

Representative Shoaf (00:31)

We're going to call the meeting to order and we start off. Senator, would you lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance please?

Senator Simon (00:37)

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Thank you. Alright.

Representative Shoaf (00:58)

Welcome you all today. I apologize, I was running late. I went to City Hall for some reason. Kind of a memory city business, but we're doing some state business today. So, today we're here to talk about two local bills. We had mentioned these bills at our formal delegation meeting, but as a result of talking with the city and stakeholders, we've worked through it a little bit more and have more specific ideas and points that we're going to make to be able to discuss today, and decided to hold another second meeting about it for the sole purpose of discussing these two local bills that are impacting Franklin County. So, first on the agenda is the Eastpoint bill. So, I'd like to lay out the basics for it, and then we will take public testimony on it, and then we will take a vote, and that will be the format for both of the local bills. Senator, did you want to add anything before we get started?

Senator Simon (01:58)

No. No, I'm excited to be here and get the state's business taken care of.

Representative Shoaf (02:04)

Alright. With the Eastpoint local bill, we have East Point Water and Sewer District. This bill would expand their territory boundaries to include all of St. George Island. That isn't going to automatically mean that they pop up everywhere over there, but it expands their boundaries to allow them to operate in that area. There are several private systems there that they would have to negotiate with and work with to acquire over time. It is a state entity, a special district, very much like the one that is the second on our agenda would be.

So, pretty simple, in my opinion, cut and dry. But with that being explained, we'd like to open it up to the public testimonial questions. Public appearance cards, are these separated by issue or just in general? I just have water issues here. Okay, got it. Alright. Anyone that is put in a card would like to speak on the St. George Island issue? Please come up now, or forever hold your peace. I understand that logical at times.

David Adlerstein (03:28)

Would this be subject to a vote by Islanders or Eastpoint current residents in the Eastpoint Water and Sewer District? And is there any state funding associated with this process?

Representative Shoaf (03:42)

Yeah. The local bill doesn't tie dollars to it. The local bill is just setting up the legislative framework. So, it would, should it pass all the way through the process, it would just expand the boundaries for the simple. There's no dollars attached to that, but we can come back and add appropriations. There are mechanisms that can go into place that are separate from this local bill that would help with funding, should they need it. They're not requesting any funding right now. And no, the other part of your question, state bills, local state legislative bills, do not go for a local referendum or local vote. That's done at the ballot box when they elect the senator or not. And then we come to get feedback from the public here, and this is where we're able to listen to the will of the people and adjust what we're trying to accomplish based on what their will is.

David Adlerstein

Another question is, any numbers or percentages as to how much this would expand the existing base within the Whitewater and Sewer District? Would it double it in size?

Representative Shoaf (05:01)

I'm not familiar with the percentage increase, but we can see if we can have that provided to you.

David Adlerstein

Thank you.

Representative Shoaf (05:02)

Thank you. Any other questions on this one? All right, seeing none, Senator, we'll take a vote. All in favor of approving our local bill for the East Point Water and Sewer District expansion, say aye. Aye. All opposed, we'll show that that local vote carries. All right, next up, our local bill for the city of Apalachicola water system.

This local bill will take or create a brand new special district of the state that would, the territory would be the entire system of the Apalachicola, the system that cut and serves the city of Apalachicola now. And a portion of it expands outside of the city limits, so this district would cover all of that area. And it would create board-appointed positions. We would have, it was three, if I'd help me in on this.

Senator Simon (06:09)

The government would appoint three members, the county commission would appoint a member, and the city council would appoint a member.

Representative Shoaf (06:16)

Thank you. That's, I don't have my notes in part of me. I'm going from memory and after a lot of meetings on this back and forth. So that would give the city commission a voice on this board, the county commission a voice on this board.

Representative Shoaf (06:30)

And then the three would be appointed by the governor in the interest of the state. The intent of this is to remove the politics out of the local city commission on setting rates, on setting, I guess, governing the local water and sewer. We've had nothing but problems for 20 years with it, and it is time the people have demanded action. And this board, this new board, would be able to function as a utility and not as a political pass-through for wishes for the city. It's, the revenues obtained by this special district would have to go back into improving the water and sewer system, or be given back in the form of reduction of rates or rebates to its consumers. Also, we're adding in that these, all of the board members must be customers of the water system. So there won't be any outside area person put on this board. They will all be members of your community. They are not subject to elections. They are not going to have to come back up and try and get votes, you know, every two years to keep the bills low for this group or that group or this friend or that friend. They are here to provide good quality water and none of the bull. And that is what we're doing with this local bill. So we're going to open it up for any questions from the community. Go from this, go from the public appearance cards then. First up, Glenn Gilmore.

Mayor Ash to Glenn Gilmore

Well, we want to hear your comments first.

Glenn Gilmore (09:04)

Glenn Gilmore, 11th Street, Apalachicola. I think we appreciate you responding to our concerns back in the summer. And we did need to have something done. And I think you all started a process with some auditing, both financial auditing and operational auditing, which is much needed. It's still ongoing. We haven't really reached the conclusion of those investigations yet. And I personally feel like the timing of this bill is a little off. We have some new faces on the commission. We have some new faces in city government. We have some improvements that are definitely being made. And this is coming from one who has not been in my in my couple of years living here as a city resident. I've not been the greatest fan of our city government. M And I'm here to tell you that there are some

improvements that are being made. And there are investigations that are underway that are not complete yet. So I just feel like the timing of this, it seems a little rushed. We're coming up on a hard deadline for this bill, from my understanding. And I truly believe, as some others in the audience do, that the city as it stands still needs a little bit of time to work through their issues. And I hear you about 20 years of trouble. But we're on the other side of this structurally. Some of our main infrastructure has been repaired and is now functioning well again. And I don't know that this is the time to throw the commission under the bus and take away local control of this. It's a one time opportunity and you can't turn back. I think that if there was a time for this bill, and if we could see a permit on this bill, if the city does not continue on the path that they're on right now, making good changes, this is something that we could revisit again. It doesn't have to be rushed through right now. You all put things into place. We are very appreciative of that. These investigations are happening and are underway. We'll see the results of them. We'll see what that bears out, whether this bill is necessary or if we're headed in the right direction. Thank you.

Representative Shoaf (11:42)

Thank you. And just to clarify my understanding of the investigations from the Attorney General was just if somebody is going to jail or not. They're not. They're not. They don't have anything to do with it. So we're not waiting on them.

Glenn Gilmore (11:58)

Is it not an operational audit? Yes.

Representative Shoaf (12:02)

Wait, we're going to have to come up to the mic.

Glenn Gilmore (12:03)

So the financial audit may have implications of criminality. Is not the operational audit more to the functioning of the city?

Senator Simon (12:17)

Yes. So the JLAC audit will take place over the next several months. Hopefully we'll get everything back by next year. Well, next committee year. We just finished our six weeks of committee meetings over the last week. And so next committee, when we start our committee meetings, next calendar, next calendar year, then we'll get back the JLAC audit.

Glenn Gilmore (12:42)

Which, in my opinion, would be found more important than the financial audit. And something that we really need to see results of would be the perfect deferment on this action to get us to that point where we can review those results and really see if this was the thing to do. Instead of rushing into something that can't be changed and can't go back from it.

Representative Shoaf (13:07)

Thank you. Thank you. Appreciate that, Tommy. Next up is Bobby Miller.

Bobby Miller (13:16)

Bobby Miller, 3416th Street, Apalachicola. At this time, things have changed since the summer. Right here in the summer, we wanted to tar and feather folks. Things have changed. We have a new match city manager. We have some new members on the board. And at this time, I would encourage you to defer passing this bill and give us a chance. We don't have many rights left in this country. And your government control is taking over our community. And I don't think this is the time to do it. Like the gentleman just said, we haven't even the operational audit has not even been done. Are we correct? Right now, we're in full compliance with everything to do with water. Are we correcting a problem that we don't have? Is that the goal here? I mean, really and truly, we do appreciate your help that you gave us. We screamed. You came. We appreciate that. Don't think we don't. We needed your help this summer. But things have changed. And I would really like to see you defer passage of this bill. Put us on probation. Give us some time. Come back and review this. But please don't pass this bill today. Thank you.

Representative Shoaf (14:37)

I would say the city's been on probation for 20 years on this water system. And I would say the city got defaulted on their loan from the state years ago. And that was all in probation. The city had to work out a payment plan, and then they didn't pay it. I mean, it goes off. I didn't come prepared today to body slam them. I mean, if we need to lay out all the facts to make this point, we can do that. But I thought you knew all of the things that the city had done wrong on this water system over the years. This is not something that the senator and I jumped up and said, let's go do this. I promise you there's other things in our 11 and 14 counties that we'd rather be working on. This is a problem that has been going on for decades and decades. And electing a new board member and getting a new city manager, I've seen three city managers. Four. I've seen numerous city commissions come and go. And every time it's, well, it's better now, it's better now. Folks, it's not. It's worse. The band-aids are on right now. The water system is limping. It is not correct. And it has tens of millions of dollars of work that should have already been done, that needs to be done, that

we're waiting any day now for one thing to go wrong, and we're right back in this mess. And this system takes a long time to do to go through this bill process. And I will also say that the way this process works, we're not voting today to make it final. We're voting today to move it forward. It will then go through two to three committee hearings at the Capitol where we will readdress all of this, where your concerns will be able to get up and address the entire committee. And it will be hashed out. And once it passes that, then it has to pass off before the House, and then it has to go to the Senate. And we've got a lot of hearings and a lot of time to hash this out. This is just the very first step that allows us to bring this forward and to have this discussion, where instead of Facebook warriors and neighbors getting fired up, we'll have people that have facts, the data. We'll be able to lay it out in front of you and answer all of your questions. But if we don't do this today, none of that, I guess, turning the lights on and flushing the roaches out will happen. It ends right here if we don't do this vote. And that's a big thing to me, that we must move forward. We must bring out all of this information for you then to come to the Senator and I and tell us your thoughts on it before we start to pass it off the floor of the House or Senate.

Senator Simon (17:15)

I was going to reserve my comments, but I can see the theme that folks are coming up here or talking about. I watched the commission meeting yesterday that was had. And so I am familiar with part of the council's concerns and the folks that came up and spoke at that meeting, at least the ones that I could hear. You couldn't hear for about 14 minutes of the meeting. But the remainder of the meeting, I did watch. I liken it to this. Before I became an upstanding, at least I try to be a young man. I got in a little bit of trouble when I was a kid. And my mom would tell me, don't do something. And I'd do it. And then she'd tell me again, don't do something. And then I'd do it. And it wasn't until she pulled out the belt that I realized, okay, now I got to straighten up and do it right. It wasn't until we showed up and you all screamed at how bad things were with the water here in Apalachicola. And it wasn't until we came up with the idea of really pushing forward some meaningful legislation to bring correction, long-term correction after long-term mismanagement and inefficiencies with your water system, that everybody then says, okay, I'm going to get it right. It shouldn't have to take that. For 20 years, we have pumped state resources up until recently. And we will continue to do so.

But when the water got bad this past summer, the state taxpayers pumped additional resources in making sure that we had drinking water here in Apalachicola. And paying for bathroom trailers so that people can shower. That was paid for by the taxpayers in this state. And so for us to walk away and say, okay, they got it this time. After years of inefficiency, because we're watching now is the time to get it right. When the residents of

this city have been drinking terrible water, it didn't break down overnight. It didn't happen overnight. You didn't just one day wake up and now your system was broken. So yes, this process is necessary. I applaud the city for finally stepping up and doing what should have been done over the last 20 years. I get it. Management has changed. Elected officials have changed. But we can't play politics with the water. Our job as officials, as folks that represent you all, first and foremost is public safety. That shouldn't be political. That should be the bare minimum. You folks have fallen asleep at the switch. And then finally, when things get really bad, I have to step in again. And for us, the ones that are coming to tell us, no, just delay it. A little bit more. A little bit more. A little bit more. A little bit more. Sorry. That's falling on deaf ears after 20 years. Personal. Anybody that doesn't agree with us. Personal. Because each and every one of you have to shower and drink the water. And so, as Representative Shoaf mentioned, this isn't the final. There will be several meetings, there will be several opportunities to show up in Tallahassee with ideas on how we make this the most efficient water system we possibly can for the future residents and the current residents of Apalachicola.

Representative Shoaf (22:14)

Continue with public comments. Um, Robert Zingarelli.

Robert Zingarelli

Thank you. Robert Zingerelli, 16 Avenue D. Apalachicola. First, I want to comment. Thank you for all of the states's put into this. Um, I wanted to ask you one more time. I feel like we're just getting this cart packed on the rails. We're just, we're just getting things going. And we would like to retain local control for, as proposed before, for at least another year. I, I appreciate how state funding has been put into this. We, we all appreciate that. But I feel like we're just getting this thing back together. A new city manager. A change on the city commission. A change of heart from the remaining city commissioners. I think we can pull this off this time. I truly do think we can pull this off. Finally, I want to add that, adding another layer of management and oversight won't really help the problem, I think. What's needed is an engineer to oversee the waterworks here. That engineer is going to have to be hired either by the water district or by the city. Either one, either way, we're going to have to pay that engineer.

And so, um, I, again, I prefer to keep that control local. Um, finally, I just want to say there's so much, um, I've never seen such an agreement on anything before the city commission in all my years here. So, then again, we want to keep local control. Uh, thank you.

Representative Shoaf (23:49)

Thanks, Robert. Um, and I wouldn't say it is local control. The board members will be local. Um, it will be. And, and the...

Commissioner Elliott (23:54)

Just has to be customers!

Robert Zingarelli (23:56)

Yeah, that's not local.

Representative Shoaf (23:58)

Okay. If you'd like to add a comment, we'd ask you to come up to the microphone. I think you know that. Go ahead.

Robert Zingarelli (24:05)

Okay. Um, I, I think, as Commissioner Elliott had pointed out at several of these meetings, um, as, as the legislation, as the legislation is currently drafted, we would, we would only have to be a customer of the district. You could have somebody with a summer home living in California appointed to the board under the wording of the...

Representative Shoaf (24:27)

And that's the reason we get this good feedback. That's a great point. Wasn't considered. Keep those ideas coming. We will modify that. Okay.

Robert Zingarelli (24:34)

We need to see somebody... If this goes forward, we have to have somebody local. We can't have somebody from Atlanta or California.

Representative Shoaf (24:42)

No, sir. Nobody, nobody.

Robert Zingarelli (24:45)

Well, that's... Well, that is certainly, certainly, I look at this legislation and I look at a buggy piece of computer code that is just untested. I know it will go through the deep revisions, but I'm, I'm really scared for Apalachicola to be the crash test dummy for this case.

Representative Shoaf (25:02)

Okay. No, thank you. Appreciate your comments. We've got, we've got a lot of special districts across the state that work very well. And the only thing that's crashed is, is the

current system under, under Apalachicola control. Okay. And it crashed and burned. Um, so Lynn Wilder is next. Lynn, please come on up.

Lynn Wilder (25:42)_

Hello. Thanks for coming. Allowing us to, um, comment and provide input. I'm Lynn Wilder and I live at 133 Avenue C. And I'm going to read this or I'm going to ramble. Um, the city of Apalachicola needs a year to complete upgrades to our drinking water system before any decisions are made to change a water district approach. In a way, uh, last May to early July's water failure may have been what had to have happened to wake everyone up and a new, and to start a new method of maintaining, upgrading and funding the system. Our new city manager is up to the task. He's a good manager, is proactive, and looks at those short and long range outcomes for our city. His updates to the commission and the city workers know this water system and have worked 24/7 for years. Now they're being given the funding and equipment they need. We are in compliance with water quality standards. I look at every water monitoring and laboratory results. I'm thankful that the city has allowed me to do this and to interpret and explain what the results mean. We now have a community that is holding our city commissioners and manager accountable. Our community is holding them accountable now. Passing a bill now to remove our control over our water feels like punishment for things that are now in the past. That's what the audits are for, right? Changing system oversight before we've had a chance to finally get things right will set us back. It will slow things down and create confusion and more outrage. Yes, there have been decades of poor maintenance and putting out fires as things failed or almost failed. Look how far we've come since May. I don't have any comments on version two of the draft bill because I think there needs to be a lot more detail in it beforehand. Thank you.

Representative Shoaf (27:37)

Thank you. Bonnie Davis.

Bonnie Davis (27:48)

Good afternoon. I'm Bonnie Davis, 411 Avenue D. I do not think, and I'm not here to defend the city's past management at the water system, the water and sewer system. I don't think it is defensible. And I think your comments about 20 years or maybe 30 of under management and poor management are on the mark. However, I do not think creating a separate district is a solution to the problem. And the reason I believe that is partly my background. I am a retired utilities lawyer. I'm very familiar with special districts and how they work versus municipal systems and how they work. And I think that the most important thing to realize is that whether you give it to a district or whether you leave it with

a municipality, the customer base remains the same as the customers who are going to pay for it. And in my opinion, what we need in this situation is we need a good manager with expertise in water and wastewater to direct and manage the system. And that is what you should get whether you leave it with a city or whether you give it to a district. When you move the assets and liabilities from one form to another, the impact on the customers is exactly the same. At the end of the day, they are the ones who are left holding back. And I think that the really hard question is not the format of how you deliver the service. It's do you want a board that is responsible to the customers or is appointed? And in my opinion, leaving the water system with the city gives customers the greatest amount of power to drive change. If you give it to an appointed board, with all due respect, I don't think you take the politics out of it, you shift it to a different set of politics. But there will always be politics with the delivery of local services by a local government. So I come down on leaving it with the city, not because they've done a great job in the past, but because I think that they have got a path forward that will allow them to get management that has expertise, that knows how to run the system, and they're too afraid now not to pay attention to what that person says. I don't think that a water management district that has a majority of members appointed by the governor is going to be as responsive. Or customers will have as much control over the system as they would if you left them with the city. But I also encourage you to hedge your bets. Defer the bill. Instead, appoint a citizen board that reports directly to the two of you that has access to records, to operational decisions, to whether or not long-term planning is going on, to whether the city is actually turning over a new lease or not. Have them make regular reports to you. Give them the complete ability to have a total vision over what's going on. And if after some period of time, say a year, nothing has happened, you don't think that the city is on the right path, then you've made a case for taking it away from them. But right now, it seems to me we had a terrible crisis and we're rushing to implement a solution that it's going to lead the people who paid for the system and who ultimately bear the brunt of any decision with less power than they have today. And I don't think that's prudent or wise. I would also respectfully suggest, I've been around the legislative planet long enough to know, that if the two people sponsoring a local bill are in favor of it, all the testimony in the world is not going to alter the outcome. Other legislators will honor your wishes. So, in my opinion, it's do or die today. And I really encourage you to work with the city, get an oversight board, stay involved in it, but don't pull the lever on a complete revolution today or yet. It's always there as a tool available to you.

Representative Shoaf (32:52)

Thank you. I appreciate your comments. I'll give you one rebuttal on the last part, though. The senator and I ran a local bill together last year that went all the way to the end, and we pulled the plug on it at the end. And that was because of the progress we've made between

this part of it and the final vote. So it does happen. And there's a lot of good input that can come to make it better. I would just push back a little bit on that part and let you know we do want to listen. The comment made earlier about the citizens not being full-time residents here that hadn't been brought up yet. That's a great one. We'd love to hear more good ideas from you.

Bonnie Davis (33:36)

Well, I'm very glad that you are willing to pull a bill later on down the road. But I think what we're encouraging you to do is let's don't waste three or four months debating the merits of this particular bill. Let's defer it and get something in place that will actually have a chance to produce some information that might better guide your decision than what happened last summer. And the time to do that is today, in my opinion. Thank you.

Representative Shoaf (33:29)

LaRaela Lee Coxwell

LaRaela Lee Coxwell (34:29)

Representative Shoaf, Senator Simon, thank you so much for the opportunity to speak. I attended the majority of all of such commissions over the last four years. And I think that probably most of the commissioners grit their teeth whenever they see the comment. I've been disgruntled and angry at the lack of community engagement, at the lack of response, transparency, leadership, integrity across the board. This isn't something that a few people saw in common. But this was something that it was absolutely inevitable. I'm not a fan of the board's commission and the capacity of the administration. I'm the opposite of that. I used to work for the legislature. I used to work for representative for the legislature. I know what kind of hard work it takes to bring a thorough and comprehensive bill. And the reason I'm going to tell you I'm not in favor of this one is there are so many holes in it. I believe that it feels a little bit rushed and unfinished and potentially put the citizens of Avalanche Cole back in the same vulnerable position that they were this past spring. I think that the outrage, the righteous outrage of the citizenry is what has prompted things to get better. I really, I spoke at that town meeting y'all came and had at the armory. And I pleaded with you to help us get some help. And you came through it. And I am forever grateful for that. I feel like Apalachicola is not necessarily unique in terms of small town culture. You get a pass if you were born here and you were raised here and now you want a big position here, whether or not you have the credentials. I think we've seen the end of that culture. We've got a city manager from New York City for God's sakes now. I mean, there's no bigger risk. It hasn't been taken by the local people to bring somebody in like that. I'm encouraged by the level of accountability that may be demanded of our commission up to this point. But we

all know that the electorate generally wants to be spoon-fed. They don't want to be bothered with the details. And when you're talking about people are essentially holding torches and pitchforks, they like a broad brush approach. I just don't think this is finished. Commissioner Elliott mentions that the problem with that. I own a business here. I own a home here. And I own rentals here. But for this water crisis, I stay in Tallahassee. So, as she has highlighted, I would be eligible for that award. And I should not be. Because the water made my house stink so bad I couldn't stand to be in it down here. I just, I think that you've been in politics long enough. If you don't think three political appointees, it's political. It's political. And I think, if I could be mistaken, but I think if the bill is written, the board is required to meet once a year. And I know that you know that any board that's required to meet once a year is a token gesture. An empty and a token gesture. So, I just want to say that I do not have a lot of confidence in the city commission thus far. I do see a sea change. And I am encouraged by it. But I think the bill is problematic. And I would have, I would have attended your fundraisers and sang your praises if there weren't holes in it that I don't think it's ready and I think if you are unwilling to collaborate on this bill with the city commission, I don't know if you can understand how hard it is for me to say those words, but I believe it. That we have, we have, we're in a better place for people, for staffing now. We have some understanding of things. And we have an electorate that's going to hold people accountable. And so I'm asking you to consider delaying it. If you can't collaborate on something that fills the gaps that are big, I think, and to shelve it until next year. Until we've done, I don't, I'm not, I'm not looking for anybody to go to prison, by the way. I'm not a fan of this past administration. And I'm not looking for people to go to prison. But I would really love an operational audit so we could see why our departments have not functioned properly or efficiently. And again, this is a part before the horse issue that Mr. Zingerelli was talking about. Why don't we have that information yet before reforming this legislation? So I would all, with all gratitude, I thank you both for the work that you've done here. And I'm just saying I'm not signing off on it because I just don't think it's finished. Thank you.

Representative Shoaf

I appreciate it. Thank you.

Senator Simon (40:01)

And would you, look? See, your comment, it isn't finished. That is, that is the whole point of this meeting. That is the whole point of the process that we have to go through to get this, get this bill through. Because it isn't finished. It's not finished. What you see today will not be what you see at the first stop or the last stop. There will be different iterations. And part of the, part of formulating a bill, because just so you can understand the process, there are 1,900, 2,000 bills that are filed every year. The first iteration of the bill, rarely, rarely, is what

finally passes on the floor of the House or the Senate and makes its way to the governor's desk. Rarely. I don't think, in my last three years, I've never seen a bill that is left so that we can make the necessary changes that I think will make this bill what it needs to be in the end for the folks that have left. That's what this process is about. It's not about ramming through something that we feel. It's about hearing the input from the folks that live here. Also experiencing those folks that may not be here today that are totally for what it is that we're trying to get done. And so it's bigger than just the people that are in this room. And it's bigger than what the initial view or the initial words on a page of this current bill. So we will continue to work through the issues of the bill. If the frequency of a meeting is once a year, we look at how do we expand it. If, you know, if how the board is made up is a problem, we look at ways that we can get to a position where we can make some concessions there. But that's a part of the process. But if we do none of this, we are then, depending on a system, not done what it was supposed to do. It just hasn't. And so if we walk away, what we're saying is, okay. But then the next time it happens, because the phone call that I got, we need help. We need water down here. Folks can't bathe. They can't drink. And you know who I picked up the phone and called? I called the governor's office and I called the Senate president. Can we chip in? What can the state do to provide resources? Because Apalachicola is a fiscally constrained county, doesn't have the revenue to pay for the ice trailers and the shower trailers. And so the taxpayers of this state put the bill to cover those costs. So on top of all of the money that the taxpayers have spent in the past, I have to step in and fix the problem again. So how many times do we go through that dance? And like I said, it isn't until the belt comes out and it's time for the lashes that now I'm a good boy again. That's just, that can't be the way we operate government. It can't be.

Representative Shoaf (43:16)

Next up is...

LaRaela Lee Coxwell (43:22)

Let me just say one second response. I appreciate the metaphor because I do agree that people snap back into good behavior when there's a, when something's hanging over their head. I appreciate that. I just wish there would have been a real push urgency to finish these audits so we could have a really good road map for how to lay things out to make sure we never find ourselves in this position again. But again, I appreciate your thoughts and the things that you have to say. I don't think it's finished.

Senator Simon (43:51)

We will walk and chew gum at the same time, I promise you. The audit will continue to move forward so that we can find out what went wrong and what are the deficiencies in

local government and how do we add efficiencies to the means so that we can make sure that we're protecting the taxpayer.

Representative Shoaf (44:08)

And I would add that these problems, having grown up in St. Joe, just right down the road, we get the same news, we know the same folks, we hear the same stuff. But these issues have been going on since I was a little kid. I mean, nothing's new here folks. And to me, I know the city has done a good job rounding up their closest friends to come speak today. (LOUD GROANS FROM THE CROWD). The overwhelming...The overwhelming... I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Hold on one second. Look, we can wrap this up or we can continue to talk. I'd like to hear from you. But my point is, the overwhelming feedback our offices are getting are to take the system from the city. Period. Overwhelming. 85, 90%. So it is...I'm glad you're here today. And I want to hear these good ideas.

But in no way is this a clean representation of the system's customers by any means. And I think it's Linda Buchanan.

Linda Buchanan (45:16)

Good afternoon, my name is Linda Buchanan. I live at 211 A Street, free of my froggy voice. Again, I thank you for caring about us. I thank you for the actions you took this summer, for showing up today. Your staff is here. This takes a lot of time and energy and resources from you all. I believe you very accurately understood the depth of anger and frustration that all of this community felt this summer. All of us this summer. Did you politically not assume that that level of anger and frustration is still at that level? Now, I appreciate you talking about an 85% metric. That's interesting to me. Because as I just said to Mr. Miller, I'm going to pick on him. This is not a raging liberal progressive Democrat over here. This is a solid Republican to the government and does not want to see government overreach. I believe that is accurate. So local control here is highly valued. Perception of government overreach is not. And here. So if the rates go up, which seems inevitable no matter what we do to fix our infrastructure, we're going to have to raise rates.

But if this bill passes and rates go up, whether it is fair or not, whether correlation is not causality, this is going to come squarely back on YouTube. And I really encourage you to think about that. Because people like Mr. Miller are the backbone of your constituency. The manager, I appreciate, Mr. Schoaf, that you don't force the manager so about. And until this gentleman, I was not at all convinced that they possessed both the ability and the will to do the job correctly. So we are very fortunate to have hired Mr. Anderson. That is a credit to our city commission who made that hire. I support my current city manager. I support my current city commission. And I would ask, as many others have, is to hold the bill for a year.

As we do, as we see the progress that we are currently making, I think the points about audits are very well made. I do support the creation of a local oversight board. Interesting point that that board might report directly to you. I envision that as reporting to the city commission. I'm kind of big on chain of command. When things get a little bit convoluted, nobody's accountable. But I think that's an interesting point that that board might report to you. So, again, thank you. Thank you for this opportunity.

Representative Shoaf (48:30)

Thank you. All right.

Representative Shoaf (48:33)

Robin Ripple, and that is as far as I can go.

Robin Vroegop (48:44)

Good to see you today again. My name is Robin Vroegop. I live at 145 Avenue C in Appalachia Cole. I have for 30 plus years. First, I want to thank you, yes, of course, for your help. But we'll get to that later. I want to first thank you both for your service. Because I've been around the political scene enough my whole life. I've been a political junkie for forever. And I know it takes a lot out of you to have to do this and have to mediate this. It's tough. Yeah. Y'all have a huge district too. So, I want to thank you for doing that. I feel like I need to start first. And I don't usually do this. I like to be the dog in the corner watching what's going on. And in truth, I have chronicled over 20 years of cultural, political, yes, but lifestyle. Just imbued myself in my adopted hometown is almost half my life spent him now. So, whatever you want to call me local or non-local, I am definitely plugged in here. So, I wanted to say that and also to tell you that I try not too often to take a stand, but to get both sides. I've had the county attorney call me the truth speaker. I've heard the local editor of the paper call me a dad prop fly. But I certainly have watched and I have certainly come away with some conclusions. I've watched a lot. I don't want to make a recommendation, which will relieve you, but I want to bring out a few things that have been overlooked.

Right here in this chamber, not quite 10 years ago, I presented to them as a then senator, and it doesn't matter who it was, and I'm not suggesting or comparison, but I'm just going to state the facts and you come away. I presented him and I had already sent registered mail to his office, this document right here. What it is, it's our 2019, January 2019, request from JLAC for an operational audit. That long ago, that long ago, it would be seven years ago, we never got a response from JLAC. That was a long time ago, and I'm not saying that this should blow back on you. I'm just saying that that was sent, not by me personally, but a group of citizens. So, I just want to dispel any idea that we've been on our heels and

haven't paid attention. It went into great details about audits we've had, the three times we had had a finding of financial instability then, okay, which indicates usually JLAC sends in a group to investigate it, of course, at the community's expense, which would have been bad. But also, we pointed out the first paragraph of the letter, and I haven't read it in a while, and I was reading it today, the first paragraph. With the letter, we firmly request you that the Joint Legislative Audit Committee to direct the Auditor General to conduct a comprehensive and index audit of the operational practices and managerial oversight of the city of Apalachicola. The city has been in extreme financial straits, dating back to at least 2012. That was seven years prior back then. Okay. I think I've made my point there. Okay, but we went on to corroborate it, and the first thing we bring up is what? The water and sewer. In detail of the water and sewer, what had gone on, and you all are aware that I know you are, but I want you to remember that that came from a coalition of citizens here. Some of them now sit on the city commission. Some of them now sit before you as your aides. She's not going to like that, but anyway, it's the truth, and I am the truth speaker, and I care for her very much. Okay. The other thing I wanted to point out is we got into details. We went into the consent orders that were being ignored. There were other things, too, besides city and city water, but this is about the water. It's three and a half, four inches long, but I want to read instead of going into a lot of detail because there's so many that want to speak here, and their voices are very important to me and to you. The last two paragraphs, if you'll indulge me, can I read them? They're short. May I?

Representative Shoaf (54:03)

Can you please summarize them for us?

Robin Vroegop (54:05)

Pardon me?

Representative Shoaf (54:05)

Would you mind summarizing the paragraphs?

Robin Vroegop (54:08)

I'm sorry. I'm hard of hearing.

Representative Shoaf (54:10)

Would you mind summarizing the two paragraphs?

Robin Vroegop (54:14)

There is a growing breach of trust between the citizens and the city government over the past 10 years, and a feeling of helplessness. And to us, we have watched the city's slow unraveling of finances. I can go on about that, but my last paragraph is this. We wrote this seven years ago. We were on the ball, and I believe these people can stay on the ball at least for another year to try to prove that we can do something different. The last paragraph was, our city desperately needs help to reorder this financial crisis that we find ourselves in. Senator Monkford, we implore you, I'm sorry, that's who it was, I didn't want to beat him up, but to request the Joint Legislative Auditing Committee on which you serve, and the Auditor General conduct an audit of the city's finances as referenced above. Your constituents are turning to you once again to get us on the road to sound financial help and restore confidence in our public trust. Please help us. Okay, I think that speaks for ourselves, and I'm going to leave you with all this. And looking at the operational audit, probably deserve to know about this. We never got a single response to it from JLAC. We got one response from one of the senator's aides, and that was it. So, here's my personal concern. Now we're about Robin. In the future, we see unique issues in particular that apply to our town with the water, and it's...

END OF RECORDING

Allen Palmer (00:21)

Is that you have Facebook warriors that this lady is in contact with on social media burning up your phones. And you came in here with a formed opinion of what those things are being said. And then you came in and we're ready to speak. We're saying she called us cheerleaders. And that they stacked the room for that. I'm not that guy. I want clean water. I want city government that works and isn't. But the way I see it happening isn't. I'm not saying this feels wrong. Anybody in my study. And then I go into the Piggly Weekly. And I sat down there and I talked to the mayor. I talked to one of the commissioners. And I said I don't know what the hell this means. Or what's going on. Because it matters to me. I'm not doing this because you know I'm jumping on a bandwagon. But I'm doing it because I do give a damn about this place. And I chose this as my home. I'm not a local who is responsible for 30 years of sitting back and letting councils and city managers do their things. But I think the way we affect change and the way it's happened since that meeting is you guys getting involved. It's getting the hell out of people who are sitting there worrying that they're going to come up on some paperwork that they don't want to see it on. But then it's also being affected by me fishing off the park pier in the mornings. The city manager of Anderson happens to be coming by. And I have access to a guy who's standing there and he listens to me. And I think that's how we can truly affect change around here. It's not about bullshit. It's about actually caring. And if all these commissioners aren't doing what they're

doing by what they're saying, we get up in the meetings and we show up. I don't get on Facebook and trash people or say that the city is going to hell in a handbasket. I'm not going to sit what you did yesterday and blame the city manager.

Representative Shoaf

Sir, sir, sir. Hold on. Time out. We're not going to get into our staff. No, no, no. No, no, no. No, no, no, no. Sir, sir, sir. We are not here to talk to our staff. The senator and I are right here. Why would you like to meet after us? We had a group of people at your staff. You can call my office anytime, but you will not belittle a staff member at this meeting. Period.

Allen Palmer (02:31)

Anyway, passion is great. But passion doesn't do anything but fuel fires. Intelligence, well reasoned, thought out information. Intelligent people like Dr. Lynn Walder, Dr. Knutson, people in our community that are brilliant minds. They've done incredible things. And they're not about politics. They're about drinking the water. And I think that we care affecting change. Not by being negative Facebook lawyers, but by literally holding their feet to the fire in the Piggly Wiggly. And I think that we're doing good things. And as I said before, I'm not saying that this bill in its entirety is wrong. I agree with Lorela and the other folks saying that there are things I'm encouraged by what you said about how these things can be addressed. And now they can be fixed. And that's all great. But I think if we can take our passion and turn it into reason, well thought out information, that we can set a precedent for a state that needs a precedent set. That we can actually do something really great here. I chose to be here. I'm choosing to be here. And I'm not running away from it. And I believe that good people in this town have the best hearts and the best intentions that we can actually do something really great. I'm just saying this may be fantastic. But let's slow our roll enough so that the fear that the people out here feel, you know, that what they feel, the fear that they feel, the anxiety that they're expressing can be dealt with appropriately so that we can all move forward together. Otherwise, we're just going to have more divisions. We're all just going to hate each other. You know?

Mr. Vroegop

If you apologize right now, that's a start.

Allen Palmer

Me?

Mr. Vroegop

Yes, you. Okay.

Allen Palmer

For engaging staff. No, I won't. I'd love to tell you. All right.

Mr Vroegop

We'd love to tell you.

Representative Shoaf

Thank you. Thank you for your comments. Next is Eric Palmer.

Eric Palmer (04:39)

My name is Eric Palmer. I live at 140 Avenue C. You heard a lot about our concerns about accountability. I'm not going to ramble too long over that. A suggestion that it's apolitical is ridiculous if you're talking about an appointed board. Politics enters everything in our lives. Let's just be honest and call spade a spade about that. As for the legislative process, you pointed out a bill perhaps that was withdrawn during the process. That, I believe you would agree, is a bit of an outlier. When a local delegation supports a bill, historically, it has been passed in multiple legislative bodies. So I believe that is a fair statement to make. But even that's not so much important. I've spent my life, my professional career, as a newborn ICU doctor. I have been tasked time and time again over three decades with making life and death decisions, oftentimes within seconds and minutes, when I have incomplete information and I just got it the best I can to save that baby's life. That happens. But my job is also to know when the situation has become less acute and that I have time to obtain data and to get more information to make better, accurate, well thought out decisions to help that same baby. I've been around 61 years, and in 61 years you see a lot of really bad laws and reaction from our government when things are made with emotion and made with haste. I'm not necessarily against the bill. I'm not. However, I expect the accountability to be there. I expect to not be given inaccurate information through various means. And I believe that has happened in this process. And is this, you mentioned that, hey, we've got more layers to go. I certainly believe that first drafts of bills, they go through multiple changes. But is this our only chance to comment on the next series of changes? And so just understand we do care. We're not here to rubber stamp things. It may well be this is the best thing. But make the decision based on data and wait in a few months for an operational audit to be completed and available. I'm not even asking for a year. Give us, defer it until that time, at the very least. Thank you. Thank you.

Senator Simon (07:37)

I keep hearing this incomplete data as if the last 20 years don't matter. Like that wasn't data? Is that not data that the state is pumping millions of dollars into the infrastructure

here in Apalachicola and the outcome of that data was a failed water system. That is data. That is the ultimate data. That is complete. That's not incomplete. That's complete. We have an operational audit still. So when the system fails and you have ground water that smells like rotten eggs, that is a failure. That is not success. Now, what comes out on the back end of that is the work that needs to be done. And that is also part of the process. If you're going to take state resources from taxpayers, including the taxpayers in this city, and then expect the state to just say, okay, just do what you want, it's okay, I know that you failed, but it's okay, and you don't want us to interject at all, that's a problem. That is data. In my opinion, that is data. We pumped millions of dollars into a system, we paid for those folks that were in those positions to make sure that that system was supposed to work accordingly, and it didn't. But we kept throwing good money after bad. And we ended up in a situation like this. It shouldn't be surprising that we look to change course.

I am appreciative of the new members that have come on to the city council that are fired up now about water. I am appreciative of the new city manager. The new basket of just people. Because what happens if the city manager decides to leave? What happens if something happens to that city manager and he can no longer be here? What happens when the eyes and the attention leave Apalachicola because the water crisis is no longer there? And the system falls into disrepair again? What ifs? And it has to go past emotions and personnel. Because elected officials will change. And city managers will change. I see your hand great. I don't need somebody to raise their hand and talk to me. More than welcome, we can have a conversation. To make sure is that we put a system in place, not people in place, but a system in place that can work. Because we tried it the other way and it hasn't worked. That's how we got here. And I don't think anyone in this room can disagree with the fact that we were in a very bad place. And it wasn't until the eyes of the media and of your electeds, your state electeds, started paying attention that now everybody, again, the belt came out and now everybody wants to say we're focused, hyper-focused on the world. It's not what happened. It's not what happened.

Eric Palmer (11:36)

It's not what happened.

Senator Simon

Sir, you're welcome to come back up and we can talk after this. I'm not running from anywhere. So, your additional comments, I'm more than happy to hear them out.

Al Engel (11:56)

Representative Shoaf, Senator Simon, thank you for being here. Thank you for taking the interest and letting me speak. My name is Al Engel. I live at 27 Merle Avenue when I was

born here. I come from an aviation world. In aviation, you're accountable. Everybody's accountable. The feds make sure that all the verbiage and all the regulations, everything, you're accountable. Okay? So, the city here is being held accountable justly, okay, for what they've done the last 20 years. We understand that. Okay? The question I have is, when I look at your, um, the, um, the, um, that you're putting in, that you're submitting, um, I don't see any accountability from this new board. You're telling us that, yes, what the city has done is mismanagement on a gross level. I don't think anybody's going to argue with that. Okay? The question is, you're going to come in, you're going to have this state board, and it's going to do all these wonderful things. It's going to solve all our problems. Okay? I'm saying, from an aviation world, show me accountability. Okay? For example, couldn't you add quality? Since it was so badly run and our water was so bad, can you put in this law that you're going to meet the following, parts per million, contamination, water pressure, delivery, whatever constitutes water quality. You're going to meet this, as part of this, since, since we're incompetent. Okay. How about cost? Now, you get into all kinds of things, inflation, and on and on. What if this board is held accountable to the cost cannot exceed the average for the state of Florida water and sewer services? They're bound by cost, because if you're going to ring out all the inefficiencies and mismanagement here, you should be able to provide quality and cost, better quality, at the same cost as everybody else, the services we're providing in the state of Florida. And the last thing, going back to aviation, aviation, if you don't play by the rules, you don't get to play. Okay? The FAA is so fast to pull your license to do anything on an airplane. Okay? So, what is the, we call it the or else. What happens if you don't meet these metrics? What if it doesn't really get any better? There's delays everywhere. The cost shoots up very high. What's the or else? What is the accountability? What if, we put in there, that if this board doesn't meet these metrics for a number of years, two years, maybe three years consecutive, the control goes back to local. Because you failed at what you said you were going to do. You're taking this because Apalachicola has failed. Okay? But what happens when you fail, or if you fail? Nothing in this bill covers quality. What are you going to provide for this new management? What's going to be the cost? Are you bound by anything? No. No quality management, and there's no accountability. There's no way out. Would you be willing to put that in your bill, some guidelines that we're going to do this, and you should be able to do it?

END OF RECORDING

Mayor Ash (00:08)

...and how we go forward and what we can do to work together on the state level and on the municipal level. Again, I thank you for what you've done in the past. I thank you for what you're attempting to do now for the betterment of the city of Apalachicola. Thank you.

Representative Shoaf (00:30)

Thank you Mayor. I'm gonna respond real quick because I have all the respect in the world for you and our relationship that I don't think has changed a bit as far as I'm concerned. But I do have a job like you to do. And I can tell you where you say you can feel anger coming from up here, out there is. There is a lot of anger because of the pictures, the calls for mothers' crimes saying that they couldn't bathe their children. Completely. And yes, I'm sorry that that anger can't seep down. I've tried to hold it in. I'm furious about it because if that happened with my children, I would be down at City Hall with the pitchforks too. And those people did that and they bussed and bussed for years and they were ignored. They were ignored. The calls, the request for information to the city over this period of time, much less in the past, went unanswered. People were spoken down to. There is a lot of built up feelings about how the city has operated its business. It really doesn't need to be part of this discussion. But since you mentioned it and said you noticed it, I figured I'd better address it. As a father, that's where the anger is coming from. So my job as an elected official for this city, this county and this region is to step in at this point. Because what the senator has harped on over and over again, and it's a good point, the city receives millions of dollars, more than any of the other cities around here, for their water system. And they can't get it right. And it keeps messing up. And you keep changing city managers. And it still keeps going wrong. And we just passed a \$5 million fund specifically for the city for the water and sewer runoff. It just never ends. And we love helping you get those dollars. But when that effort, and that's money from Miami, from Jacksonville, from Mariana, from Annabelle City, from St. Joe, from Crawfordville, it's everywhere coming here. And I've seen, I've heard from experts that say if the system had been managed properly, you wouldn't need all this extra money. What we're about to find out is how much money the city has been transferring from revenues and using on other costs around the city. And then coming out with their handout saying we're out of money, we're broke, and the state gives them more money, and then they've transferred out the back door to do something else. That's illegal. Those are the things that create anger. And I just, I don't believe this city commission is capable of running this water system, period. I don't believe it. I don't believe it. I believe that it has been proven. This isn't a feeling. This is all the proof you want. And then the suggestion that we haven't communicated or we haven't worked with you all, that's insane. I've got notes on eight meetings that I've had since August with your administrator, Chris Holley, Chuck, your lobbyist, with you there. That's eight meetings since August to talk about this one issue. And I can tell you that your former city manager told me on two of those occasions, I told him, we have to work together now so that we can work on something, come up with a local bill that the city and the state are partners on. He came back and your city commission said, no, we're not going to do

anything until they come up with a bill. So don't tell me that we haven't been communicating. We've been trying and asking for the city input to work with us on a local bill. And it has been crickets up until the last delegation meeting when we put it forward. That's when everybody jumped up and said, okay, now wait, wait, wait, we're ready. So no, no, ma'am, and I have all the respect in the world for you as a person. I know you care and love your constituents. I believe you're honest with them and I believe you're a good person. The commission as a whole is incapable of running a water and sewer system, period, in my opinion.

Mayor Ash (05:01)

None of us are engineers for water people. That's not what we are. We are professionals that live, work, breathe, drink water in this city. All of us on the commission care about this city. Some of the comments that were made could be debated, but we won't do that. Because going forward, forward looking is my goal to look forward. We can continue to talk about the things that you have brought up. We can continue to throw darts at one another. But what is that going to accomplish? Until we can sit down and have a conversation on how to move forward, will we genuinely accomplish the mission that we all have in mind?

Senator Simon (06:22)

I will say, one, I put down anger a long time ago. My mother told me dogs get angry. I get extremely disappointed. I ran from politics for a long time because I just got tired of seeing folks that gave a whole lot of lip service and nothing ever changed. And one of the things that I told Representative Shelf on many occasions, and other members of the delegation that represent Leon and some of my other counties, is I'm in this to make sure that the folks that don't feel like they have a voice, have a voice. And so whether that is going after a city of 750 that have been disenfranchised like we did last year, or a town of 2,500, or 250,000. Those folks that have showed up for years as evidence by this. This is great evidence. Because seven years ago, you bought this. You wanted an audit. Because things weren't looking the way they should look for local government. Seven years later, you're still waiting on that audit. Before the JLAC Committee. I brought it before the JLAC Committee. Because in the summer, I sat before you all and said we were going to request an audit. And we did that. In the JLAC meeting, unanimously, we're getting that off. Important that folks that live in communities that depend on their elected officials to represent them. What we have now is less than 50% in the nation actually show up to vote. So why is that? For many of them, and far too many of those stories, because they don't feel like they're being represented or heard. Guess what? You showed up in August, and you all were screaming for pitchforks.

And you were heard. Don't get to always pick the punishment. The opportunity. Do you want this switch, or do you want to sit in your room and know? No. The product that will leave out of here and go to the governor's desk. Wherever that goes. Being definitive. Time for suggestions. In January, when this gets its first committee meeting, you can show up at that meeting. And let your voices be heard. And depending on if it gets one stop, two stops, three stops, whatever, you can show up. You can call our offices and make suggestions. You've made several here today. That's the great thing about this process. Sometimes I sit out, I tell her, Why do we have to look at the bags? I'm going to do better tomorrow. Just let me do better tomorrow. But that was an impact. Put some clothes on the floor. Yeah, but that was an impact. To reflect the future. And if we do nothing, we're just sitting back in those folks that couldn't show up here today. Or those folks that may have different opinions. Or even many of you that had come and stood. Because really and truly, you want your water fixed. You want to be able to determine what your bill's going to be. That's what's really important. We're having a conversation today. But ultimately, this is what's going to matter. You're going to walk in your house. You're going to turn on your faucet. You're going to stick a glass or a cup under that. And you're going to drink it. At some point in time, during the course of the month, you're going to get a bill. And you're going to see how much it's going to cost you for that clean water that you're drinking. Or that not so clean water that you haven't been able to drink. What am I paying for? See, the uproar came because people were still getting bills for water they couldn't drink. That's what matters. Don't get caught up in what's presumably a political fight. When what really matters to you is how much money is coming out of your pocket. And can you actually drink the product or bathe in the product that you're paying for? And if we're going to put a system in place that is new. And nobody likes new. Nobody likes new. Nobody likes change. Nobody. We're going to resist change. But if change works. And you're like, okay. What was the big deal? What was the big deal? Reliable rates. And I've got water that I can drink. And I can shave. And shower. That's what we're trying to get to. Now, there's a process to get to that point. And I want your input. But look at it through the caveat. We're asking for input from the same people that left the system down. And let you all down.

Mayor Ash (13:38)

Before I relinquish the podium. That does matter. And looking back, you create the opportunity or you have the opportunity to make change. You may not believe in us. We believe in us. You may not be willing to give us a chance, but we're still going to give ourselves a chance. So, thank you again for what you've done. For the City of Athletico, you've always been there cheering us on. And I appreciate that. And I hope you continue to cheer us on. We believe in what we're doing. We believe in going forward. We have community members that are willing, that have stepped up to assist, that have the

knowledge in these fields. So, Jesus gives us all a chance. Every day, we give brand new mercies. It's a brand new day. And for you to sit up there and say that you don't want to give the City of Apalachicola that opportunity, it's just not right. So, I'm grateful to God that I have brand new mercies each and every day. I'm going to allow City Manager Anderson to come up and give you an update on where we're going.

Representative Shoaf (15:33)

Mayor, I've still got another public appearance card. We're going to get to that first. Okay. Thank you. Thank you.

Representative Shoaf (15:36)

Brad Glaze.

Brad Glaze (15:47)

My name is Brad Glaze. I'm recently relocated within the last three months to the City of Apalachicola. And so, like some of the others that I've heard speak here today, I'm new to the community. We've gone on quite some time here. And I just want to make a couple of points. First of all, I am against this local bill as it currently stands. I believe that the people of Apalachicola should be given an opportunity with the new city administration and with the new people that are in place to break this measure. Because I believe that in the constitutional republic that we live in, the people should be allowed to have their voice in this matter. And that brings me to my first point, the first main point. One of the big issues that we are facing here is stability. The government, the people of Apalachicola, as the Senator pointed out, need certainty in what their rates are going to be. They need certainty in how their water system is going to be run. The thing that is most analogous to what's going on here in Apalachicola right now in the state of Florida, I believe, is what went on in Gainesville earlier this year with a similar special bill or special piece of legislation. And with that piece of legislation, I think it was the Gainesville Utility Authority that was formed to deal with a similar issue within the city of Gainesville. As far as I understand it, the people of Gainesville voted on a referendum to overturn what the legislature had done. And as I understand it, that matter is currently on appeal within the Florida appellate system. They did not stay or provide, the court did not provide any type of injunction on the bill to stay the Gainesville Utility Authority's authority. But it seems to be a great deal of uncertainty right now as to whether or not the Gainesville Utility Authority will be able to go forward under this special legislation.

From what I've read, it seems that the people of Gainesville could come back and vote in a referendum to redo or overturn what happened there based on, depending upon what the, ultimately, I guess, the Florida Supreme Court rules. So it would seem to me that given the

uncertainty in that area, that it would at least provide a good opportunity to pause here and at least see what comes out in that legislation. Or not in the legislation, but in that court case before we address the issues here. I wanted to address one more point. Someone mentioned earlier that I believe that this issue brought some conservative voices out within the community. Well, a little anecdote, when I was making the decision to move here several months ago and talking to some realtors and going around to different houses within the community, I did not wear my political beliefs on my sleeve at all. As a matter of fact, I wasn't sure what the local client was with respect to that around here. As a matter of fact, I was talking to one realtor and she told me that I was talking to one realtor and she told me that I was a dot of blue within a sea of red. I must say that when she told me that, I got a lump in my throat and it gave me quite a bit of pause because I would generally find myself to be on the red side of that. Well, I found that I am a dot of red probably in the sea of blue, but given that, I found that this issue has brought many different types of people politically together. You don't see a lot of agreement in our nation or in our state or in our communities on a lot of things, but from what I can tell here today, you see a lot of agreement on this. And the agreement is that the people should be given an opportunity, especially given the uncertainty, which I alluded to earlier, that is very real and is a very real risk with what's going on in the city of Gainesville right now. Thank you.

Representative Shoaf (20:01)

Thank you. All right. City Manager, did you want to give us an update on what all you're doing now? Then we're going to wrap this up.

Chuck Anderson (20:14)

Representative Shoaf, Senator Simon and the staffs, thank you for being here today. I appreciate the time and opportunity to recap the collaborative efforts that the city and the state and other parties have undertaken to enhance and fix and work on our water and sewer utility system. First and foremost, I think we said earlier, I'd like to say we're happy to report water quality meets all state and federal requirements and their standards. The city has come a long way since June of 2025, and there have been many meaningful changes to our water and sewer utilities to improve the situation. And more will continue. A few examples of that are what I would like to go into below. For our water service and our infrastructure, we're more than halfway through a \$500,000 well rehabilitation project. We have one well that has been completely rehabilitated and has a new motor, excuse me, as a new motor. That is well number six. And since it has been rehabilitated, the water clarity depth has increased from 70 feet to more than 400 feet. And it's giving out more than twice the gallons per minute than it was previously. We're in the middle of rehabilitating wells five and seven.

New motors and the new pumps are going to go in there also. But the equipment has also been standardized. Instead of having different pumps that operate at different horsepower, we've got the same pumps at the same horsepower. If we need to swap equipment, we can do that now. Previously, that wasn't done. But that's something that is being pursued right now. A future well number eight is past the concept phase. And the \$1.5 million of funding has been secured for a new fourth municipal well designed to advance energy efficient systems. And it's harbored against extreme weather events. Our famous odor scrubber or aerator, it's up and operational as of the end of November. This half a million dollar effort removed the need for the hydrogen peroxide injections. And we continue to have negative contaminant testing results. We've replaced 180 out of the 215 fire hydrants across the state. An audit of overdue utility accounts was conducted recently. And measures were taken to standardize this practice on a routine basis. And when I say routine, routine and scheduled basis. Ordinances are being followed for the handling of overdue accounts. And there is a focus, a very strong focus on accountability, but balanced with the assistance for people to meet. We're working with Florida Rural Water to perform a full hands-on meter audit to ensure we can match the meters in service with our inventory. We also want to cross-reference that with the properties and individual accounts. Because we want to ensure to 100% that each water sewer tap that has been installed is functioning properly. It's properly accounted for, and it's associated with a billing account. Twenty-three requests that the community had for water sewer taps that were backed up because of the water crisis this summer are completed. There's zero right now that are overdue. Weekly water quality and system reports that were started in June continue to be posted to the city's website and on social media to keep the community updated. I do have to say thanks to Lynn Wilder, a community member who has taken this on herself to compile the information to make sure it gets posted on a weekly basis. She assists the city in doing that. We're also actively conducting interviews for a utilities director, and we do have some promising candidates. In fact, I interviewed a gentleman last Friday, and I have another one scheduled for this week. On our sewer service, our wastewater treatment plant Phase A project was awarded to North Florida Construction in November at approximately \$9.3 million. We have a \$1.3 million IGA and Ellis Van Fleet lift station upgrade contract that was also awarded in November. This effort will totally retrofit those lift stations and provide backup generators on a first-time basis. They've never had backup generators before at both locations. We've also awarded a contract for sewer upgrades collection system. It's called a flow-back system, and a flow-back system is kind of like a smart system that you have that uses pressure versus gravity to move your sewage around. We have approximately 50% of our sewer system that is on this flow-back system. Now we're going to get it to 100%. We completed spray field and solar projects to install 150 replacement spray heads. You know why? Because it increases the reliability and resiliency of our

wastewater reuse program. We're currently and actively working on an inflow and infiltration study that we had through a grant opportunity of \$300,000 to identify our aging infrastructure, which has made up a lot of terracotta pipes and failing water lines. And those are some of the things that were started before I arrived, and I continue to make sure that they move forward as the staff. And those are the things that we're working on to make sure the water and the sewer utility system are at the best operating efficiency as possible, they're prepared for the future, and they're used to gain the trust and confidence of our community. The city is aware of the problems that have been identified, and we have made great strides correcting them, and we will continue to do so. And as other people have mentioned, we couldn't have done it without your help, so thank you. We continue to work with DEP, following up on previously noted routine inspection and consent and judicial order deficiencies. In fact, I've had meetings almost every month for the last few months with DEP and with our contracted engineering firm. And what I want to say is that for the number, and I couldn't get an exact number on it. I think it's in excess of 50 deficiencies that were noted. I think we're down to about four deficiencies that are left. A verification of O&M or procedural manuals. An agreement with DEP on the construction phasing of our phase A of the wastewater treatment plan construction. We just need to make sure that they're in agreement with the way that we have the construction phase so a write-up can be taken away. And the last one is a review of our valve exercise program. Senator, you mentioned system. And you couldn't have been more right about that. Putting a system in place. And pardon me if I may, but you come from a football background. And so when you played professional football, you had a system in place. If something happened to you or you needed a break or you were injured, somebody could fall in and take your place. Because there was a system in place to make sure that could happen. And that's where my focus is right now. It's on a water and sewer utility system that has systems in place and backups to make sure that we don't run into the same problems that we did before. That is a work in progress that is being done. It's something I've done either 27 years in the United States Air Force or for the last 15 years associated with local government. To make sure when you're in the special operations arena, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and you're working with nuclear weapons, you have systems in place. So I am not the answer all for this solution, but I want to tell you I'm going to be part of the solution. Thank you. Thank you.

Representative Shoaf (27:45)

Thank you, Chuck. Again, I'll tell you the first time I met you, second, third, and now. I am very impressed with you and your ability. I think that the city needs you and needed you for a long time. I'm going to use your phrase, though. A single point of failure is not acceptable. If you get hit by a bus tomorrow, I don't know that, you know, I don't know what will happen.

So I'm glad you're here. Don't go around any buses. And we need you in Apalachicola for many years to come.

Senator, do you have any comments before we... I believe they have...I don't know. I'm so sorry. I was looking down on my notes. I don't have any more cards. So if you could please tell us who you are.

Commissioner Knutson (28:31)

Sure. I'm Donna Knutson. I'm a commission member and a resident in Apalachicola for the last 10 years. And, you know, I...

AUDIO NOT AVAILABLE

Commissioner Duncan (00:03)

Hi. Good afternoon. My name is Donna Duncan and I am a whatever you want to call it. I've been called native. I've been called a local. I've been called a back-homer because I did leave. I have a law license and I have a doctorate in the law so I'm am certainly not incompetent and I say that because I want to explain today as Donna Duncan the citizen and the local here and as a city commissioner the problem that I have had through this process is not feeling comfortable to step out is the rhetoric. And I explained this very early on when I had a conversation with Rebecca and Dunn's office, it's just a, who deserves the whippings? Who deserves the lashings? Who deserves for the heads to roll? This is my second term as a commissioner and I am so thankful that I was re-elected because I do believe that that's because the people who know me know that I am about my hometown of Apalachicola. But I also have passion and sitting here as a bar member, an officer of the court, I do get upset when people, and it's coming from the rhetoric of politics and you're telling us it doesn't have to be political, but when I am hearing things in the present, knowing very good and well that I have not stolen any money, I don't even know how any of the other commissioners that I sit with would steal any money, or how our heads were going to roll. I mean, who are we lashing here, Senator Simon, because I don't deserve a lashing.

Senator Simon (00:57)

I'm sorry, I hate to cut you off, but you were going down, you were casting aspersions that, one, I never said. I have not, did I say anybody stole anything?

Commissioner Duncan (01:10)

At the very first meeting we had at the Armory, you all had a little time chart that said \$34 million, and you also said that the infrastructure was failure. And then, U ggmyer did the

video. So yes, you even made the comment at that meeting that we were going to have these audits, but then you stated, but all of the records are destroyed. So yes, sir, you did cast those aspersions. I've been living this for a year. So anyway...

Senator Simon (01:37)

So, you're saying that I said someone stole the money?

Commissioner Duncan (01:40)

You have all implied and made comments that there's been malfeasance and something...

Senator Simon (01:45)

What I said is mismanagement. Mismanagement isn't malfeasance.

Commissioner Duncan (01:49)

I understand that, but...

Representative Shoaf (01:50)

Donna, Donna, I'm out, I'm out. This is not productive. What is it that you would like to communicate with us before we vote on this?

Commissioner Duncan (01:57)

I am communicating to y'all exactly what I want to communicate with you, is that the narrative has changed. There have been allegations. The only Facebook lawyers that I've had to deal with are those who are representing your interests. And I think that it's unfair to sit up here and use those types of comments and then shut me down when I'm repeating those comments back to you. It's unfair, and I'm asking you that whatever it is that has caused... I looked at those videos, I looked at those pictures, and I have been a very responsive commissioner, as others have. So it is the overarching umbrella of that this commission right here has done something wrong that required y'all to come in and remove this. Just like the comments that you have no faith that this board can handle the water system. This board has done great things, and not just since the aerator failed because of the hurricane, but because we were addressing these issues to begin with and realizing that things had to be done. I am asking you on behalf of the people of Apalachicola to listen to them, not just a small minority, and do not... basically you're removing the infrastructure that belongs to the city of Apalachicola and belongs to every individual out here. Thank you.

Representative Shoaf (03:20)

Thank you. In the last few minutes here, the aerator failed because of the hurricane. That is not true. It was never filed, claimed at all, to FEMA, DEP after the hurricane. It was a long time after it, and I was on the call with the mayor when DEP, during this water management crisis, where the mayor brought up that it was the hurricane that damaged it, and they immediately said, we've never been told about this, and what we found out through asking questions, as you like to say, was that the structure had deteriorated so bad that, yes, the winds, whatever they were, caused it to fail, but the wind or caused the rust to give, it had already been way past its time to be replaced. The negligence left it in such bad shape that a thunderstorm could have blown it over. So it wasn't like the hurricane came through and left it. I just don't...we have to be honest about these things. Commissioner?

Commissioner Elliott (04:33)

Thank you. Just as a point of information, you can clarify with our staff afterwards, an insurance claim was made.

All of those were made. I'm sorry that you were not aware of that at this moment. Just to recap on how we've gotten to this spot and where we are at this bill, and I apologize. Let me begin by introducing myself. I'm City Commissioner Adrienne Elliott. We first started talking about a local bill, typing over the Apalachicola water and sewer system in this room on August 21st. But the way that we discussed it was a lot different than the form we were discussing it in now. The news was broken to all of us in that room that day, including people from East Point Water and Sewers and Apalachicola and the county, that that news was going to be coming out that day. It was news to all of us. It broke the whole news of a potential merger that might be happening, because it wasn't clear where the district bounds were going to be at that point. The City of Apalachicola after that point, with our interim manager at that time, we began to take direction and coordinate, scramble to put out RFQs or RFPs to solicit third-party management. Before we could get far enough along in that process, this bill had already been filed. And we didn't know. We were notified after it was filed. So, it's really hard to try to get things back on track when the people you're trying to work with keep changing the orders without telling you, right? So, my question is...

Representative Shoaf (05:52)

Sir, when was the bill filed?

Commissioner Elliott (05:54)

The bill was filed just a few weeks ago.

Representative Shoaf (05:58)

You're saying it was filed right after the August meeting?

Commissioner Elliott (06:01)

No, sir. I'm saying after...

Representative Shoaf (06:02)

It still hasn't been filed.

Commissioner Elliott (06:03)

No, sir. After the draft.

Representative Shoaf (06:06)

You were sent a copy of the draft, which is a working product. It's not been filed.

Commissioner Elliott (06:12)

Thank you. My question is, between August and now, who are all of the constituents that you heard from that wanted this specific thing? Because this specific solution is something I had not heard proposed by any of my constituents in this area. So, I would love to see a public records request of who you've been communicating with and where that's coming from. Whose will is this? The gentleman said you came here to do the will of this community. These are the constituents that put you in your seats. I understand that you have 12 counties to serve. You have the largest district in Florida. I commend you for being here and taking care of us. However, two weeks ago, we had meetings with you all to discuss questions about the bill, but neither of you showed up. Your staff did, but neither of you showed up. Between myself and the other four members of my commission, we met with your staff for hours and we compiled thousands of questions that our staff presented to the public and also had supported to your staff. And we have received no answers back to any of our questions. These are questions that range from things such as who is responsible for the start-up cost of this district, if and when there will be a feasibility study, and what that would actually study the feasibility of rates, district itself, or regionalization. Because what was in the driver's seat of this bill from the discussions I've had with your staff are that this is supposed to be the first step towards regionalization and creating a regional water system in North Florida. But today in this room, we've only heard the word regionalization brought up a few times, but we have heard a lot about punishment. Gentlemen, you are not my parents. You are my elected representatives. If the chief complaint here is that my commission is unfit to oversee this utility, how would appointing a new board of five uncompensated members that are only users of that utility system, how are they going to bring more expertise and oversight to the table? As it's already been stated, we were not elected to our positions because we are engineers or we are water experts. We were elected to our positions because our community believes in us and they

trust us to find people, to find solutions for these problems and get the right key players on our staff and retain that talent. We have had a severe problem retaining talent over the years. After you guys submitted your request to JLAC, the city received the forensic audit we requested that I personally demanded that we have after I was elected because I ran for public office because I was unhappy with the lack of transparency and the way decisions were being made in this community on the scale of a good old boys club. So I got involved and I'm trying to do something about it. Like that piece of equipment, which was 30 years old, it's older than me. A lot of the people responsible for the bad policy decisions that put us here, they're long gone. And a lot of the records are gone too. That's what our forensic audit showed us. So I'm very excited to have this operational audit done because I want answers to a lot of those questions too. What I fear, however, is because we didn't have really good record retention back in the day, and a lot of the people that were involved in that time, some are dead, some are elderly, and some have illnesses. Whether or not you can depose those individuals and how credible it can be is above my pay grade. Going back to that oversight board, right? So, yes, the city of Apalachicola, us commissioners, we are paid. We receive a little less than \$400 a month as our salary. An uncompensated board. They have no incentive to serve there, only because they're appointed. And they care because they are users of the system, right? Well, three-fifths of that board is going to be appointed by a governor. And Governor DeSantis has been very favorable and very good to our community, and we respect him and thank him for that. However, he's turned out. And even if this bill went through, and it gets past this year, and it theoretically gets signed on July 1st, that doesn't mean that the appointments are going to be immediately made. It doesn't mean that he's going to be the one to make them. We're going to have a brand-new governor, and he has no idea who it is, what their policies are going to be, and how they're going to feel about this. We don't know who they'll appoint. You've got on one hand, you talk about wanting to remove the politics from this process. But then at the other time, you talk about being personal, because you want the people on that board to be users of the water and sewer system, right? Well, if you take away the ability for the constituents here to hold those people responsible for the decisions they are making, those people are serving at the pleasure of the governor. There's only two members of that board that serve at the pleasure of this community. That would be the representative from the city of Apalachicola and the representative that's appointed by Franklin County. They serve at our pleasure, and we can recall them and replace them wherever we want, according to this bill. The governor can do that with his appointees as well. However, I'm led to believe that the way that all of this works is the governor can remove any of them that he wants to, outside of just his three. So we will inherently find ourselves in a position where the majority of that board will be serving the political interests of the governor that's sitting, because they will be uncompensated. I'm not going to get into the personal part of this. I

think that the way that this meeting has been conducted speaks for itself, and I will not comment further on that. I think that the decorum is most important. I would like to see it for the spill, because I do think that the spill has the potential to lay the groundwork for the much needed regionalization of water systems in North Florida. No matter what happens, even if it still goes through, it doesn't do anything right now. If anything, if there were no roadblocks and this went through at light speed, it would probably be two years before that board even gets appointed and seated. But that doesn't actually solve the problem that's going on right now.

Problem in which, we have a manager that's currently addressing. And if you want to know why we are in such a position where we have a city manager that manages our public utility, well, that's because we have an anticipated city charter that only gives us two forms of government. Either a manager-commissioner form of government, which we currently operate under, or we act as legislators and we have a manager that is duly empowered to oversee the day-to-day operations of the city. We are not involved in those day-to-day operations. The other form of government is a mayor-commissioner form of government, where each one of us is responsible for one of the city's departments. Under Sunshine Law, I think you can see how that gets a little hairy when you can't call the head of another department if you represent water, if they represent sewers, if someone else is representing public works. We don't have a lot of good options here. That's why we have a position. We've been trying to hire a utility public works director that can be someone that oversees that and is making sure there's nothing falling off that plate and sliding off the table. We are having trouble finding candidates. As you know, we're in a remote area. It's hard to have natural homegrown talent that can sort out those sort of issues. So it's hard to recruit and retain talent for that. Part of that recruitment is we can't afford to pay what somebody up in Tallahassee is going to be able to pay them. We can only afford to pay them what this city can afford. And according to this bill, what only the customers of this system can pay for. Because no adequate loan taxes will be able to be levied. And we all know, based on when the city received the revolving loan to install these systems, there is even an escrow fund created. The state made the findings that say the city water system doesn't actually have the tax base to continue to sustain itself. And it will have to rely on outside investment and capital injection. Now, if we know that, we know that the city or this board is going to have to continually get investment in the millions of dollars for critical infrastructure upgrades and capital outlay. Now, if it becomes the entire state of Florida's problem, why is every taxpayer in the state of Florida going to want to pay for us to have drinkable water? They probably won't want to after a while because that's our problem, not theirs. And what would probably happen is in this bill, it does empower the board by resolution to sell that system off to a private or public entity. What happens if our water system is sold to a private

entity? We have no recourse, we have no way to affect the water rates, or even really voice a concern. So, something I would like to see going forward is, if this bill does come to fruition, I would like to see a clause that gives the city first right of refusal to take that system back. I don't want it to be sold or given away to the next bidder. It's our system, and it's our water, and this is our community.

We may not have managed it properly, but you can see, generationally, we are stepping up and we are trying to do what is right. And I don't think that punishing the people that are trudging through this mess and trying to make things right, who else is going to want to help? If this is how you get treated, when you do try to stand up and make things right, you just get beat back down, who's going to help? I was taught that the only time you should look down on somebody is when you're extending a hand to help them up. And gentlemen, it does not feel like you're extending a hand down. It feels like you're just watching us on the ground. Thank you.

Representative Shoaf (15:47)

Millions and billions of dollars for the city and the county that we've done nothing but help.

Commissioner Elliott (15:53)

Thank you.

Representative Shoaf (15:54)

Over and over again. And so that, no.

Commissioner George (16:03)

I'm Despina George. I'm on the city commission as well. I mean, I support the decision that the vote of the state commission yesterday to ask that the bill be withdrawn and for us to be given additional time while we collaborate with the state on a path moving forward. I'm no stranger to the problems the city of Apalachicola has had. It was the discovery of the defaults of the DEP loans and the transfers from the Enterprise Fund to the General Fund, which were hidden from the public through the years. That caused an officially awkward introvert like me to run for city commission. So I do take this seriously. I'm also a retired auditor, and I know that all audits work. They reveal important information. That's why I was so supportive of Senator Simon's call for a JLAC-directed audit, operational audit of the city. I've seen the results of those audits, and I think they identify the problems, and those problems have to be corrected. I also know that our Attorney General has ordered an investigation of the city, and his words really focus on accountability, as were the comments that those that you made when he had a town hall meeting in June for the city. I don't think this bill creates accountability. I think it takes away property and rights of the

citizens of Appalachia Coal without assessing accountability. Like I said, I know that audits work, and audits have worked for the city of Apalachicola in the past. There were state reviews such as the city's water and sewer fund in 2012 and then in 2017, which discovered the transfers of about \$800,000 that have escaped from the enterprise fund to the general fund, and also the practice of not increasing the rates to accommodate the expenses of the system. The city had to begin to pay its defaulted loan and raise its water and sewer rates commiserate with the expenses of the system. And the city has, since that time, raised the rates 3% a year as were directed. So I think today, in order to establish accountability, I think the audits and investigations need to go forward and be completed. I think there's a lot of misinformation. Again, I'm not saying the city does not have problems, but there are things that were said here today. You've referenced the transfers from continuing transfers from the enterprise fund to the general fund, and that has not been the case since 2018 because of the prior reviews. There's been reference to the view for not misrepresenting information, but based on the comment at your town hall of saying that \$34 million that the city has been unable to account for, when in fact that \$34 million was on the city's website and our very critical state concern work plan, which was a snapshot of all awarded grants at that point in time, whether or not they had been funded. It includes the significant amount of funding awarded for the new sewer treatment plan. So I think, you know, I think the audit is important. I don't know how to say that because I think accountability is important. I think, you know, if it is an audit revealed in my six years on the city commission that things that I did contributed in any way to the problems we have, then I should be released from office. And I think that's how our system works. I'm afraid of, you know, without this data from investigation and from audit to form a special district, which is starting from nothing, I don't see how that creates a better situation for the city.

Representative Shoaf (21:16)

Thank you. Thank you.

Representative Shoaf (21:21)

I appreciate the job you do, too. All right. That's our last speaker. Senator, do you have any closing remarks?

Senator Simon (21:31)

So, a couple things. The first town hall meeting that we came and we heard from everybody, one of the things that I said was that outside of one person that's sitting on the commission, and she is no longer on the commission, none of the folks were here to see this deficiency. And you can go back and hold the record of that meeting. That was my comment. She's no longer on the commission. The mismanagement that has happened

over the years with the water and sewer is a grave concern. Such an issue that, a couple years ago, Representative Shoaf and I both ran and passed Apalachicola's area of critical state concern bill. That, as long as the funds are available, we put \$25 million over five years back into Apalachicola. We believe in the people of this city to the extent, we're looking to make state investment in these areas. As projects are filed, we run and try and get those projects funded. Continue to do that. Even in the midst of this water situation. We're still trying to find dollars to come here. When this finally, we were first made front page news I had a phone call with the mayor, and my comment was What do you need? What do you need? And that's when we started getting things coming to Apalachicola because we understood the grave concern. What I didn't want for Apalachicola, is what we have seen in the media for the last ten years in Detroit, Michigan. The Flint water crisis. I didn't want that here. So it is imperative that the problem is fixed. We also need to look, as one person alluded to, the cost of our utilities in our rural districts. It is hard to maintain. And you're going to see an increase in your bill this year. You saw one last year. Because it's hard to maintain a water system. For small areas of that don't have the population or the ad valorem to be able to support them. And so that's why we're looking at a regional option. Part of that is trying to get the water, the wells off the coastline to better protect them for the future. But that's a problem that we can't fix today. What we can work on today is putting our water in the best position possible so that your local electeds can work on some of the other issues that are plaguing the city. And I am not going to go into those issues. You all live here. You know what they are. But getting professionals is what I'm doing in my rural renaissance bill that I filed a couple weeks ago is getting additional administrative help in rural communities. Because I understand the challenges because you don't have this huge swath of talent that is just jumping at the bit to engage in government. You don't have that. Often times you get what you have here. When you have one person that's doing five or six or seven jobs, out of necessity. And so part of what this bill does is to bring additional eyes and resources to the table. And I am open, that's why this process is the way it is. I'm open to those suggestions. If you have someone that would be an asset to this particular board I want them to be a part of this board. Because at the end of the day, I only care about one thing. The health and safety of the people that live here. That's what I care about. I care that we don't have to ship water in or shower stalls in for you to get clean. That's what I care about. So, that's where this comes from. It's looking to the future of where we need to be in order for communities like this to thrive, not just survive. Right now, we are just barely sustaining, because it's going to cost, and we're going to have to go back as a legislature and look at ways that we can continue to help. I'm glad to see that things are moving in the right direction. They need to continue to do those, go that way. They need to continue. To look backwards, I wish it would have happened 10 years ago, 20 years ago. It didn't happen. But that's okay. We're here now. We now have the

attention of the community because they had to go without. Folks that live here stepping up and positioning themselves to help. I understand the deficiencies. Mayor, I get it. There are folks that are on your city commission that aren't engineers. They didn't get involved in water. Listen, there's one thing I say all the time. In the legislature, I'm a mile wide and an inch deep on just about any subject matter because you deal with so many other issues. But when, as you look at this as a negative, I look at it as a positive from the standpoint is now we're acquiring additional resources and talent to go and try and apply for grants and things that often times we sometimes miss just because we don't have the administrative support to go and apply for those things. There are things that we need to work out in this bill, there's no question about it. But that's why the product, that's why the process exists. That is why it exists. I apologize because my passion that comes through from wanting to support a community and wanting to see things done the right way comes through as anger. Like I said, I'm not angry. I'm frustrated. And to the city council. The city commission, my frustration doesn't end or start with you, it wasn't intended to be personal towards you. I am angry at the situation not the people involved in it that had no bearing on how we got here. But, nonetheless we all sign up for the job, there were things that were broken in communities that I represent that I had nothing to do with that predate me. But that doesn't stop me from showing up and trying to fix the problem. That's what I signed up for. So I don't get to push it off on somebody else. I'm here now, it is my job to fix. And so, the fact that you felt I was being personal towards you, I apologize for that if it came off in that manner. But the reality of it is, like the representative discussed I heard from the families, that in a time of need, that their government was not there, and they needed help. And so we do what we always do. We all pitched in. From going to the to the local restaurants, and trying to send the department of Florida commerce out to try and help our small business owners. That's what we do. If you're upset by that, I'm sorry. It's the job we sign up for. We'll continue to try and bring resources. I'll continue to be around if you have some other questions. By all means. I'm open to hearing. I'm open to hearing your suggestions. But this is just a start of a process. It's not the finish.

Representative Shoaf (32:11)

Senator. I'll keep on real brief. Despite everything that's been said in this meeting. Despite the emotions, despite the personalities and the. Prerogatives, um, at the end of the day this is a health, life, safety issue. It is an economic, vitality issue. And the tourism dollars dropped 25.27 percent during that this period, um, when the water was bad. And that's just a very short glimpse into what could have been. Um. Um. Your current city commission jumped up and worked hard and fixed, helped fix this issue quickly but. It doesn't, doesn't... we don't just say okay they did a good job fixing it so we're all good. The last

three city administrators knew this water system was in bad shape. They'd say it to me. when they would they put in their, their appropriation request each year. We need this \$400,000 for this or else. We need this new water system to no should depend and sink or swim off of a wonderful appropriation. It should be managed right. And as the new city manager said, systems in place. these are things that this city has known for the seven years, six years I've been elected. Nothing new here except to collapse. That's the only difference. We've got two new members of the board. Three. But. We're building a new system now, we're hearing. It's December. Our job as your state elected officials is to be good stewards of the state's dollars. To be good stewards of the resources in this district. And to be good representatives to every single voter. We don't work for the city commission. We don't work for the county commission. We work for you, each of you in this room and, you know, the only way I feel like I could fail at this job, in this circumstance, is to do nothing. I feel like sitting here and kicking the can down the road a year -well, there's 20 more cans behind me that have been kicked. And I refuse to not do my job. I refuse to kick the can another week. That's why I'm here today. It's what I believe is in the best interest of this community. And with that I'd like to take the vote. All in favor say aye. Aye. Any opposed? Vote carries. We're going to adjourn the meeting now. But I want to say in closing. Once the local bill goes through the house. The senator and I will be working together on it the whole time but it will be assigned to typically two or three committee stops. We won't know that for sure until the bill is actually filed. Um. When that happens. We will have it on our social media, I will get it to David, we will make sure that you are aware of when those committees are. You are more than welcome to come up. Work with Anna, she will help make sure and Stephen. They will make sure you are there at the right room, at the right time, and you will be on the Florida channel, and you will be able to speak your mind about it. Of course, if you'd like to... if you don't want to come to Tallahassee, or be on TV, you can call...call me directly. I will give you my number right after this meeting. Call me up. Tell me what you want in it. That's the best way to get it done. Um. But if you want to be seen and heard come to those committee meetings. And you'll have multiple opportunities to publicly speak on whether you want the bill or not, or what you would like to see changed. There won't be a single good idea given that's not implemented. Give us a good idea. Please. We won't, uh, to date, regardless of what has been said, there's been no assistance, from locally, or from the city, on how to make it better, it's all been about "Don't do it." So. We look forward to working with them on ideas of how to improve the bill. With that, we hope to see you all soon. Thank you for coming out.