

The Anniston Star

Food taxes and the wolf

by The Anniston Star Editorial Board

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The Alabama Legislature too often resembles the boy who cried “wolf!”

Many times, members of this august body say the right things, support worthwhile, life-changing legislation, and seem willing to consider alternatives to status-quo mediocrity. That raises hopes and expectations. It makes Alabamians believe Goat Hill isn't only for those who graze on the state dime.

But too often, the Legislature's tendencies sour those expectations. Like the aforementioned lad, legislators repeatedly say one thing but mean another. Thus, you start doubting both their sincerity and their commitment to bettering Alabamians' lives.

In the few days left in this session, the Legislature has a chance to alter that perception — if it will move the state closer to removing the 4 percent state sales tax from groceries and over-the-counter drugs.

State Rep. John Knight, D-Montgomery, has tried repeatedly to push this proposal through the Legislature. Each time it has fallen prey to steep Republican opposition and special interests who claim it is a shell game that limits tax deductions and raises taxes for too many. They preach a sermon that says the bill's intent isn't couched in helping people stretch their paychecks each week.

What an unfortunate, and unwise, approach to take.

If anything, it's a credit to Knight that he hasn't given up this crusade to help everyday Alabamians. To calm GOP concerns and the loudest critics, Knight altered his proposal this year; if passed by the Legislature and approved by voters on Nov. 2, the bill now would not raise state income taxes on individuals unless they had adjusted gross incomes of more than \$100,000 and couples with incomes of more than \$200,000 a year.

For the state's highest earners, the bill would also phase out deductions for federal income taxes from taxable state income. Again, that would begin for individuals making more than \$100,000 a year and couples making \$200,000 a year. The deduction would be eliminated when those totals reached \$150,000 and \$300,000, respectively.

The skinny: Only 3.7 percent of Alabamians — those at the tip-top of the earning scale — would pay more taxes to make up for the lost revenue. And all Alabamians would benefit from having no sales taxes on their groceries and over-the-counter drugs.

State Rep. Mike Hubbard of Auburn, the chairman of the state GOP, has told The Birmingham News that his party is “keeping an open mind” about this latest incarnation of Knight's plan while it tries to independently verify the bill's fiscal claims.

That's fine; appropriate, too. Due diligence is critical.

But in the end, legislators — Democrats and Republicans alike — must view this bill as a slice of humanity, not merely as a piece of legislation. It's time this bill's critics do more than offer lip service on the plight of everyday Alabamians.

It's time they actually do something about it. They have that chance.