

The Anniston Star

No defending this vote: House GOP let Alabama down

by The Anniston Star Editorial Board

04.12.10 - 03:00 am

A select group of Republican members of the state House of Representatives owes Alabamians an answer to this question:

What is wrong with asking those who make more than \$100,000 a year to pay a little more in taxes so a majority of Alabamians can save some of their hard-earned cash at the grocery?

It is appalling that the state House this week rejected the latest proposal to remove the state's 4 percent sales tax on groceries and over-the-counter medicines. At fault are GOP legislators — including K.L. Brown of Jacksonville and Randy Wood of Saks — who voted no. The bill fell four votes shy of what was needed to bring the proposed constitutional amendment up for full debate.

Four times last year a version of this bill failed in the state House. It's not going to make it onto the ballot this year, either.

Yes, these legislators need to answer that question.

The bill's author, Rep. John Knight, D-Montgomery, was too kind when he attributed the Republicans' votes to unfortunate ignorance instead of party-line lunacy.

"I think many of the people voting against it have been misled to believe that the average taxpayer was going to be paying more, and that is just not true," Knight told The Birmingham News.

That's where Knight erred. Instead, the representative should have blasted his GOP

colleagues for sticking so solidly to the plan of protecting the state's well-to-do from having to fork over a little more during tax season. The argument that the bill would hamper limited liability corporations' ability to hire workers pales when compared to the bill's redeeming qualities.

Knight should have put it this way: House Republicans should be ashamed for the message they've sent to Alabamians, most of which will never make a six-figure salary or have a \$200,000 combined household income. That message: We care more about party politics and business interests than we do about helping you make ends meet during these trying economic times.

The need to remove sales taxes from groceries is grounded in reality. Alabama is one of only two states that fully taxes food; Mississippi is the other. That's a sad pairing.

Research conducted by Alabama Arise, a nonprofit advocate for low-income residents, paints a clear, nonpartisan case for removal. According to Arise, if the state would implement Knight's plan, the average Alabama family of four would save more than \$450 a year. Additionally, 96 percent of Alabama taxpayers would have received a tax cut under this proposal.

But, alas, bringing those real-world advantages to Alabamians wasn't enough for House Republicans to vote for this worthwhile bill.

On second thought, maybe these GOPers don't need to answer that question after all.