Edited by Dick Bennett. This is the 2\textsuperscript{nd} report in the past month, in preparation for the upcoming legislative session. I hope someone will carry ON the reports for future sessions.

This is a good time to talk with your lawmakers, before the 2007 Ark. General Assembly meets (Brenda Blagg, “Time to Talk,” TMN 12-13). What should be done with Ark.’s projected $842 million surplus in state funds? Should we support Sen. Kim Hendren (R-Gravette), who would provide a tax break of more than $110 million? TMN (12-13). Should we redirect the general fund to roads? (TMN, 12-22, Brenda Blagg, “a bad idea”). Should we set aside $50 million from the fund to lure industry to the state as Gov. Beebe intends? Do you want to add money to the $2.5 million annually spent for the 19 drug task forces? (See Gene Lyons, “War on Drugs Is Another Ill-conceived Crusade,” ADG 12-13). Or $109 million on various construction projects? Or more billions for NASA, which participates in the US militarization of outer space? The planned Mars exploration will cost more than the $59.8 billion now proposed (and which Cong. Barney Frank tried unsuccessfully to stop). “House OKs NASA Budget” (TMN 6-30). John Brummett reminds us that the state must pay ongoing debt-service obligations of about $30 million.

The true priorities of Arkansas derive from thoughtful weighing and comparing of the needs of the entire state. Much will be improved by eliminating the present grabbing (porking) of the Arkansas General Improvement Fund by individual legislators. 2000 projects totaling $36 million were funded during the 2005 leg. Session, including $400,000 to the town of Bigelow, now rejected by the Ark. Supreme Court (Brenda Blagg, “Court ‘Grinches’ Bigelow,” TMN 12-20: “legislative abuse of a constitutional provision that prohibits local legislation”). (See John Brummett, “It’s Time to Pull Pork,” TMN 12-19). In the last session of the legislature, each Senator was given approx. $750,000 to spend as she/he deemed appropriate.

John Brummett comments that we must “establish priorities” for our limited money via public discussion (“It’s All Good: Working Man’s Struggles Persist,” TMN 12-26). Bring into legislative debate all the needs for appraisal. Ask hard questions with all choices under consideration; for example, which is more important, a working person trying to raise kids on a meager salary, or a retired person getting a SS check, Medicare, and prescription benefit, or should we support both?

Highways are always well-supported compared to other needs, with their realtors-contractors-bankers-Chambers of Commerce money and lobbyists. “Council Seeks to Raise State Road Funding” by Jason Wiest, TMN (11-29). The 2007 federal highway program is $40 billion. But this “need” will increasingly run head-on into real planetary needs, since roads, cars, sprawl produce CO2 and climate change. Airports similarly produce CO2. And both highways and airports are

REAL NEEDS

WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN

“State Ranks 45th in Kids Count Study.” TMN (6-28). High poverty is the main cause, more than one in four children.

EDUCATION

--“Panel Backs Funding Plan” (TMN 12-20) by Andrew DeMillo, to raise per student funding by half a percent.
--“Beebe Proposes Statewide Prekindergarten,” (TMN 8-2). $40 million more will be needed in addition to the $60 million funded in the previous legislative session.
--“Federal Officials Approve Plan for ‘Highly Qualified’ Teachers.” TMN 12-16). Money will be needed for Ark. to have the best quality teachers.
--Steve Barnes, “School Facility Bill Comes Due” (TMN 12-15).
--“School Budget Comes First,” Steve Barnes (TMN 12-17).
--“Education Priority for Lawmakers” by Jill Zeman, TMN (12-28).
...education will remain the top priority” says Beebe.
--John Brummett, “Let’s Spend Surplus” on public school facilities and the state’s colleges and universities (and take sales tax off food).
--“Mixing It Up: Overcrowding Makes Mixed-Grade Classes Necessary at Elementary Schools” by Brett Bennett, NAT (11-4).
--“Districts Face Expansion to Meet Student Growth,” ADG (11-6).
--“Schools Are Scrambling for Acreage,” by John Krupa, ADG (5-8). Land has become a very expensive part of school expansion.

HEALTH

NATIONAL RANK

“State Health Ranking Remains Low: Arkansas Among Unhealthiest in Nation...” TMN 12-6.

WASHINGTON COUNTY

--Trish Hollenbeck, “Report Assesses Washington County’s Public Health Services,” NAT. Wash. County “has fully met enforcement of laws and regulations, but needs improvement in other areas.”

OBESITY: “Obesity Prevalent in Region” by Amy Sherrill, TMN (12-27). Five w. Ark. counties have overweight/obese adults more than state and national averages.

TRAUMA CENTERS

“Legislators Hear Health Chief Call for Trauma Hubs,” by Seth Blomeley, ADG, to prevent unnecessary deaths from vehicle accidents and other emergencies. Ark. is the only state lacking a Level One trauma center.

--INSURANCE

“State Cost to Cover Retirees Increases,” ADG (12-18). Ark. may have to pay $2.1 billion to cover health insurance coverage for current and
future retirees and their dependents.

--MENTAL HEALTH, PSYCHIATRY

“A Sad Anniversary,” NAT (4-29), editorial deploring the closing of Highland Hall in 2002, the only inpatient psychiatric unit in NWA. Its 20-bed facility admitted more than 800 patients in the previous year.

--“Advocates: Mental Health System Getting Worn Out.” ADG (4-13).

--SCREENING BABIES

Ark. health officials seek to expand the screening program for newborns from 6 disorders to 29.

--SOCIAL JUSTICE: HOMELESS

TMN (12/24-27, 2006) gave a considerable glimpse of homelessness in NWA. “Just Like You and Me’: Northwest Arkansas Needs More Services” (TMN 12-24): causes of homelessness. The second of the series (12-25), “Tough Times for Youth,” focuses on support for homeless teenagers. In its concluding editorial, the editors emphasized their “attempts to put a human face on that great demographic group, the homeless.”

--YOUTH AT RISK

--Kate Ward, “Program Helping Young Adults Adjust to Life on Their Own,” NAT. Need to support Youth Bridge, a transitional living program.

--“Grant to Help Boost Foster-Children Visits,” ADG 11-6. “Just over half of Arkansas’ 3,654 foster children see their caseworkers each month.” More social workers needed.

--After-school care. “Growth, Demand Stretch Agencies for Children.” TMN (11-27). Pre-school children need a safe place to spend their days while parents at work, and child who attend school need a safe place after school until parent or guardian arrives.

--YOUNG PEOPLE’S SUMMER

“Deprived Youths Lose Funds to Free Summer Program.” ADG (1-9-06). The National Youth Sports Program budget was slashed, eliminating about 1000 Ark. children of low-income families. The GOP Congress allocated the money to its militarism and wars.

--ELDERLY

“Caregiving Crisis Looms,” TMN (11-26). The huge baby boomer generation is already putting a crunch on elder-care resources.

--HUNGER

“No More Hunger,” editorial ADG (11-27). Food Insecurity is the new euphemism to describe the condition of the 35 million hungry Americans.


--POVERTY

“State’s Poorest County Rebuilding...” by Peggy Harris. TMN 12-6.
Phillips County in the impoverished Miss. River Delta. But the Delta Bridge Project offers hope.

TERMINALLY ILL POOR
"First, a Doorknob" by Mike Masterson, ADG (11-19). People are dying in miserable conditions and need a hospice.

SOCIAL JUSTICE: CHILD CARE, SICK DAYS, TAX CREDIT, MINIMUM WAGE
"ACORN to Lobby..." ADG (11-24). ACORN plans to ask for tax credits and subsidies to help with child-care costs, paid sick days to full-time employees, and state earned-income tax credit, and to ask Congress to increase the federal minimum wage.

HUMAN RIGHTS: ABUSED CHILDREN
"Task Force Wants More Centers for Abused Children." TMN (12-25). Needed: 1) more advocacy centers, 2) in every judicial district a system to bring together all agencies, 3) a state child-abuse hotline, 4) higher education criteria for instruction in child-abuse detection. But there’s not enough money.

PRISONS
"Study Says Close Two Centers, Build Anew," by Rob Moritz, TMN 12-19. The study recommends closing 2 juvenile detention centers and building new ones, costing $105 million including improving the others.
--Amy Upshaw, "Close Two Youth Lockups, Rebuild..." ADG (12-19).
--"Priority No. 1: Replacing Youth Facility a Must." NAT editorial. Sen. Madison’s rec. to close the Alexander Youth Services Center and rebuild it.
--Some critics have said that more important is an increase in money to help at-risk teens and juveniles. “Report: Close youth Lockup.” TMN 12-10.

DRUGS
"Drug Court Planned.” TMN (8-13). Need to expand the courts to assist drug offenders and prevent incarceration.

EMERGENCY FUND
"Group Says Rainy Day fund Good Idea for State" by Rob Moritz (TMN 12-20). Study by Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. Ark. is one of five states without such an emergency fund.

OVERSIGHT
"$1 Million Lost Yearly to Fraud...” TMN (11-26). More investigators needed to scrutinize Medicaid, Food Stamps, Unemployment benefits.

WHAT NEEDS WOULD YOU ADD? See my November 26 Newsletter on Arkansas’ Needs.

AND THE NATION AND WORLD? What are our responsibilities?
CLIMATE CHANGE
DARFUR

REFUGEES
Amman, Jordan has 750,000 Palestinian refugees, and now Iraqi refugees are pressing to enter Jordan (and all around the Middle East). Global refugees are hundreds of millions.

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--Congressman John Boozman, District 3, 12 counties from Benton to Washington
Lowell office: 479-725-0400. 213 W. Monroe, Suite K, 72745. Steve Gray, coordinator of office. Web site (with contact link): http://www.boozman.house.gov/ Heath Hasenbeck, intern (one of them). Boozman's new office in Lowell is located at 213 West Monroe in Lowell between I 540 and Business 71. To reach that office take Exit 78 off I 540 and go east. You will be on Hwy 264 which is also West Monroe. The office is in the Puppy Creek Plaza, past the McDonald's on the right. His suite is in the back of the complex to the left.
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