

The Andalusia Star-News

Governor's fix will be bitter pill

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In general, Alabamians probably liked what their doctor ordered last night.

Gov. Robert Bentley, a physician whose “Alabama is hurting, and she needs a doctor” message resonated with voters in 2010, delivered his second state-of-the-state address last night. Addressing a previously announced anticipated shortfall in funding for the state’s general fund next year, Bentley said he’ll continue to make government smaller. Not only will he not suggest new taxes, he vowed to veto any new tax passed by the legislature.

And he vowed to protect funding for essential services, citing the Department of Public Safety, the Department of Human Resources, and the Department of Corrections as agencies under this doctor’s care. No prisoner will be set free due to lack of funds, he said.

It sounded reasonable. But the reality is that the general fund budget, which basically includes every government service in Alabama except schools and highways, will be one-fourth smaller than this year. Most of us can’t get our minds around what \$150 million is, but we can imagine what it would be like to cut our own spending by one fourth. No doubt, the cuts would hurt.

Despite the governor’s excellent bedside manner and analgesic words, even those who are for smaller government will find the cuts painful. Who among us wants those who need medical care not to have access to Medicaid? Patients with mental illness not to have counseling? Courts and court offices not to be open at our convenience? Anyone we know to lose a job? That’s what “consolidating state agencies” really means.

Those are among the services funded by the state’s general fund that the governor did not include in his hands’ off list Tuesday night. Among his proposals was modernizing technology to save \$100 million over 10 years. But that doesn’t put us anywhere near the \$150 million we need to save in the coming budget year.

Like most patients, we Alabamians will find our medicine distasteful before the governor’s surgical reduction of the budget is over.