

ANNISTON STAR

Alabama's twisted tale: The grocery sales tax debate

In our opinion

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Last week, the state Senate refused to pass a bill that would have allowed Alabamians to vote on removing state sales tax from groceries. The effort fell one vote short.

Why?

One reason was that all Republicans who voted marked their ballot against the measure.

At a time when food prices are soaring and gas prices are eating into everyone's monthly budgets, why did Republicans vote against a bill that would give the majority of Alabamians a tax cut and ease the burdens of senior citizens on a fixed income?

Mainly, Republicans voted as their constituents wanted them to vote.

Sen. Larry Dixon — who is becoming the poster child for Republican insensitivity — made it clear that his upscale Montgomery neighbors and those who live in the rapidly expanding suburbs in Elmore County that he represents "would lose money on this deal." How? Because they would lose the federal income tax deduction that those in their tax bracket currently enjoy.

As for poor folks, in what could be the classic "let them eat cake" statement of the debate, Dixon told the Montgomery Advertiser, "I don't care what people say about poor people. Poor people get food stamps."

As yet, no Republicans have come forth to disavow Dixon and reject the sentiments he so eloquently expressed.

But one should not blame the Republicans entirely; two Democrats who could have voted for the motion decided to abstain. One of these was Tom Butler of Madison, who is usually considered one of the more progressive members of his party.

Butler, it seems, had been pushing Sen. Zeb Little, D-Cullman, to release a bill regulating quarries that Little was holding in committee. Butler withheld his vote on the grocery tax motion to force Little to let the quarry bill go forward.

It worked. Under pressure from those who support the grocery tax bill, Little released the bill, which should now come up for a vote the last day of the session next Monday.

It follows that the grocery tax bill should also be voted on that last day and sent on to the governor.

Once done, what will Gov. Bob Riley do? Veto it? Sign it?

Either way, it will be a defining moment in his political career