

STATE OF THE COUNTY SPEECH 2017
CHAIRMAN RAY LONG

Thank you all for being here this morning. It is always an honor for me to get to stand before you and talk about our great county.

Before I get into my speech, I would like to thank the Chamber for sponsoring this event each year. John, you and your staff do a great job promoting Morgan County and I want to thank you for your service and dedication.

I want to thank the ROTC for being here again. You do such a great job and I am honored that you are willing to participate each year.

I would like to thank all the elected officials for taking time out of your schedule this morning to be here. I know some of you are here hoping to hear that you will be getting more money out of the commission. Sorry but please stay anyway.

I would like to thank and introduce my department heads that are here this morning.

Next I would like to introduce our county administrator, Belinda Ealey and our assistant administrator, Julie Reeves. They do a great job for you each day. They are responsible for making sure we commissioners know what we can and can't do.

Now I would like to introduce your commissioners. District one is Jeff Clark. District two is Randy Vest. District three is Don Stisher. District four is Greg Abercrombie. Thank you for coming.

It is always an honor to have my pastor, Brother Shane Lewis, participate in this event. He is more than just my pastor, he is my friend. When Brother Shane came to Somerville Baptist Church we had a little over 200 people attending. Today we average over 500 each Sunday.

I have several family members here this morning. The first I want to introduce is my brother Hillard. When we decided to undertake the challenge of running for the Chairman's office in 2010, he was the first person Regina and I turned to for help. He has always supported me in every adventure that I jumped into. I had

never invited him to this event because I figured he heard me talk enough without actually paying to hear me speak. Hillard, thank you for being here.

I am very proud to have all three of my daughters here again this year. They are Patti Brown, Mary Melson and Micah Long.

You have already met my three grandkids that are here. Didn't they do a great job with the pledge? Chance, Ellie and Tripp, thanks for being here. I also have a two year old grandson, Sawyer, that I'm sure most of you are glad is not here.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my lovely wife, Regina, for being here today. Regina and I are truly a team. She is my inspiration. She's my biggest supporter. I love you and thanks for coming.

This is the seventh time that I have had the opportunity to stand before you and give the State of the County Address. I want you to know that I do not take this job lightly. In the past 78 years, we have had six other chairmen before me. Sim L. Howell served from 1939 until 1956. Guy Roberts served from 1956 thru 1968. Thornton "Dick" Fleming served from 1968 thru 1981. William "Jr." Waddell served from 1981 thru 1987. Larry Bennich served from 1987 thru 2004. And John Glasscock served from 2004 thru 2010. Each of these men brought something different to the commission. They all had different ideas about what was best for Morgan County. They all had different styles of leadership. Whether we agreed with the way they did their job or not, there was one thing that was common among all of these men. They had a desire to serve Morgan County. I am honored to be mentioned in the same category as these men. We all have had the privilege to serve Morgan County as Chairman of the County Commission. Thank you for that honor.

Holding a public office is a privilege not a right. It is not something we just wake up and decide to do. We must first show the citizens that we are worthy of their support and trust. During the past year, elected officials all over the state have caused citizens to have doubts about their leaders. From the conviction of Mike Hubbard to the cloud of suspicion over the appointment of Luther Strange as a senator, people are looking down on their elected leaders. It only takes a few

corrupt officials to make it hard on all the rest of us. Being chosen to lead our citizens is a great honor and should never be taken lightly. I take this job serious. I pledge to you today that I, along with your commissioners, will continue to work hard to promote Morgan County in a way that will make you proud.

We have a lot to be proud of here in Morgan County. The way that all of the municipalities and the commission work together is unheard of. As I tell people across the state about how we all work together, they are amazed. Our monthly meetings, sponsored by the Chamber, help bring us together so we can know the needs of each other. We have a great group of Mayors and Councils serving our cities and towns.

But let's go a little further. Remember during the summer when we had the water crisis on the west side of the county? Look at how are partners stepped up to the plate to help out. Ray Hardin and his Decatur Utilities staff were on the phone with us in just a few hours offering to help. They were offering to open the valves and get water to those people affected. They had water flowing to West Morgan's water customers in just a few days. We also had businesses, churches and individuals calling and donating bottled water to those affected. Our volunteer fire departments stepped up and helped with the distribution of this free water to our residents.

Again in November, when the storms hit the Neel area, people from all over Morgan County turned out to help. Church groups, school groups, and citizens from all over Morgan County showed up with chain saws and trucks to help those struck by the tornado. But it didn't stop there. Our neighbors to the west, Lawrence County Environmental Department was calling wanting to help. They loaned us three roll off dumpsters so the citizens would have a place to get rid of their debris. Not only that, they kept them emptied for us.

Yes, we have a lot to be proud of in Morgan County.

Morgan County is the place where three state championship sports teams call home. Three different teams from Morgan County brought home the big trophy last year. The Brewer High School Fishing Team proved that nobody knows more

about fishing than the Patriots. The Decatur Heritage Baseball Team knocked everyone out of the park to win their first ever state title. The Brewer High School Shooting Team was on target and brought home the state title. The Commission has been honoring our state champions each year since I have been in office. We are very proud of our young people and want to make sure they know they have our support.

In 2016 we reinstated the Government Day Program in Morgan County for our high school students. We had over 50 students from four high schools participate. We let them learn about their government from the people that actually do the jobs. They were able to participate in a mock Commission meeting as well as a mock trial. They also toured the jail and observed some of the things that go on in the sheriff's office. This was the first Government Day in Morgan County since 2010.

The Morgan County Commission was a proud partner in the SNAP Project in Hartselle. Commissioners Randy Vest and Don Stisher, along with their crews, spent many hours working on this project to make a handicapped accessible playground for the children of Morgan County. It was a great day for everyone when Former Alabama Coach Gene Stallings came to Morgan County to cut the ribbon and open the playground. It is named after his son, John Mark Stallings.

Yes, we have a lot to be proud of in Morgan County.

I would like to recognize Sheryl Marsh for the great job she does with our county newsletter, The Voice of Morgan County. Last year we added 6000 more homes to our mailing list. We are now sending The Voice to 46,000 homes each quarter. This newsletter focuses on things that are going on within the county. We try to spotlight employees that go above their normal duties. We want you to know what is happening and how your tax dollars are being spent. Our first edition of The Voice was December 2012. Our newsletter has only positive news and the response from the citizens has been great. I hope you look forward to your copy each quarter.

We recently opened the Lacey's Spring Senior Center. This is the fourth new center the commission has built in the past six years. Thanks to Commissioner Greg Abercrombie, the seniors on the east side have a very nice place to meet each day. Our senior centers are more than just a place for seniors to go and get a meal. They play games, cards, sew and quilt. Several of our seniors even participated in the Alabama State Master's Games this past summer. And yes, our seniors brought plenty of medals back to Morgan County. I would like to report, to my knowledge, they haven't had a lottery run to Tennessee in a while.

I am proud to stand here today and say the jail addition is completed. We had the ribbon cutting last Thursday. We still have some equipment to install before the Sheriff will be placing inmates in the new addition. This jail addition has been an ongoing 4 year journey. The total cost is around \$11 million. It will hold 450 inmates. If you look at all of us commissioners, with our age, we will never have to build another jail addition in our lifetime.

Kim Thurston continues to do a great job with our Community Corrections program. Currently her staff is supervising nearly 2100 clients. Without Community Corrections most of those 2100 would have to be locked in a jail cell. Because of the dedication of Kim and her staff, they have a 75% completion rate with their clients. That means that 75% of the people they supervise does everything the courts requires them to do to return to normal in our society. That is a very good percentage. Thank you to Kim and her staff.

Along those same lines, I would like to announce that all of the emergency services responders, police and fire, throughout the county are on the same radio system. They can, for the first time in a long time, all communicate with each other. I would like to take this time to thank all of the emergency responders for their dedication to Morgan County.

Now I will give you a rundown of the highlights of each district. District one Commissioner Jeff Clark spent over \$400,000 resurfacing roads last year. He worked with Decatur Utilities to extend a water main to an area that did not have treated water. Jeff and his crew completed the ROW clearing and drainage

improvements on Red Bank Road. They also spent many hours on their tree removal project to keep the ROW's clear.

District two Commissioner Randy Vest and his team completed nearly 500 work orders. They installed nearly 2100' of culvert pipe in 66 locations. Randy partnered with Commissioner Clark in the replacement of the Kirby Bridge Road Bridge. Randy also began the replacement of Vaughn Bridge on Vaughn Bridge Road. Randy worked with the volunteer fire departments in Somerville and Neel to install FEMA approved storm shelters. Neel's shelter got tested on November 29th when a tornado went thru the community. Randy also installed an Archery Practice and Tournament Range at West Park.

Don Stisher and his staff at District three had a busy year. Along with the normal maintenance duties of patching, paving and bush hogging, they found time to help the Towns of Falkville and Eva on several projects. They helped the Town of Falkville replace rusted culverts and replace them with concrete culverts on Culver Road as well as placing guardrails and repaving this road to make it safer. Don and his crew also did the site prep for the FEMA approved storm shelters in Eva. Don and his crew also helped the City of Hartselle construct a 4 acre lake as well as add ¾ mile to their current walking trail. Don, like our other commissioners, serves on several boards that expand his hours of work. The one that really stands out is his tenure as President of the Association of Tennessee Valley Governments. This board serves the 7 states that make up TVA.

District four Commissioner Greg Abercrombie had a productive year. He purchased 3 acres of property that joined his current shop property for future expansion. He completed the bridge replacement on Cotaco-Florette Road as well as repaving and the placement of 2600' of guardrail on this road. Greg paved streets throughout his district. He has also been working with our Environmental Department to have a county clean-up facility at his shop.

As you can see, you have a great group of commissioners. They work really hard for you and I hope that you appreciate them. I sure do.

Industrial development is very important to Morgan County. Finding a job for everyone that wants a job should always be our goal. This past year we had one new company locate in Morgan County and 11 companies that expanded. They made a total investment of nearly \$72 million and created 219 jobs.

A few years ago the Morgan County Commission was asked to help the City of Huntsville in their effort to lure Remington to our area. Your commissioners took a bold step and helped with the incentives to lure such a large company to North Alabama. When we were told the project would bring 2600 jobs to our area, we felt we had no choice but to participate. As I stand before you today, I would like to report that the risk was worth it. Remington has hired 992 workers so far and 204 of those workers are from Morgan County. That's 21%.

We were also asked to help lure Polaris to our area. Again, we partnered with the City of Huntsville. When all phases are completed, Polaris plans to have 1800 employees. Today Polaris has 533 employees and 75 or 14% of those employees are from Morgan County.

The only way that anyone can land the big manufacturing companies today is with a regional approach. Our efforts have paid off for the people of Morgan County.

As we closed out 2016, we also closed out an era of service with our county attorney. Bill Shinn had represented the Morgan County Commission for 28 years. As you noticed, I said service. You could tell when speaking to Bill that it wasn't just a job for him. He loves Morgan County. Bill became more than just an attorney to all who worked with him. I'm proud to call him my friend.

As I begin to wind this speech down, I want to brag on your commissioners again. They work hard every day to promote Morgan County in a positive way. They place the reputation of Morgan County at the heart of all the decisions they make. Not a single one of your commissioners puts his personal agenda ahead of what's best for our county. I say this every year and I hope I can say it again next year, since November 2010, we have had only one vote that wasn't unanimous. I am very proud to work with your commissioners.

Yes, we have a lot to be proud of in Morgan County. God has truly blessed Morgan County and its citizens.

Thank you to our sponsors today. Thanks you all for coming. Thank you for allowing me to serve as your Chairman.

May God continue to bless Morgan County. Thank you