

Morgan County Commission Chairman Ray Long's 2015 State of the County Speech

I want to thank you for being here today. This is always such a special occasion for me. Just knowing that the Chamber can get people to pay to come hear me speak is amazing in its self. I would like to thank John Seymour and the Chamber staff for putting on this event every year.

Before I get started, I want to recognize a few people. First I would like to recognize my fellow commissioners. Jeff Clark, Randy Vest, Don Stisher, and Greg Abercrombie. Next I would like to recognize my staff that is here today. Belinda Ealey, County Administrator, Peggy Lynch, Business Service Coordinator, and Sheryl Marsh, Communications Director. Sheryl is responsible for publishing our county newsletter, The Voice of Morgan County. And also, Greg Bodley, our county engineer. I would like to recognize the mayors that are here today. If there are any other elected officials here, will you stand?

You have already met my pastor, Bro. Shane Lewis. This is the third year that he has been a part of this event. Bro. Lewis has been my pastor for over 10 years and he still volunteered to be here today. Bro. Lewis is more than just my pastor, he is my friend, and I am so honored that he joined us this morning. Thank you Pastor Lewis for being here. Thank you to the ROTC for being here this morning. I really appreciate you taking time out of your school schedule to be a part of our program.

You have also already met two of my grandchildren. Ellie Grace and Chance mean a great deal to me. I love spending time with them. I am so glad that they wanted to come and help in this event today.

Next I would like to introduce my three girls and my son in law. Micah Long, Patti Brown, and Mary and Josh Melson. Thank you for coming this morning.

Last but definitely not least is my dear wife and best friend, Regina. Regina and I are a team. Regina, I love you and want to thank you for being so supportive in my adventures as Chairman.

This is the fifth time that I have had the opportunity to stand before you as your chairman of the Morgan County Commission and give you a report on the state of our county. I am deeply honored that you have given me this opportunity. It is something that I do not take lightly. When I ran for this position, you had three other choices you could have made. But you chose me. Now if you are here today and didn't vote for me, please keep it to yourself. I don't need to know. You chose me to be the one to lead the charge to turn our county government around. I accepted that challenge and went to work seeing what we could do to make Morgan County a better place. I met with each of the other four commissioners and pledged my cooperation to them if they would pledge their cooperation to changing the image of Morgan County. We have kept our pledges to each other and to the citizens of Morgan County. Since November of 2010 thru our last meeting on February 10, 2015, we have only had one vote that wasn't unanimous. No one on your Morgan County Commission cares about grandstanding so they can be the headlines in the paper. They do not put their own agenda's ahead of what is best for Morgan County. Ladies and gentlemen, you have a good commission. These four guys put in many hours working for you. While most folks are home by 5 o'clock, sometimes these guys are out all through the night. They are not mailmen, but they work in the rain, sleet, snow, and even in the sunshine. You have some very good commissioners and I am proud to serve with them.

I would like to take just a few minutes and talk about the group of mayors we have here in Morgan County. Each one of them works hard for their respective towns. But I want to talk

about how they all work together. They work well with each other and they work well with us on the commission. We meet once a month to share ideas with each other. Now for those that are in the press, don't think you just got another story. We don't vote on anything. We look for ways to help each other. In Morgan County, there are no boundary lines when it comes to helping one another. Thank you for what you do to make Morgan County a better place.

Today I am proud to report to you that your county is in good shape. We are financially strong and getting better every day. During the past year we added an additional \$700,000 to our reserves bringing our reserve balance up to \$2.8 million. Now this may not sound like much for a county our size. But when I came into office a little over 4 years ago, we had a zero balance. I am proud of the way our elected officials and employees have responded over the past few years when we asked them to be conservative with their spending. They have responded year after year by watching their budgets very carefully. Our general fund budget for this year is \$21.7 million. Our total budget for Fiscal year 2015 is \$44 million. If anyone is interested in seeing our financial records in detail, you can find it on our website. Every dollar that we spend is your money and we want you to see how we are spending it. I think your elected officials and employees are doing a great job watching how your money is spent. A good sign of that is how we have managed to start building up our reserves.

We've had a good year in Morgan County. During the past year we have opened two new senior centers in the county. Commissioner Randy Vest built a new center at Somerville and Commissioner Greg Abercrombie built a new center in Union Hill. Just recently we signed the contracts to build a new senior center in Lacey's Spring. Commissioner Abercrombie has already started the site work and it should be complete by the end of this summer. Our seniors are very important to us. They are the ones that have built the foundation for what we have today. We want to make sure that they have a nice place to fellowship and enjoy activities in their retirement years.

We average serving 165 meals at our senior centers and also deliver 150 homebound meals each day.

Our MCATS program continues to be successful. We are in our 19th year of operation. We currently average around 600 trips per day. We carry people shopping, to medical visits, school, and even work.

We have finally got our jail expansion ready to bid out. We have begun the process to start qualifying contractors and we will open the bids on April 16th. This has been a long process but we wanted to make sure that we had it right. Once construction starts, it will take about a year to build. This will add a little over 400 more beds to our jail.

John Allison has been busy at our Archives the past year. If you will remember just a few years ago we opened the Scottsboro Boys Exhibit. This past year, we opened the Civil War Exhibit. With the help of Sen. Arthur Orr, Morgan County received a grant to help finance most of the cost of this exhibit. It is very educational and has a good trail of the historical events that happened during the Civil War. You need to go by and check it out.

We have made some sweeping changes in our Park and Recreation Department. For years each commissioner was responsible for the park in their district. They did a great job keeping the parks in good shape and making sure they were available to the communities. But this took a great deal of time away from them. They needed time to work on the other aspects of their jobs, like roads, budgets, and solving the issues of their constituents. We have now combined the parks into one department. We have hired Sean Dailey as our Park and Recreation Director. Sean has big plans for our parks. His goal is to have them used a lot more in the next few years. We look forward to seeing what he can do.

Our Engineering Department has been very busy. When we send out the request for highlights of the past year to department heads, our Engineer, Greg Bodley, takes it serious. Every year he will send me two or three pages of projects they have completed or are working on. If I gave you the entire list from him, I wouldn't get to talk about anyone else. Greg does a great job for us. He is respected around the state as one of the best and we are proud to have him working for us.

I just want to tell you about a few of the things he has been working on. He completed over \$1 million in road and bridge projects. He currently has over \$7.3 million of road and bridge projects under construction and has another \$4 million of construction project in the final phase and is planning additional projects. He reviewed and approved 61 sub division lots in 2014. His department did bridge inspections for 118 bridges. They did site planning for the Union Hill, Somerville and Lacey's Spring Senior Centers. This is just a few of the things our Engineering Department was a part of.

Your commissioners have been busy during the past year. District one Commissioner Jeff Clark spent around \$500,000 last year paving roads in his district. Jeff has helped the county schools board with work in preparing the grounds for their new bus shop and central office. He has also helped out around West Morgan School as well as Priceville High School and Priceville Elementary. He has also helped the Town of Trinity with some drainage problems. Jeff has plans to spend another \$500,000 this year on paving projects.

Randy Vest spent over \$1 million in paving projects in 2014. As I said earlier, he built and opened the Somerville Senior Center. He has spent around \$400,000 on upgrading and renovating West Park at Neel. He has another \$750,000 of paving projects planned for this year.

Jeff and Randy sweated more this past year than the other commissioners. Not because they worked more but because they both had opponents in their re-election campaigns. District three Commissioner Don Stisher finally got moved into his new shop in Falkville. Don went from the worst shop in the county to probably the best. Don stays very busy. He is always there to help the towns in his district. He helped the Town of Falkville with a major drainage project. He has helped Falkville High School on many projects.

Don paved several roads during the past year, spending over \$300,000 and has plans to pave more than 10 miles this year. Don is also working with the Town of Eva to get their Storm Shelters installed.

Greg Abercrombie, District four Commission, is always busy. As I said before, he built a senior center in Union Hill. He is working on a senior center at Lacey's Spring now. He is finishing up re-building the Brindlee Mt. Park. They will be in use when the season starts next month. Greg paved several roads in his district last year and has several more on the list for this year. He is constantly working around the schools in his district. He tore down the old field house for Brewer High School and the old bleachers from the football field. He also tore down an old house at Lacey's Springs Schools where they plan to build an Agricultural Building. This saved the schools system thousands of dollars.

This is just a few of the things your commissioners have done. They are out front every day in the communities trying to make Morgan County a better place to live. They put in many hours. They sometimes miss the family gatherings because when an emergency comes up, they have to respond. These four guys that serve you on the County Commission love Morgan County. I see it every day. They work hard to satisfy every complaint or concern. Now you and I know that is hard to do. But they have patience with our citizens. They go well beyond what is required of them. Ladies and gentlemen, I am proud to serve with these four guys.

Look how far we have come in the past four years. Just a few years ago we were the laughing stock of Alabama. Today we are respected once again. Jeff Clark, Don Stisher, and Randy Vest all serve on state boards at the ACCA. In August I will be sworn in as President of the ACCA. Don Stisher was recently selected as Vice President of the Tennessee Valley Governments Association and will transition into the President's position next January. This group is made up of government agencies from the seven states that are served by TVA. Four years can make a big difference. We've come a long way. We are still working hard to get better. Our goal is to continue to work together and make Morgan County a better place live and raise a family.

Friends, I want to thank you again for letting me serve as your chairman. This is a job that I truly love. I love working for the people of Morgan County. I am honored that you have allowed me to have this opportunity. I hope that you will continue to allow me to work for you for many years to come.

Thank you again to John and his staff at the Chamber. Thank you to the ROTC for being a part of this event. Thank you again, Bro. Shane, for helping us today. Also, I want to thank Chance and Ellie Grace for missing a few hours of school to help their Papaw. And thank all of you for coming. Have a good day and may GOD continue to bless Morgan County.