

JEFFERSON COUNTY COMMISSION



BETTYE FINE COLLINS - PRESIDENT
WILLIAM A. BELL, SR.
JIM CARNES
BOBBY HUMPHRYES
SHELIA SMOOT

JIM CARNES

COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT V
Suite 230
716 Richard Arrington, Jr. Blvd. N.
Birmingham, Alabama 35203
Telephone (205) 325-5503
FAX (205) 325-5960

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Release

Birmingham, Alabama, January 26, 2010 – I ran for this office hoping to bring a successful solution to the county's fiscal problems. For the last 3-1/2 years, I feel that I have been going 90 miles an hour on a bridge to nowhere. It is time for me to move on. With the present situation and leadership, I believe I can be a stronger advocate for Jefferson County by not seeking re-election next term. I will, however, be watchful and vocal in finishing my present term and relentless as the county faces the challenges ahead.

My number one legislative goal as County Commissioner was to install a County Manager. Jefferson County will have a County Manager, mandated by the legislature, in place by April 2011 to oversee the financial operations of the county and to provide clarity and transparency in financial issues.

My service has been proactive. I began my term by questioning expenses other commissioners had accepted without question, such as the \$150,000 monthly Environmental Services expense for oversight engineering and monthly reports on the sewer system. I cancelled this immediately with no negative effects to Environmental Services Department, and it resulted in a savings to the county of \$1.8 million in the first year and each year thereafter.

I pushed and was successful in bringing to a halt annual discretionary funds for each commissioner of \$250,000 each, resulting in a net savings of \$1.25 million yearly to the county.

My first few weeks in office, I cancelled a contract carried forward from the last administration for \$200 million to increase sewer capacity. With more comprehensive oversight, I worked with the Director of Environmental Services Department with the objective of saving money but still getting the job done effectively. During a 12-month study we found a more cost effective solution. We achieved the same desired result at a cost of only \$2.5 million to the county (instead of \$200 million).

Also, when I took office, Jefferson County was under several federal consent decrees, some dating back to 1996 and before. Prior to my election in 2006, to my knowledge, I was the only elected official to have in-depth meetings with federal EPA officials to solve the sewer consent decree problems and seek release from these dictates. Today, the Jefferson County sewer system is in compliance with the federal EPA clean water act. Four of our nine basins have been satisfactorily

cleared and are no longer under federal consent decree with two others currently under submission to EPA for approval.

I reduced my personal office budget payroll by more than one-half.

I borrowed no money on my watch, as promised. All debt was incurred before I took office and my current personal goal is to accumulate for Jefferson County a minimum reserve of \$44 million in a rainy day fund to cover extraordinary expenses which are bound to occur.

Although I am pleased with these accomplishments, I believe Jefferson County faces huge challenges in terms of leadership and structure. If these challenges are not adequately met, growth will be stifled, taxes will rise sharply and county services will be cut drastically.

As Jefferson County's debt debacle continues to disable the county and punish the taxpayers for poor decisions on the part of prior leadership, the solution remains obscure. The county's finances are in shambles. There are no monthly numbers for any period and no annual numbers, audited or unaudited, for 2008 and 2009. Even the state auditor has backed away from an audit in Jefferson County. At the same time, legal expenses incurred in efforts to preserve county occupational and business taxes are depleting the county treasury.

Finally, the sewer debt problem and kindred corruption cripples the county, stifles growth, and places a burden on taxpayers that continues into the future ad infinitum. The voters should know that at one time a solution to the county debt was close at hand. However, the republican commission president and two of her fellow democrat commissioners blocked that solution in favor of a plan which would have let Wall Street off the hook. Their plan places the solution squarely on the shoulders of the taxpayer (imposing additional un-required taxes), where it rests today. The bloated carcass of the sewer debt should rest at the feet of those who created it and who share in the obscene profits.

In the summer of 2008, the governor was crowned "Chief Financial Sewer Debt Negotiator" by the majority of the Jefferson County Commission. Since then, I have been left out of the loop in all negotiations and have received no reports indicating there has been any progress whatsoever.

If the county continues on this dysfunctional path, the citizens will eventually dismantle the occupational and business taxes, leading to further cuts in services, more disgruntled voters and eventually restoration of rational government. Therein lies our hope.

I refuse to join the ranks of those who would rather raise taxes than find a solution to the numerous financial problems facing Jefferson County at this time.

Make no mistake. I am not going away. On Tuesday, January 19, the state of Massachusetts saw the first wave in a tsunami of national outrage as the voters rejected irresponsible government and big spending. I will continue to push for better and smaller government on every level. I will be active in advocating political and financial solutions to improve the place we all call home.....Stay tuned.

###

If you would like more information please contact the Office of Commissioner Jim Carns at 205.325.5503.