

I would like to thank the Chamber for putting this event on each year. John, you and your staff do a great service for Morgan County and I want to thank you for all you do.

I would like to thank the ROTC for once again doing a great job presenting our colors. Thank you.

I want to thank Pastor Josh Grubbs for filling in for Pastor Shane Lewis, this morning. Josh is our Associate Pastor at Somerville Baptist and a dear friend to Regina and me. I would like for all of you to keep Pastor Shane in your prayers. He is fighting a battle with Leukemia and we know that through prayers, he is going to win that fight.

I want to thank my department heads for being here this morning. They do a great job for Morgan County and I'm really proud of them.

I would like to thank all the elected officials for showing up this morning. It is really nice to see that my friend from Limestone County, Chairman Mark Yarbrough, is here. Thank you for coming.

Since last year's State of the County, we have had a shakeup at our office. Our Administrator, Belinda Ealey, retired at the end of November. Julie Reeves was promoted to be the new Administrator. Taking Julie's place as Deputy Administrator is Jessica Smith. They are doing a great job with their new duties.

It is always good to have my family members here. I'm proud my three daughters, Patti, Mary, and Micah could make it. You have already seen two of my grandkids, Ellie and Tripp. Didn't they do a great job with the pledge? This is the second time that my brother, Hillard, has attended. Thank you for coming.

Each year I try to decide what am I going to say about my best attendee. She is my friend. My soul mate. The love of my life. She laughs at nearly all my jokes whether they are funny or not. She is a partner in everything I decide to pursue. She even stood on side of the road and waved at cars when I was running for this job. They just don't get any better than Regina. I couldn't do this without her. Thank you, Regina, for not only being here this morning, but for being a part of my life.

My friends, today I stand before you for the 8<sup>th</sup> time as your Chairman to give the State of the County address. It is an honor that I do not take lightly. To be elected by the citizens of our great county to represent them is something I am very proud of. I try hard every day to represent the people of Morgan County in a way that they can be proud of. I have an obligation to make sure that what I say is true and accurate. When I speak I represent the 120,000 citizens

of Morgan County. When I ran for this position in 2010 my slogan was, "It's not about me. It's about you." I try to live by this today. I don't serve as your Chairman so that I can benefit myself or my family or even my friends. I serve as your Chairman to try to make Morgan County a better place for you, the citizens that I represent. The trust that you have placed in me is something that I will never take advantage of, or forget. Thank you for letting me serve as your Chairman.

We had a pretty good year in 2017. It started out looking gloomy on the financial side. We saw several costs escalate that we were not expecting. Inmate medical costs went \$236,000 over budget, which comes directly out of the Commission's general fund. Inmate medical cost is a growing problem as our jail population increases. This year we were forced to budget \$1 million for inmate medical treatment. It is a cost that probably will never come down. We are getting more and more inmates that should be getting treatment for mental health issues instead of being placed in the county jail.

The cost of our employees' health care went up. Because of a great number of surgeries and other unforeseen illnesses the county did not receive the extra \$700,000 in rebates that we normally would get.

We also received a cut in what we had budgeted in our TVA payments. These payments were around \$220,000 less than what we had projected.

As we began to see the trend wasn't going in the right direction, we met with all department heads in April and asked them to examine their budgets and see if there was anything they could cut out or put off until later. We sent the same memo out to the elected officials. All of their effort plus a late increase of income in a few other areas helped us finish the year around \$460,000 under budget.

We have not seen anything to make us think that 2018 will be any better. We passed a 2018 General Fund budget of \$22,751,894 projected expenses and only \$22,767,064 income. This leaves us around \$15,000 to play with. Of course this is only a projection. We hope it comes in better.

2017 was a banner year for industrial development. Every year I brag on Jeremy Nails and his staff for the great job they do promoting Morgan County. We had over \$535 million in announced capital investments along with 436 new jobs announced by local industries. This is great news for everyone seeking a job who lives in Morgan County. But it doesn't end there. With the recent announcement of Toyota/Mazda bringing 4,000 new jobs to Huntsville and Limestone County, I am very confident there will be plenty of Morgan County residents working at that plant. Then there are the estimated 6,000 supplier jobs. Yes, a lot of good job opportunities are coming for our people.

Just for a moment let's look how far Morgan County has come in the last few years. When I began my journey to be your Chairman in January 2010, Morgan County's unemployment rate was 12.7%. At the end of December 2017 it was 3.1%. I'm not going to stand here and say that it is all because me or the Morgan County Commission. The results that I have just spoken about are the results of everyone working together to bring jobs to our area. We have had to tear down boundary lines between cities and counties and face the reality that only by working together can we serve our people like they deserve. I am proud that Morgan County took a leadership role in tearing down these walls and bringing everyone together.

Now I would like to take a few moments and brag on a few of our departments.

We have a new Director over our IT department. A few months ago we hired George Hill to come in and oversee all of our Data Processing and IT. George is a Morgan County native and was employed at Calhoun Community College.

In May of 2017, Darren Tucker became the Director at our Animal Shelter. Darren brought with him years of experience in dealing with the public. Darren is the Mayor of Somerville, was manager of a business for 15 years and had 32 employees working for him; and he had actually worked on a farm several years in his younger days. He has two dogs and a cat that live with him. But the thing that really made Darren a good fit for the director's job was that \$100 he donated to me back in 2010. Just joking.

Really, Darren has done a great job at the shelter. One of his first actions was to open the shelter on Saturdays. Now folks that work during the week can come by and adopt animals on their off day. He sponsored a Micro Chip event at the shelter that allows pets to be identified easily. He and his staff have built relationships with several rescue groups to save the lives of many animals. We've built a barn at the shelter so we can hold large animals if they get out or are surrendered to law enforcement. Our staff at the shelter works hard to adopt out the animals they have at the shelter.

At our Environmental shop, Johnny Howell and his staff stay busy. He has set up dumpsters so that residents can bring their unwanted items throughout the year. This service took the place of the cleanup days at the county shops. District four still holds their cleanup day twice a year but even then Johnny has dumpsters set up to put your items in.

Johnny also found a local vendor to start purchasing our regular dumpsters from, keeping our money in Morgan County.

Our 8 senior centers continue to be a big part of our communities. Debra Gardner does a great job making sure the needs of our seniors are looked after. Besides our centers, we have around 170 seniors that get a meal delivered to their homes.

Our seniors still compete in the Master Games in the state where one recently qualified for a national event. Your Commission works hard to make sure our seniors are taken care of.

Sean Daly continues to do a great job with the Park and Recreation department. This past year we had 94 basketball teams, 44 soccer teams, 68 baseball teams, 29 softball teams along with 10 fall softball teams. We also started a flag football league and had 6 teams in it. Along with the help of District 2 Commissioner Randy Vest, Sean and his staff set up an Archery course at West Park. During the year they hosted four 3D tournaments. The Archery facility at West Park is an official ASA club range and he is hopeful they can host a state event in the near future.

Sean also worked with the community leagues to purchase a laser grader for the Park and Recreation department. He plans to have all the fields in the county laser graded before the beginning of next season.

Our engineering department, led by Greg Bodley had a busy year. They inspected and approved 120 sub division lots in the county. They inspected 55 bridges and 68 culverts to make sure they still met the safety standards. They worked to help finish the last of the big ATRIP projects which was Vaughn Bridge. They also work with FEMA in maintaining the Flood Zone maps and flood plain determinations. Greg also works daily with the four commissioners to help them with road projects.

I want to brag on Kim Thurston and her staff in Community Corrections. They have 2060 clients with over 2500 cases. Nearly all of these people would be serving jail time if it wasn't for her program. They collected over \$300,000 in court cost and over \$9,000 in child support last year not counting what is collected through garnishments of the work release checks.

They have also partnered with Calhoun College to do Work Keys testing for their clients. This makes it easier for them to get jobs so they can get back to a normal life.

Jeff Simmons is doing a great job with the Juvenile Probation Department. They work real hard to make sure that the kids they work with have the opportunity to finish school and they try to prepare them so they can get a job and be productive citizens.

Last but not least of our department heads is Sheryl Marsh. She does a great job as our communications director. We are now live streaming our commission meetings. This allows people to see their commissioners in action. This has been well received by the public. We leave it on our Facebook page for people to watch anytime.

Sheryl also does a great job with our quarterly newsletter. We are putting out 46,000 copies to our citizens so they can know what is going on in county government. We've watched as folks have called the Washington Post, New York Times, CNN, NBS, and even our Decatur Daily, Fake

News. I can assure you that you won't hear that about The Voice of Morgan County. People love our paper. In fact Sheryl recently received a note from a citizen that read, "This was another great edition of The Voice. It was very interesting from front to back. I look forward to getting the paper." This was from Ellen Hodgen of Somerville.

Wayne Lindley, Maintenance Director, Eddie Hicks, EMA Director and Michelle Echols, Sales Tax Director, couldn't be here this morning. They all take a lot of pride in their work and do a great job for Morgan County.

I want to thank all of our department heads for the great job they do.

Each year I like to give you a quick rundown of what your commissioners have done. We have a great group of commissioners and I'm proud to work with them.

In District one, Jeff Clark and his crew spent over \$500,000 resurfacing roads. They partnered with Decatur Public Works on rebuilding a portion of Mud Tavern Road. They completed a water line extension for Decatur Utilities to serve residents that didn't have access to public water. They are currently working with the Town of Priceville to extend Marco Drive and working in Decatur to fix a parking lot behind the Princess Theater in preparation for the opening of the Cooks Museum.

In District two, Randy Vest and his crew resurfaced and striped 14 roads at a cost of nearly \$800,000. He completed the last of the ATRIP projects which was the bridge on Vaughn Bridge Road. His crew did the site preparations for the new Oak Ridge VFD and also the new building site for the Neel VFD. Randy and his crew also worked to get more parking at the J.P. Cain football field in Hartselle, outdoor practice fields at Danville High School, playground improvements at Danville Neel Elementary School, and resurfaced a bus lane at Sparkman Middle School. Randy serves on the ACCA Legislative Committee. He was appointed by Sec. of State John Merrill to serve on a Board of Registrars task force and was also appointed by Gov. Kay Ivey to serve on the Monument Protection Committee.

District three Commissioner Don Stisher faces the same challenges that the other three districts face. Rain, sleet, snow, tornadoes, hot days and cold days, are all just part of the routine. Don, in his fifth term as commissioner, has seen just about everything. His staff has a combined total of 132 years' experience. Like the other districts, they fix pot holes and mow the sides of the roads to keep them safe for their citizens. They are constantly helping the Towns of Eva and Falkville along with the schools in those towns. Don is very proud of his staff and always lets them know how much he enjoys working with them.

Greg Abercrombie, District four Commissioner stays busy on the east side of the county. Greg is constantly helping out the schools in his district. He has four: Brewer, Cotaco, Union Hill and

Lacey's Spring. He has worked with the Rescue Squad to obtain some land in Lacey for them to build a Storage building. He worked with the Northeast Water Department in getting their site prepared for their new building. Greg, like the other Commissioners, has resurfaced several roads and plans for several more this year.

I have said it many times, you have a great commission. These four guys work hard to make sure that Morgan County is a place you can be proud to call your home. It's an honor to be a part of this commission and work with these guys. It's more than just a job to them. It's a service. They are dedicated to the citizens of Morgan County. If you are as proud of them as I am, let's give them a big round of applause.

I want you to know that your county is in good shape. We are working hard every day to make it better. We all know that when everyone works together, and doesn't care who gets the credit, Morgan County will only get better.

In closing, I want to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to serve as your chairman. For me to have the opportunity to lead Morgan County in the highest elected county position is a dream come true. I am extremely blessed that God saw fit to place me in this position. I depend on him daily for guidance. I understand that no matter how good or bad things get, God is still in control.

Thank you again for allowing me to serve the best county in Alabama. Thank you again for coming and may God continue to bless Morgan County.

