

District 2 Commissioner Jesse Beason
Prepared Budget Remarks
June 6, 2024

I remember reading *The Art of Possibility* back in college. In it there's a story about a group of teenagers and NASA employees who are writing letters back and forth about the connections between music and space exploration. In one of those letters, a NASA employee writes to a teen "Thank you for reminding me what I am here for... 'I am here today to cross the swamp, not to fight all the alligators.'"

It seemed to fit the moment—Just two weeks from Juneteenth—when so many enslaved Black people risked so much to cross the swamps of Louisiana, the Carolinas for the chance at freedom.

It also seemed to fit the moment when there are so many alligators swimming in these waters right now, trying to pull us towards meaner times. And if I am not careful, as my Gen Z friends say, the scorpio in me will have me trying to fight them, as if these I could. So I remind myself that I am here today to cross the swamp.

I did not support every choice we've agreed to in this budget. But this is how it goes. We compromise to govern across differences in ways that we hope do not violate our core values. We count the votes. We move forward, towards the shore.

I want to commend and appreciate the Chair, my colleagues, and all our County employees who have been deeply engaged in this process, who have worked evenings and weekends to do all the math and turnaround answers to our questions and who have patiently explained to me how the technology works and the terminology works.

I also want to thank my staff who have helped me understand the nuance and complexity within budget proposals, the history that predates me and the future I can help shape in some small way in my very brief time here.

I want to thank all the community members and organizations who have provided testimony, input, and advocacy throughout this process. You had an impact and there are changes in the budget we will adopt today that are because of your advocacy.

A special thank you to the many community based organizations, including many that represent communities of color, who expressed support for a small donor program in this budget.

As someone who has a mom with a brain injury, who's battled alcoholism and who has made terrible decisions despite the love and care my sister and I provide—and as someone who's visited with those working to house the houseless, provide services to victims and those battling addictions—I have learned that it is so much easier to rebuild roads than to rebuild lives. And we need money for both. But as my mom has taught me—we can't save people. but we can love them through the supports we provide as family, friends and neighbors until they are ready to rebuild. At least that's what I believe.

This has been a fascinating experience for me. I never forgot that I am here to represent the constituents of District 2. Thank you to all of the people who spoke up, reached out to my office, joined our listening sessions, and let us know what your priorities are. I am sure I've disappointed some. I hope I have not disappointed most.

There are so many things in this budget that I am excited to see bear fruit, even if I'm not on the dais to see it. But like so many constituents of this County, I am counting on us—and believing in us—to see it through.

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