

# Commission turns down gas tax increase, approves Sheriff's raise

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The Lee County Commission decided whether six requests for items would be drafted, advertised and sent through the legislative approval process to the Lee County Legislative Delegation on Feb. 23.

A tax on gasoline was not approved, along with a tax exemption for eligible citizens and a voter identification expansion.

The gasoline tax, or the "pay-as-you-go road tax," would have raised tax on gasoline by \$0.05 per gallon for up to five years, said Robert Ham, District 4 commissioner.

Ham said this has been brought before the legislature in previous years.

"It was going to go to specific road and bridge projects, meaning that we would put it on the ballot that it was a specific bridge that would be replaced, for example, and the citizens would be able to look at it and decide yes or no whether they wanted that specific project," Ham said.

The tax was discussed with the local legislature delegation, and majority of the members

said they felt it was not a good time for the proposal because of a statewide effort to look at additional funding for infrastructure, which would include funding for counties, according to county documents.

Ham said the current and previous commissioners have believed citizens would like better roads, but commissioners will do what they can with the money they have rather than raise taxes.

"We'd rather have lower taxes than pristine roads," Ham said. "We know there's so much improvement that needs to be done there, but we've listened to the citizens year after year, and they've told us we do not want those taxes raised, so we left them alone."

John Harris, District 5 commissioner, said he thought the commissioners should not move forward on anything because the county and the state did not need to spend any more money.

"We should get our house in order where we can get financially stable," Harris said. "The state of Alabama is in bad shape."

Johnny Lawrence, commis-

sioner for District 2, disagreed with Harris' statement.

"We have worked on this for several meetings, and we have interacted not only amongst ourselves, we have interacted with state legislators," Lawrence said. "The state of Alabama's issues, while they are certainly significant, is not what we're talking about here. We're talking about our legislative package for our local delegation."

A salary increase to Lee County Sheriff Jay Jones, a Sheriff Administrative Fee and subdivision speed limits were all passed.

The salary raise for Jones, which the state legislature must approve, will bring his salary up to \$100,700. Jones has not had a salary increase since 2008.

"His salary is not comparable to the salary of other sheriffs in the state or surrounding area and especially of a county this size," Ham said. "He is so good the FBI would love to have him, the state agency would love to hire him, and we have fought tooth and nail for years to make sure we keep him."