

□ Living in Alabama we are accustomed to just about any kind of weather. However, the dramatic Christmas Day tornado that landed in Mobile, and the storm sirens that sounded all over South Alabama well into the evening, left more than a few nerves frazzled. Even though the National Weather Service provided advanced warning for Alabamians to be on the lookout for potentially severe storms on Christmas Day, hardly anyone foresaw the arrival of a powerful EF-2 tornado ripping a path of damage through midtown Mobile.

It was, in fact, the second time in less than a week that Mobile was struck by a tornado – each time beginning near Theodore and ending in Prichard. Officials say as many as 40 tornadoes were reported from Texas to Alabama during the Christmas Day violent weather outbreak. As the storm front crossed through South Alabama, practically every county in the First Congressional District was under at least one tornado warning.

As damage to homes and businesses is still being assessed, we already know that Murphy High School, as well as Trinity Episcopal Church and the Mobile Infirmary sustained significant damage. There were also reports of damage in Washington, Clarke, Monroe and Escambia counties. We have been served notice that deadly weather can visit us at any time. In addition to a battery-powered weather radio, everyone should have an evacuation plan for severe weather events.

"Cliff" Down to the Wire:

As I pen this column, lawmakers are preparing to return to Washington, Sunday, December 30, for down-to-the-wire negotiations and a possible vote to avoid the "fiscal cliff". On January 1, taxes will automatically increase on all Americans if Congress and the president do not reach an agreement. Add to that another \$500 billion in cuts to defense spending if no deal is struck and the risk of another painful recession is significant.

On Thursday, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid taunted the House for its refusal to go along with President Obama's plan to raise taxes on America's small business owners – a plan the accounting firm Ernst & Young has already estimated will cost 700,000 jobs. For standing up to tax hikes on those making more than \$250,000, and for supporting an alternative plan to keep taxes low for ALL Americans, House Speaker Boehner was labeled a "dictator" by Senator Reid.

Perhaps Senator Reid is still suffering from an eggnog hangover. He surely has forgotten that his own Senate has refused to pass two separate House bills to prevent tax increases and to make responsible federal spending cuts. Hasn't Senator Reid's Senate also failed to pass a budget in three years? The House has passed two successive budgets since January 2011 and more than 30 jobs bills – all of which the Senate has ignored. Rather than lecturing House conservatives, Mr. Reid's "do-nothing" Senate should finally do its job and work with the House to find a solution that does not punish hardworking Americans or job-creating small business owners.

Speaker Boehner made clear the House is willing to negotiate in good faith: "The lines of communication remain open, and we will continue to work with our colleagues to avert the largest tax hike in American history, and to address the underlying problem, which is spending."

A Significant Year:

While 2012 has been a year of political division, the last 12 months have also given our region reason to be optimistic.

A recent Associated Press story ranked Airbus's plans to locate in Mobile as the number one news story in Alabama for the year. Airbus's July 2, 2012, announcement to build a \$600 million final assembly line at Brookley Aeroplex, employing 1,500 workers and potentially ushering in an even greater number of supplier jobs in our region, was monumental.

Frankly, efforts to locate a major aircraft manufacturing facility at Brookley literally go back decades and came close to reality before the government reversed its decision in 2008 to award an aerial refueling tanker contract to EADS. South Alabama never gave up the fight and today, the future looks brighter as Alabama will be the new home to Airbus' North American assembly operations.

Two years ago, the top news story for South Alabama was the Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill. During 2012, Congress approved the RESTORE Act to direct billions of Clean Water Act civil penalties to the Gulf Coast states, including Alabama. While the final settlement is still pending, our region nevertheless gained hope during 2012 that Alabama's coastal communities are closer to closure and restoration from this historic spill.

My staff and I work for you. If I can ever be of service, please do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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