
362740001
Roanoke, AL 36274

Authoritative,
Informative, Engaging,
Entertaining,
Culturally Relevant
&
FULL OF SURPRISES!

Grave Conditions (Continued From Front Page)

generated from the tax would be split 50/40/10. Under this plan, the schools would get half of the tax money; the county would get 40% (which would be used to build the new jail), and 10% would go to local volunteer fire departments. By dividing the money 50/40/10, the Commission believes it could finance the construction of a 4,000,000.00 jail. If they can get their plan approved, it would mean the Commission would have the money needed to float a bond issue that would provide adequate funding for construction, maintenance and operation of a new jail. In support of their plan, they had previously passed a resolution to carry out their plan. Their resolution had been sent to State Representative Richard Laird.

In dollars, this division of the tax money would translate into \$900,000.00 for education; \$720,000.00 for jail construction; and \$180,000.00 for Volunteer Fire Departments.

The reason why this tax is even possible is because the law already empowers County Commissions to impose a 1 cent sales tax for education purposes only, and according to the law, the tax must be approved annually. The Commission does not have the power to permanently impose a tax.

Because the Commission can't

impose a tax for any purpose other than education, their efforts reached an impasse because some kind of legislation is needed before they can change the way the 1 cent sales tax is being used. Any other use of the tax money would require either a change in the law, or vote of the people.

So, during Monday's meeting, the Commissioners decided to take their question to State Representative Richard Laird, by scheduling another meeting that would take place later that day in Laird's office to discuss the status of their resolution. Their goal was to try to get the question on the upcoming June ballot.

JAIL TOUR

During the hours between Monday morning's Commission meeting, and the evening meeting with Representative Laird, The People's Voice requested a tour of the County Jail. We wanted to know what it was like inside the jail; and wanted to have an eye-witness observation of the conditions and concerns the Commissioners had discussed in Monday's meeting.

Accompanied by Commissioner Lathonia Wright, **The People's Voice** did a walk-through, touring the various areas of the jail, where personnel gladly pointed out the haz-

ards and structural problems in the jail facility. One of the first problems could be seen upon entering the jail. In the area just outside the jailer's office, ceiling tiles were missing, exposing faulty, leaky, corroded plumbing fixtures where, if one is not careful, plumbing leaks will drop right on top of the head. There was a trash can sitting right in the middle of the floor, to catch the drainage from the dripping overhead plumbing pipe.

Loose floor tile could be seen throughout the building as a result of water damage. There were many areas where water just stands. There is evidence of extensive water damage to several of the walls throughout the building, which manifests in the form of mildew on the concrete walls. Leaks were seen in the kitchen. The leaks appeared to be coming from the toilets and bathrooms in the jail cells, which are located directly above the kitchen. This water leaks into the area where food is both stored and prepared.

The most disparaging part of the visit was to the area where inmates are held. On that day, there were 76 inmates being held in a facility built to accommodate 36 people. The building was tight and crowded. People must live and work in close quarters. It is hot, humid, stuffy, and stinking. There is in the air, a nauseat-

ing mixture of odors, some coming from the lingering mildew and dampness that is constantly there, the food that is stored and prepared in the kitchen area; and the natural scent given off by human life processes.

Inmates are packed like sardines in day-rooms no bigger than a small bedroom, where as many as 40 men have to share two toilets and two shower stalls. Bedding and blankets are ragged and fragmented. Many of the inmates sleep on thin worn-out pads doubled up in corners, and on concrete floors. There is exposed wiring inside the cells, where lighting fixtures are either badly damaged, or non-existent. There is not a single shower in the building that does not look like it's infected with some kind of deadly disease. We are hard-pressed to understand why the building has not been condemned because of its overcrowded and hazardous conditions, where inmates are held to too-close proximity. It was a stomach-turning experience. It is unhealthy, hazardous and inhumane.

Additional photographs of Randolph County's jail will be posted on our website at <http://www.peoplesvoiceweb.com>.

5:30 P.M. Meeting With Representative Laird

Focus of the Meeting:

The Commissioners went to meet with State Representative Richard Laird to try to get some understanding about re-distributing the 1 cent sales tax. From all appearances, they were under the impression that they could get the question placed on the upcoming June ballot. However, in a phone conversation with Laird during the Commission meeting that morning, Laird had suggested that they call a "Special Election," which none of the Commissioners want to do, because it will cost the county \$68,000.00 to hold a special election.

Laird explained to the Commissioners that it was too late to get anything on the upcoming June ballot, because of the procedures and time it would take to get a referendum on the ballot. Moreover, Laird explained that the Governor had some pressing issues he wanted placed on the ballot, and did not want any other issues cluttering up the June ballot.

The meeting lasted almost two hours, and at times the focus was obscured by frequent asides. There seemed to be a lot of confusion about what the Commissioners want from State Representative Laird. The Commissioners emphasized that they wanted a piece of legislation fashioned after one in effect in Escambia and Houston counties. They explained that they wanted the

latitude and flexibility to negotiate with the local Boards of Education, and "agree" on how the tax money is distributed.

To sum up, however, the Commission can not commence any building plans until they know they will have the power to re-distribute the 1 cent sales tax. For the time being, the money must go to Education, unless the taxpayers vote to empower them to change the way it is used. So, they cannot put their 50/40/10 plan into effect until an election is held. State Representative Laird cannot place the question on the upcoming June ballot. Prior to any voting, public Hearings will need to be held, so that the citizens will have the opportunity to learn about what is at stake, have input, and make informed decisions about the issue. The earliest date it can be voted on would be February, 2008, if the Commissioners gets everything in to Laird by late November or December of this year. Laird emphasized that he would not put in a tax without a vote of the people.

The Commissioners want the public to understand that their plan would not result in the creation of a new tax. All the Commission is asking the voters to do is to re-distribute the same tax that people are already paying.

Wheel-Chair Bound and In The Dark



Cassandra Jones Briskey and her daughter, Kewanna wonder how they will handle the excessive financial burden of an \$1,100.00 light bill

Lanett Woman Says, Holley Bills Excessively and offers no assistance for lower-income residents in Lanett.

Charlotte A. Clark-Frieson
Associate Editor
Wednesday, March 11, 2007
Lanett, Alabama

Cassandra Jones Briskey is wheelchair bound and was permanently disabled following a 2004, auto accident. Aside from being wheelchair bound and disabled, she is living in a house without power service. Her power service was terminated on March 27, and she now owes a total of \$1,153.00 to the City of Lanett, for utility services. Her current bill in the amount of \$1,153.00 includes a past due amount of \$762.25. Briskey says that the previous month, (March) she was billed for \$762.25. This amount was for one month of service. The month before that it was 500.00. Briskey says that since Joel Holley became City Manager her light bill has been climbing upwards to four to five hundred dollars a month. And Holley is a man who refuses to make any allowances for low income earners who have a hard time paying their utility bills.

Briskey says that her excessive utility bills, and Lanett's uncompromising City Manager, Joel Holley, will force her to forfeit her home, which she has been buying for nearly 8 years. She believes that Holley bills residents, and cuts off their utilities just because he has the authority and can do it. "He doesn't have any compassion for low income people."

"Since Holley has taken over at Lanett City Manager, everybody's utility bills have skyrocketed to \$600.00, \$700.00, \$800.00 up to as much as \$1,100.00 a month. We think he's trying to move

all the low-income people out, so he can bring in people with money. They've gotten all this funding for these new houses they are building around here."

Cassandra Briskey has been in two car accidents and she is receiving a monthly disability payment of less than \$1,000.00 a month. She says that she just can't pay that kind of utility bill and maintain a mortgage on her home. With a monthly mortgage payment of \$294.04, there isn't even \$700.00 left over after the mortgage payment. Briskey says, "I've invested too much money in my house, to just let it go. But, if I pay this big bill, I won't be able to pay my mortgage, or feed myself or anything else. Once you pay a seven or eight hundred dollar light bill, and you have children you can't take care of your basic needs."

Briskey's daughter, Kewanna told **The People's Voice**, "No one lives here with my mother, but my sister. She has heat and air, and all, but, even if you run your heat in the winter time, who's going to use that much electricity?"

"My mother has been in this house without lights since the 27th of March, for two weeks, and something needs to be done about it. The bill comes on a certain day, and you would think that they would give you a grace period. But even if it's the day before you get your money, you can call them and tell them what your situation is. He (Holley) will tell them to come turn it off, and now you have a re-connect fee. They'll come cut you off knowing that you don't get your money until the next day."

Briskey says the City is doing everybody like this and nobody is trying to do anything

about it. The majority of black people have moved out of Lanett, and moved into surrounding areas, like West Point or Valley. The Apartments put you on a waiting list that could have you in limbo for as long as a year or more.

Briskey stated that she talked to Mayor Crawley, who suggested that she could get the lights on in someone else's name. But, Briskey stated that "If there is more than one person on a lease, and one of you has an old bill here, they still will not come and turn your lights on. You can't get your lights on, because that person that owes the old light bill is in the house with you."

Briskey, who is buying her home, is now debating whether she should move back to her hometown in Ranoke, Alabama. She stated, "They way the city operates, the next person that moves into the house, will have to pay my old light bill before they get the lights on."

Briskey stated that once she had called Holley's office to ask about being placed on the agenda to speak to the Utility Board. She stated that Holley said "You can come up here but it ain't going to be no arguing about it; and it ain't going to change nothing."

The People's Voice also spoke to Lela Patten who lives on 3rd Street in Lanett, near Central Elementary School. Patten told a similar story. Patten stated that her last bill was \$1,000.00, and the previous month it had also been excessive. Patten says that she has a \$450.00 house note, and at the time, she had just purchased another vehicle. She stated that she had a very hard time paying those bills, "But I thank God I didn't lose nothing behind it."

When asked whether they had spoken to their black City Council Members, Patton replied, "They are just two black fools. They don't do nothing. They are so glad to be there. They don't offer no help."

The Administrative Aspect Of the Utility Issue

According to information on the City Of Lanett's Website, the City of Lanett owns its own utilities Lanett obtains its power through the Alabama Municipal Electric Authority (AMEA) as do ten other cities located in the State of Alabama. They include: Piedmont, Sylacauga, LaFayette, Alexander City, Lanett, Opelika, Tuskegee, Luverne, Dothan, Fairhope and Foley, Alabama.

Kewanna Staples told The People's Voice that she and her mother hated to be putting their business all out, but "this is wrong and my mother should not have to live this way without lights in her condition. Something needs to be done about it."

In regard to Patton's comments, Tony Malone stated: "Our previous administration worked with the low income and disabled citizens. Because of this, many of our citizens became somewhat relaxed about their bills, because they knew their utilities would not be cut off. But this administration, I can say that Mayor Crawley has helped a lot of people, but he is selective about who he helps. I know that we could do better and we could do more for our senior citizens." "I don't feel bad about what Ms. Patton said," Malone stated, "because I know I've been an advocate for the people I've said it from the council chambers. Ms. Patton must not read the news,

or keep up with what's going on. I've repeatedly told them that Holley rules just like a Pharaoh, because he has a stranglehold around our people's necks. Anybody who keeps up with Lanett Politics can tell you that Tony Malone is our advocate. It's hurts me knowing I can't really do anything but sit up there and run my mouth about it"

The People's Voice did just that. We spoke to Nathaniel Fannings, who is a local NAACP leader in Lanett. Fannings stated "Yes, we do have two black city councilmen but Mr. Malone is the only one that speaks out. He has spoken out on this particular issue. He doesn't have any help down there with just one voice.

It is very true, that the excessive utility bills are a big problem...and not just for blacks, for white also. I have heard Holley tell white customers, to go borrow the money to pay their utility bills. Something really needs to be done. One time, there was a possibility to get rid of Holley, and Mr. Heard could have helped. But, the question didn't come to a vote, because he (Mr. Heard) wouldn't second the motion."

Malone concluded "During the previous administration, we had installed a system that would allow for a leveled plan. I'm only a City Councilman. The people in Lanett all knows, that if Tony Malone had some authority to do it, I would do it!"

The Peoples Voice made several unsuccessful attempts to contact Lanett City Manager, Joel Holley, Mayor Oscar Crawley, and Councilman Jamie Heard, and Clark Brunner of the Alabama Public Service Commission for comment.

The End

Funding Cuts From Front Page

were trying to get the old Police Station; then they told us we couldn't get it because of the fire code.

I said, how can you stop us from getting the place? How are you going to keep us out of the building? It wasn't a fire hazard when the Police Department was in it. Mack Bell said we were going to get the Armory? I knew when he said it that it wasn't going to happen. It was too big a battle for me to be trying to fight out there alone. There were a few board members who were trying to help."

However, other members of the board tell a different story

Several board members met at The Galley on Wednesday, April 9, 2007 at 12:00 noon, to finalize all the plans for their game that will be held on Friday evening at 6:30.

The full Board includes: Mary Dot Baker (President), Ann Montgomery (Vice President), Antonia Bell (Secretary), Mike Brown (Resource Development and Technical Support), Mary Ammons, David Denton, Tamara Taylor, Mack Bell, Tammi Holley, Lissa Handley, Susie Cochran, Mike Fisher, Thelma Sledge, and Representative Richard Laird.

According to several officers, the Boys and Girls Club is in a crisis. Board President Mary Dot Baker stated "Our biggest problem is financial. We get some donations, we have fundraisers. Ann Montgomery stated, "I don't think it's a lack of support from the black community." Roanoke Director, Veronica O'Neal stated, "All the clubs are going through a financial crisis, as a matter of fact, we lost one club."

Montgomery explained: "First, we lost our Executive Director, who resigned; then within three months time, the Executive Director, left. We are still without an executive director. We missed out on grants that are normally applied for. The new person

Continued Next Page

ARE YOU WITHOUT POWER IN LANETT?

The People's Voice is interested in learning out how many individuals are currently without power in Lanett, Alabama due to excessive bills, or because you have been unable to make payment arrangements to satisfy your utility bill.

If you are in this situation, please contact The People's Voice through Mr. Tony D. Malone, 706-585-2711; or Charlotte A. Clark-Frieson, at 334-375-7160.