



The Choctaw Sun
Tuesday, March 6, 2007
Page 4A

Opinions

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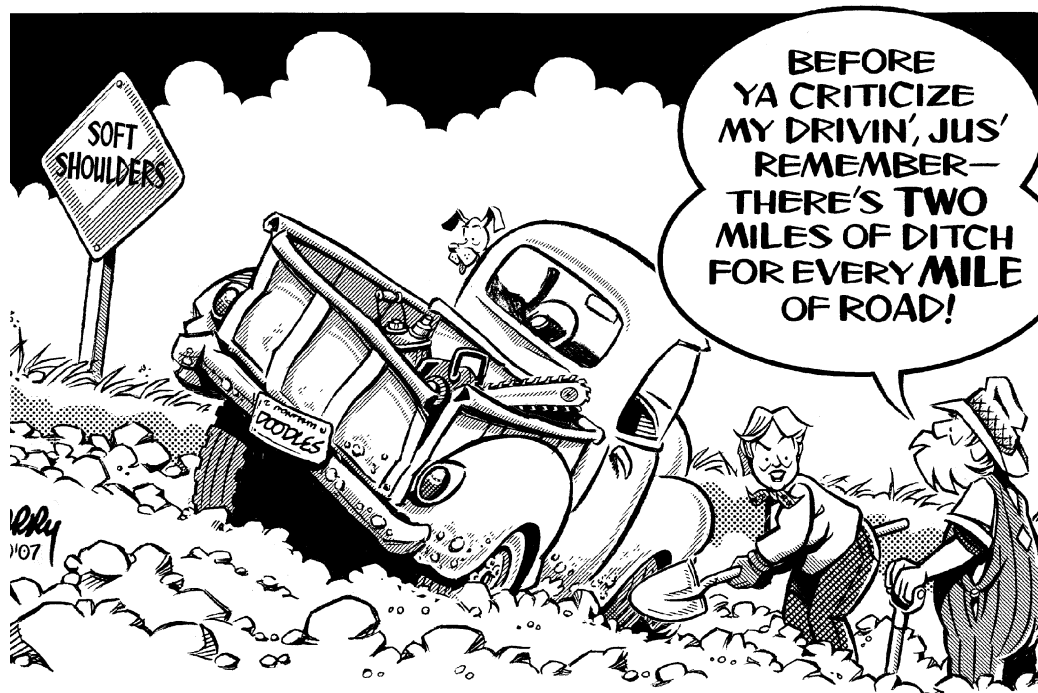
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Pennington needs to reconsider

Giving everyone the benefit of the doubt, the mayor and council members of the Town of Pennington probably were doing what they thought was the right thing when they approved their version of the Alabama Municipal Business License Reform Act of 2006.

But, as we clearly saw in last Monday night's council meeting, that decision now hangs like an dark cloud above the town, jeopardizing every one of the existing businesses, and virtually assuring the community that no new businesses or industries (in their right minds) will want to locate there under such an oppressive schedule of license fees.

We understand Mayor Jack Fendley's statement that more money is needed with which to use as "matching" funds for industrial development grants that could be applied for. The Town of Pennington, as well as the entire county, could use a good dose of new business and industry, no doubt about that.

One the other hand, business owners should not have to bear the brunt of that remedy, which the town's leaders obviously believe will come from incredible hikes in the municipality's business license fees.

Businesses in general are already "taxed" and "regulated" to death, and the new fees that were adopted by the Pennington council in November, 2006 are so ridiculously high — among the highest in the nation, based on what we have heard — that no new business is likely to consider Pennington as a home, and those that are there now may not be for long, based on what we are hearing.

We have heard that calls have been flying back and forth to Butler and other towns in the county in search of buildings and property for sale or rent. This isn't idle chatter either. These people are dead serious about getting the heck out of Pennington.

With all due respect, the council needs to back off and take another look at this monster and they need to do so ASAP.

A small, reasonable



The way I see it ...

By Tommy Campbell
Publisher

increase would have been understandable, but the enormous hikes that the Town of Pennington has heaped onto the shoulders of small business owners — most of whom are struggling just to keep their doors open — are out of line.

As a small business, the *Sun* can empathize with our fellow business owners. We understand the burdens of governmental regulations, taxation, and the fact that the overall cost of doing business and staying in business gets more expensive with each passing day.

Just look at the price of fuel, utility bills, insurance, and the fact that a U.S. Congress now controlled by liberal Democrats is about to slap small businesses with yet another heavy blow — an increase in the minimum wage — and you begin to understand that even if a business does have a large "gross revenue", those figures don't always translate into a large "gross profit."

The only alternative businesses have is to pass along increases to their customers, which in turn only serves to drive even more of them to the bigger cities, out-of-county shopping malls, and Wally World.

Even mega-corporations like Georgia Pacific — whose business license fee under the new schedule also skyrocketed from what it was last year — don't like being gouged and taken advantage of. Neither does anyone else.

In order to stay in business, businesses must make a profit, otherwise, they close their doors. That isn't that hard to understand.

When businesses go under, people lose their jobs and the town loses tax revenues that were coming in as a result of sales at those businesses. When a business closes, even a small "mom and pop shop", we all lose.

A small country convenience store, for example, whose license last year was around \$400, should not have to pay several thousand dollars for that same license this year.

Financial hardships aside, the Act itself — as passed by the state legislature — is a privacy nightmare. In case you didn't know, the Act gives municipal governments the right to go into a private business and demand that the owner turn over its financial records for an audit to determine if they are paying the proper amount in business license fees. That in itself is pure horse hooley and a good example of why this idiotic law needs to be repealed, or at the very least, amended at the state level.

And regardless of any "privacy safeguards" that are supposedly included, in Alabama, most matters that involve TAX dollars are considered public records and as such are available to any and all who would like to see a copy ... the news media and the general public included. That is scary, from a business standpoint. Think about it in terms of a business that is in — or about to be in — a competitive situation. In order to learn what a competitor's "gross receipts" are, all another business would have to do is invoke any number of the state's open records' acts and gain access to the town's license fee records. Taking information from the amount that is paid for the license and comparing it to the business license fee schedule would take only a matter of seconds, and bingo! You would know exactly what your competitor's gross revenues are.

Businesses should not be fooled into thinking that their information is "privileged and protected." It ain't necessarily so.

On another front, it was stated at Monday night's meeting in Pennington that a copy of the proposed ordinance was "posted" in public places.

That may have complied with the "letter" of the law, but as far as making an honest-to-goodness effort to get the information into the hands of the people, it is a poor excuse.

The proposed ordinance should have been printed in its entirety in this newspaper, which has the largest circulation in the county, because few people have the time to spend standing in the Post Office lobby or elsewhere thumbing through dozens of typed pages, and even fewer understand such a pile of legalistic jargon. However, if it had been published in the paper, business owners could have at least had an opportunity to sit down with it and read through it at their convenience. At least they would not have been blindsided by the massive increases when the license renewal bills went out in January.

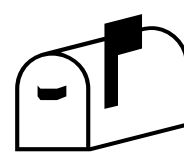
If town officials had talked to us about this in detail (and in advance) and provided us with a review copy of the ordinance before taking final action, the *Sun* would have been glad to write an informative news article explaining to the business community what was about to take place.

It was stated that the council's meetings are open to the public and the news media. That is true, but it is also a convenient excuse. Most town council meetings happen on this newspaper's "deadline" or "print" nights and so many meetings are held at the same time on the same nights that there is no way that the *Sun* — or the general public, for that matter — can attend every single meeting every month, especially busy working families with children.

We have always been available and willing to work with local mayors and council members anytime they have items that need to be publicized. I have personally visited with every municipality in this county and told officials that they can call

See TOMMY, 7B

Letters



Dee Ann's article, "Lonely In the Rural South", profiling the James and Mary Bishop family, was great. I worked with the father, James, until his death. He truly was a good man. He loved God and his family. His faith was inspiring.

Back in the 1970's we had a large band at Choctaw County High School and three buses were needed to transport the band to out-of-town football games.

Mason Campbell, transportation supervisor over all the buses for the school system at the time, entrusted James with the school's credit cards to use for fuel and repairs if needed on the road.

These three buses also made a lot of field trips. James' was the lead bus and I was in the middle. If a traffic light caught the other two buses he would stop between lights and wait for us by letting traffic go around him. The buses were never out of sight of each other.

James was a certified mechanic and if we had trouble on the road he knew what to do. On one trip he used a clothes hanger to put an alternator back on secure enough for us to get back to Butler, and he drove that bus giving his own bus to the other driver.

He was kind and considerate and the drivers enjoyed working with him. During the school day he was in the Bus Garage working on buses. He was missed when he passed away.

He has a lovely family and it is gratifying to see them accomplish so much.

Thanks, Dee Ann, for the fine write up.

Annie Tyson

I would like to thank my friends, my brothers, the Eastern Star members and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints for the cards, visits, phone calls, food and monetary gifts, but most of all for your prayers.

I am still recovering from my surgery and I ask that you will continue to pray for me. May God bless you.

Gladys McIlwain

To all of my wonderful friends and co-workers, thank you for your prayers, flowers, phone calls, cards, and other acts of kindness shown during my illness.

Please continue to pray for me and may God Bless each one of you.

Pat Parker

We would like to commend the *Sun* for taking the initiative to attack the litter problem in Choctaw County. Litter problems are not limited to just Choctaw County. It's a disgusting site all over Alabama. As you know "Alabama The Beautiful" signs are posted at the state lines which is a joke with litter scattered everywhere.

You are providing an opportunity to showcase Choctaw County as an example of what can be done to eliminate litter, improve appearance and bring positive attention to the area. A successful clean-up campaign would certainly shed a shining light on how people can come together and demonstrate pride and respect for their homes and community. Time, expense and effort put into the campaign will be minimal compared to the benefits the county will receive from business, industry and other unities from all parts of the county.

No doubt you and your committees have thought of every possible idea for implementing and maintaining this project. I would like to emphasize the need to focus on public awareness and education. Your newspaper already has outstanding respect among students and educators. Perhaps you could offer students an opportunity to write essays about "The Litter Campaign". A contest could include selecting the best essay weekly, monthly, bi-monthly, etc. and have scholarship funds established to be rewarded to students or schools periodically. Businesses and individuals could be offered the opportunity to contribute to the sponsorship of the scholarships.

Our primary residence is in Shelby County, but we also have a home at 3989 Barrytown Road, Gilbertown, which was recently remodeled by Randall Jackson. Our business requires that we travel all of Alabama and many other states and very seldom do we find anyone that knows where Choctaw County, AL is located. We tell them and that Alabama's first oil well was drilled in Gilbertown (I always add that I was there). Now, we will talk about what's being done to clean-up litter in Choctaw County.

Best wishes for much success with the project. I look forward to talking with you when we're back "home".

Darrell - Dorothy - Matt
Adams Learning Resources, LLC
Birmingham

ED. NOTE: Because of last-minute production problems on our print day, SoundOffs will appear in the Friday issue of this week's *Sun*.

We apologize for their absence and assure readers that they will be back in their normal place next Tuesday!

About the Sun:

**PUBLISHED TWICE WEEKLY
On Tuesdays and Fridays**

Deadlines:

For Tuesday issues: **Fridays** at noon
For Friday issues: **Wednesdays** at noon
(Early deadlines may apply to weeks that contain holidays)

Subscription Rates:

In Choctaw Co \$30 + \$2.40 tax = \$32.40
(Senior Citizens ... \$18 + \$1.44 tax = \$19.44
Elsewhere in Alabama ... \$35 + \$2.80 tax = \$37.80
Other states ... \$45 (no tax)

ePaper internet subscriptions are available with any subscription for an additional fee of \$10

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POSTMASTER: THE CHOCTAW SUN (USPS number 022-326) is published twice-weekly on Tuesdays and Fridays by The Choctaw Sun, 13440 Choctaw Avenue, P.O. Box 269, Gilbertown, AL 36908. Periodicals postage paid at Gilbertown, AL 36908. **Send change of address to:**
**The Choctaw Sun, P.O. Box 269,
Gilbertown, AL 36908-0269.**

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