

Alexander vows to stand firm on taxes; congressman defends government spending

By Scott Rogers
Wednesday, March 19th, 2008
The Ouachita Citizen

During a time when many Americans struggle to afford gas and groceries, U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander says taxes shouldn't be raised.

That's exactly what President Bush's \$3.1-trillion budget would do, Alexander said Monday at a Monroe Chamber of Commerce luncheon.

Held to recognize Alexander for his work in the Congress, the luncheon took place at the Monroe Civic Center.

Alexander said Bush's proposed budget for the 2008-09 fiscal year raises taxes by \$683 billion over five years by raising marginal rates for all workers. He said it would eliminate the 10-percent bracket for low-income workers and increase taxes \$500 per child, while imposing a marriage penalty and death tax and eliminating incentives for investment in U.S. businesses.

"I voted against the budget because it has the largest tax increase in history, not just in the United States, but the world," said Alexander, R-Quitman.

"We're looking at \$4 a gallon for gasoline and outrageous prices on energy, food and services," Alexander said. "This (tax increase) could impact every household by \$3,000 (in taxes each year)."

"The many tax cuts that we have passed over the years would go away if this budget goes all the way through," he added.

Another source of contention among some members of Congress concerning the budget is some \$1.6 billion in Medicare reductions in Louisiana. That figure includes about \$270 million in Medicare cuts in Alexander's 5th District.

Alexander said the budget has "a long

way to go" before being finally adopted by Congress, so it is unknown if the proposed Medicare cuts and tax increases will survive the budgetary process.

Alexander also told the chamber group that local farmers should not expect a new Farm Bill this year.

"We were told that after the Easter break, we may vote on an extension for another year," Alexander continued. "I know this creates a problem because farmers and lenders need to have a better grasp of what's going to happen for the future, but I really don't think we'll have a new Farm Bill."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently provided Congress with an analysis of the impacts on USDA programs without a new Farm Bill, or an extension of the current bill.

"We (5th District) have one of the largest agriculture districts in the nation where many crops are grown, so it's important to keep these programs so we can depend on good food and fiber products here and not from other countries that don't even like us," Alexander said.

Congress extended the 2002 Farm Bill to April 18, 2008, to work out the details of a new bill. Congress is considering a five-year, \$280-billion farm policy reauthorization.

Some members of Congress also want to tack on about \$10 billion in new spending. The current debate centers on how to include the new spending without raising taxes. Bush has said he will not sign a new farm bill that includes new taxes.

Bush has said if the Congress cannot agree on a new farm bill by next month, he will seek a one-year extension of the current bill.

The issue of earmarks and whether Congress should eliminate those requests for special projects is something Alexander believes will be hotly de-

bated in the near future.

Sen. John McCain has said if he is elected president, he will veto any special request and embarrass any lawmaker making the request, Alexander said.

But Alexander believes special projects like a new terminal for Monroe Regional Airport and the Greater Ouachita Port Commission should not be considered wasteful projects since they help enhance communities and create economic development.

"I believe if Washington is going to extract money from your pockets, it is my job to try and get as much of that money back through projects for our district," Alexander said. "The president says we would save a lot of money by doing away with earmarks, but he then hands us a long list of earmarks for F-22s (military jets) and nuclear submarines.

"The president says we need to use the merit system (to allocate funding for various local and state projects). But the merit system hasn't given Monroe a new airport terminal. The merit system didn't help Olla when it was devastated by tornadoes. Areas all over the 5th District are left out under the merit system."

One piece of good news for north Louisiana, Alexander said, is Barksdale Air Force Base should get the proposed cyber command center.

The Legislature, Gov. Bobby Jindal, recently committed \$57 million of the state's budget surplus for infrastructure improvements needed to support the proposed new cyber command center.

The Air Force delayed announcing where the new cyber command center will be located while it reviews all five proposed locations.

The base is currently temporarily housed at Barksdale.