



Speaker's Press Clips
Thursday, February 13, 2014

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FULL TEXT

Speaker Hubbard praises passage of dual enrollment bill

Opelika-Auburn News

February 12, 2014

Sara Falligant

The Alabama House of Representatives passed a bill Wednesday to create a \$10 million scholarship fund for dual enrollment by funneling money from the private sector into education. The bill now goes to the Senate for its consideration.

Rachel Adams, communications director for House Speaker Mike Hubbard (R-Auburn), said the Alabama Future Workforce Initiative passed with unanimous, bipartisan support after about an hour of debate.

The initiative, sponsored by Rep. Mac Buttram (R-Cullman) is the final piece of the Alabama House Republican Caucus' "Commonsense Conservative" legislative agenda. The initiative creates \$10 million in scholarships for Alabama high school students to participate in career-tech dual enrollment programs.

"I believe it's going to be a game changer in the state of Alabama," Hubbard said.

Individuals and businesses that donate to the scholarship program will receive state income tax credit of up to 50 percent of their total contribution, with the cost of tax credits reaching no more than \$5 million annually.

"So you're doubling your money," Hubbard explained.

Career-tech dual enrollment programs allow high school students to take academic coursework toward a college degree, including technical skills training. Only 6.7 percent of the state's 31,500 eligible students currently participate in career-tech dual enrollment programs. The \$10 million scholarship fund would allow an additional 9,542 students to participate in the programs, according to a statement from Hubbard's office.

Legislators hope increasing funding for career-tech dual enrollment programs will encourage students who may not be interested in a four-year degree stay in school.

"This is proven in other states that it dramatically reduces the dropout rate," Hubbard said. "... (Students) can see the end result of where they will be."

Students graduate with a high school diploma, associate's degree and technical certificate.

The initiative allows donors to earmark 80 percent of any contribution to a specific career-tech dual enrollment program or course at any two-year institution.

"It's kind of a carrot for companies to invest," Hubbard said.

The Department of Postsecondary Education allocates the remaining 20 percent to areas directly related to career-tech dual enrollment program student costs.

"All of the money is spent within the education system in the state of Alabama," Hubbard said. "... Industry itself is telling us where the need is. This ensures that we are producing the educational product our state needs."

But the earmarking of funds has garnered opposition from the Alabama Education Association.

“We fully support dual enrollment programs. We wish that they would be funded fully,” said AEA funding and revenue manager Susan Kennedy. “...It’s a bad idea for a really good program.”

Kennedy, who spoke with the House Ways and Means Education Committee before the bill was passed, said the AEA is concerned money from the initiative will not go through the budgeting process.

“It circumvents the process that we have in Alabama to see where the needs are in all schools,” she said.

Kennedy said the AEA believes the bill effectively takes \$5 million off the top of the education budget to fund tax credits, and is worried some programs will not receive adequate funding.

“There are so many things in education that corporations wouldn’t choose to donate to,” Kennedy said, giving the example of a middle school and noting half of the state’s students are unable to take textbooks home for homework.

“If everybody got to choose where their taxes go, we’d be in a huge mess,” she continued. “...It might prevent some programs that have greater needs from getting money at all.”

Instead, she proposed the \$5 million in tax credits remain in the budget and legislators take the other \$5 million from the state’s Insurance Liability Fund.

Last year, the state’s education budget was set at \$5.1 billion, with \$7 million for dual enrollment. The same amount was requested this year, in addition to the initiative’s \$10 million.

“We are making a heavy, heavy investment in career tech and career coaches,” Hubbard said. “...The purpose of education, at the end of the day, is to get a job.”

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Alabama House passes bill to create scholarships for dual enrollment job courses

The Associated Press

February 12, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Alabama — The Alabama House of Representatives has approved an effort to expand a dual enrollment program that lets high school students take job training classes at two-year colleges.

House members approved the bill Wednesday by a 100-0 vote.

The bill would create up to \$10 million in scholarships funded by donations. Businesses would get up to a 50 percent tax credit for the donations. They could also steer the bulk of their donation to a specific program.

Proponents say the program helps high school students graduate ready for high-paying, skilled careers such as welding and aircraft engine repair.

While the bill passed without opposition, some lawmakers questioned if the state could afford the cost of the tax breaks which could hit \$5 million.

The bill now goes to the Alabama Senate.

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GOP's dual enrollment bill passes House

Anniston Star

February 12, 2014

Tim Lockette

MONTGOMERY -- The Alabama House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly Wednesday to set aside \$5 million in tax credits for people or businesses that donate to dual high school-college enrollment programs.

House members voted 100-0 in favor of the bill, which would grant a tax credit of up to \$500,000 to anyone who donates to a scholarship program for students who take college courses while still in high school.

Lawmakers in both parties have said they like to see more students in those dual-enrollment programs. Proponents of dual enrollment say the classes potentially allow high school students to graduate from high school with an associate degree or other certification in a job-related skill, making them more marketable on the job market. Still, the cost of tuition keeps some students out of the programs.

The bill, by Rep. Mac Buttram, R-Cullman, would set up a scholarship program funded by donations. Donors would get a tax credit equal to half the money donated, up to the \$500,000 limit. With \$5 million in tax credits set aside, supporters said, the bill could generate as much as \$10 million in donations.

Democrats in the House questioned the use of tax credits to support the program. The state's income tax revenues go to education, and some Democrats warned that the move would set a precedent for future tax credits that could draw money away from schools.

"Might there be another way you could have funded it without tax credits?" Rep. Barbara Boyd, D-Anniston, asked the bill's sponsor.

"The only other way would have been a line item out of the budget," Buttram said.

Earlier this year, Democrats proposed their own version of a dual enrollment bill -- one that would raise \$5 million for scholarships by shutting down a liability insurance program for teachers set up by the Legislature last year. Many Democrats had opposed the program, saying it was designed to draw members away from the Alabama Education Association, which represents its members in legal cases.

Rep. Marcel Black, D-Tuscumbia, proposed an amendment Wednesday that would, in effect, turn Buttram's bill into the Democratic version, replacing tax credits with money from the liability program. Black noted that lawmakers are already working on a bill that would provide teachers with some legal immunity, and he said that bill would make a liability program unnecessary.

After Black's amendment failed in a 64-29 vote, Democrats dropped much of their opposition to the bill.

Buttram's bill moves on to the Senate for consideration.

Also in the Legislature:

- A Senate committee voted Wednesday to approve a bill that, supporters say, will strengthen the Alabama Open Meetings Act. The bill would ban some "serial meetings" in which members of a governing body meet in small groups to decide an issue without holding an open meeting; and it would require the Legislature to establish rules that would ensure their meetings are open to the public.
- Sen. Del Marsh, R-Anniston, on Tuesday filed a bill that would allow Weaver to annex a parcel of land on Alabama 21, across the road from Heroes American Grille. Heroes was annexed last year, shortly after the Legislature approved Sunday alcohol sales in the city. Mayor Wayne Willis said the annexation would encourage development of the parcel across from the restaurant.

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Tracking the 2014 session: Lender regulations stall; dual enrollment bill advances

Al.com

February 12, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- A bill to lower the interest allowed on payday loans got sidetracked by a House committee today.

The House Financial Services Committee sent HB 145 by Rep. Patricia Todd, D-Birmingham, to a subcommittee. It would cap the annual percentage rate at 36 percent, the same allowed under the state's Small Loan Act.

Payday lenders can now charge \$17.50 per \$100 borrowed on a two-week loan, more than 400 percent if calculated as an annual rate.

The committee also delayed a bill to lower rates charged on auto title loans. They can now charge 25 percent a month, an APR of 300 percent, the same as pawn shops can charge.

What they did:

The House:

-- Approved a plan to create a scholarship program to help more high school students take job training courses in community colleges. Goes to Senate.

The Senate:

-- Approved a bill that would exempt barbers who have been working more than 10 years from new regulations passed by the Legislature last year. Goes to House.

Committees:

-- The Senate Judiciary Committee approved a bill to strengthen the Open Meetings Act. Goes to Senate.

-- The Senate Judiciary Committee approved a House bill to make the penalty for causing a death while operating a boat under the influence the same as for causing a death while driving under the influence. Goes to Senate.

-- The Senate Fiscal Responsibility and Accountability Committee approved a bill to expand and change the composition of the Birmingham Water Works Board. Goes to Senate.

-- The House Ways and Means Education Committee delayed action on a bill to authorize up to \$100 million in bonds to help school systems switch from paper textbooks to digital textbooks or tablets.

Coming up:

The House convenes at 9 a.m. today; the Senate at 10 a.m.

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Alabama Senate committee approves bill to strengthen Open Meetings Act

Al.com

February 12, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- The Senate Judiciary Committee today approved a bill to amend the state's Open Meetings Act in response to several recent state Supreme Court decisions.

Those supporting the changes, including the Alabama Press Association, want the law tightened to help stop “serial meetings.”

Those happen when members of a public board deliberate in small groups or pairs to avoid notifying the public.

At today’s meeting, there was initially some disagreement about what constituted a serial meeting.

Sen. Cam Ward, R-Alabaster, the bill’s sponsor, said he thought a member of a public board could poll other members by telephone on a specific vote without that being considered a serial meeting.

Dennis Bailey, lawyer for the Alabama Press Association, said the association’s position is that would be a violation.

Bailey later said he misspoke. He said as long as there is no deliberation about an issue, a board member could ask others how they plan to vote and it would not be a serial meeting.

Today’s approval by the committee moves the bill to the Senate floor.
Gov. Robert Bentley has expressed his support for the bill.

The bill would also clarify that the Open Meetings Act applies to the Legislature because of the requirement in the Constitution that the Legislature conduct business with its doors open to the public.

And it would say that anyone in Alabama would have standing to file a lawsuit claiming a violation of the Open Meetings Act.

Those two issues were also raised in state Supreme Court rulings. Ward said the rulings essentially “gutted” the law.

The Open Meetings Act was passed in 2005, replacing the Sunshine Law that had been on the books for decades.

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Bill to authorize bonds for digital textbooks, wireless systems delayed in Alabama House committee

Al.com

February 12, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- A bill to authorize up to \$100 million in bonds to help school systems use tablets or digital devices instead of paper textbooks was delayed today in the Alabama House of Representatives.

The Ways and Means Education Committee delayed action on the Alabama Ahead Act, HB 1, by Rep. Jim McClendon, R-Springville, after a subcommittee questioned the cost and implementation of the plan.

McClendon said he asked for the delay and said he would work to provide more information and try to address the questions. Because of the delay, he was asked the outlook for the bill for this session, which is almost half over.

"I guess it depends on if I can get them comfortable with the cost and get them comfortable with the bond issue," McClendon said.

Rep. Bill Poole, R-Tuscaloosa, the committee chairman, said he was not sure of the outlook for the bill.

Poole said the Legislature would look for ways to help schools make better use of technology and said HB 1 would be part of that discussion.

"Anytime you are borrowing money, just like appropriating money, you want to make sure the money is being invested in an appropriate manner," Poole said.

School systems would apply for the bond money and pay a 25 percent match, which could be waived for poorer systems. The bonds could be sold incrementally, according to need, McClendon said.

School systems could use the money to buy tablets or other digital devices and to install the wireless infrastructure needed to use the devices. They could also use the money to train teachers in how to use them.

McClendon said the bond debt could be offset by what the state will save on paper textbooks.

McClendon said some Alabama school systems are already using digital textbooks and are seeing benefits, such as better test scores and attendance. He mentioned schools in Baldwin County, Huntsville, Vestavia Hills, Piedmont and Sylacauga.

"There's going to be a cultural upheaval in education and hopefully we'll see the results across the state, particularly in systems that can't afford to put in the wireless," McClendon said.

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House members fuss about state examiner

Decatur Daily

February 12, 2014

Mary Sell

MONTGOMERY — A discussion about Rep. Ed Henry's bill to put the state examiner of public accounts under the state auditor led to some excited exchanges in a committee meeting Wednesday.

The legislation was largely prompted by chief examiner Ron Jones' decision last year to promote an assistant examiner at the highest salary allowed for the job — \$240,000 a year.

A panel of lawmakers, including Henry, R-Hartselle, criticized Jones' decision but lacked authority to overrule it. Jones, who is paid \$241,000 a year, stood by his decision. Henry's bill essentially transfers examiner's office oversight to the auditor's office.

But during the committee meeting, several lawmakers questioned Henry's agenda. Rep. John Knight, D-Montgomery, asked repeatedly for the purpose of the bill.

The examiner's office "has been irresponsible with taxpayer dollars and if you don't understand that, I don't understand why you're here," Henry shot back.

Knight responded: "I know why I'm here and the people who elected me know why I'm here."

State Code allows the examiner's office to operate differently than other agencies, including with regard to salary structure. Rep. Lynn Greer, R-Rogersville, said the large raise the assistant examiner received was an insult to other state employees who haven't seen a cost-of-living increase in years.

"We've got to think of the taxpayer, and sometimes I think they're the least thought of," Greer said. Later, he challenged fellow lawmakers opposed to the bill to go home and explain that to their constituents.

A vote on House Bill 350 was carried over until next week.

According to its website, the examiner's office can audit the books, accounts and records of all state and county offices, officers, bureaus, boards, commissions, corporations, departments and agencies, and report on expenditures, contracts, or other audit findings found to be in violation of law.

The auditor's office reports to the governor receipts and disbursement of revenues collected and paid into the treasury. It's also responsible for the accounting of state personal property costing \$100 or more.

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Bills to limit payday loan, auto title loan rates sidetracked in Alabama House committee

The Associated Press

February 12, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Alabama — The House Financial Services Committee on Wednesday sent a payday-loan regulation bill to a subcommittee, a move that the bill's sponsor called an effort to kill the legislation.

The bill would cap the annual interest rate at 36 percent on the short-term loans. It also would establish a state database to enforce existing limits on how many loans people can have out at one time.

The committee voted to send the bill to subcommittee after a public hearing. The committee action was the first skirmish this session in the long-running battle between groups who say the businesses take advantage of the poor and lenders who say they provide a service.

"I'm very disappointed because of the thousands of people who will be driven into poverty while we fiddle around on this," bill sponsor, Rep. Patricia Todd, D-Birmingham, said after the vote.

Shay Farley, the legal director of Alabama Appleaseed, an advocacy group for low-income people, told committee members that the interest rates charged by the lenders are immoral.

However, Jay McDuffie, CEO of Alabama Cash Services, said customers choose those loans over others types of financial transactions. The charges are less than the fees for overdrawing a checking account or missing a payment on a credit card, he said.

Committee chairman Lesley Vance, R-Phenix City, said Todd's bill could possibly come out of committee this session, but also might not.

"You've got to address the cause of what's causing people to run down there," Vance said of people's use of the lenders.

The committee also carried over a second bill related to the automobile-title loan industry.

Alabama campaign finance records show that the lenders and a related political action committee had contributed to six of the nine committee members. The cumulative contributions ranged from \$1,000 to \$3,900 per lawmaker.

Rep. Jack Williams, R-Vestavia Hills, said the \$500 he received wasn't a factor, noting that his campaign had received more than \$100,000 in total contributions. Williams said he had been bombarded with information from both sides and wanted time to learn more.

Campaign records show Vance received \$1,000 from Alabama Lenders PAC, \$1,500 from Title Max, \$500 from Cash America and \$400 from Check Into Cash. Vance said he didn't remember receiving any industry-related contributions and would have to check his records.

Todd said she thought the contributions were a factor in the bill's demise.

"It's disgusting. I don't know what else to say," Todd said.

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Legislation to change Birmingham Water Works Board tilts balance of power away from city

Al.com

February 12, 2014

Joseph D. Bryant

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- Legislation in Montgomery to change the Birmingham Water Works Board operation and composition goes further than most expected, tilting the balance of power away from Birmingham in favor of outside municipalities.

A Senate committee today approved a bill from Sen. Jabo Waggoner, R-Vestavia Hills, that reduces board member terms and salaries and adds more members outside the city of Birmingham.

The bill now makes its way to the Senate floor.

A surprise addition to the bill includes a provision giving Jefferson County appointing authority for one member who does not live within the city of Birmingham.

Jefferson County representation is in addition to the expected addition of members from Shelby, Blount, St. Clair and Walker Counties. If approved, the nine member board would be comprised of five from outside the city and just four from Birmingham. The new members would be appointed by the county commissions in those areas.

The bill passed the Senate Fiscal Responsibility and Accountability Committee with a lone 'no' vote from Sen. Linda Coleman, D-Birmingham.

Waggoner told AL.com this afternoon that he is still open to some negotiation.

"I've been willing to compromise, and maybe we can come up with something that the other side can live with," he said this afternoon. "I'm not hard and fast with this. I'm trying to be reasonable."

Waggoner said he plans to meet with Coleman Thursday before the bill moves to the full Senate.

The new configuration would put Birmingham in the minority on a newly-composed board, a deal-breaker for Birmingham officials who have lobbied against the bill.

Waggoner's bill also reduces the years of board terms from six years to four years and imposes a two-term limit for service.

Other changes include capping monthly stipends for board members to \$500. Additionally, the bill would require public hearings before water rate increases are enacted.

The provision would make official the gentlemen's agreement already in place where the City Council has appointed one non-Birmingham board member.

However, Waggoner's bill takes away that non-binding promise and makes it a requirement fulfilled by the Jefferson County Commission.

Today's bill shocked some at City Hall.

Water works board.jpg

Birmingham Water Works Chairman Jackie Robinson, members George Munchus, Ann Florie, David Herring and Sherry Lewis.

"I'm a bit taken back because I thought that a compromise could be reached in order to settle the matter on the issues that this bill was seeking to address," said Councilwoman Lashunda Scales, chairwoman of the Utilities Committee.

"As a city of Birmingham official, I would not support any measure that would give outside municipalities more governance than its original owner, in which Birmingham is the largest single customer base of the Water Works board. Why would we have less representation than other municipalities being considered?"

The city argues that the legislation is unfair because it dilutes Birmingham's authority on the board.

Most Water Works Board members oppose the legislation, calling it unnecessary. They have said the authority is already transparent, inclusive and has taken voluntary steps to reduce board pay.

Mayor William Bell had also called for a compromise with legislators and offered to mediate. On the other hand, he recommended the city hire its own team of lobbyists at a cost of \$130,000.

"In his State of the City Address and even during the meeting that was held at Crossplex with a number of elected officials, he was willing to sit down and listen and if necessary, bringing people together," Bell's Chief of Staff Chuck Faush said today. "Today's action stresses there is obviously some discussion that needs to be had, and the mayor is the one to lead that effort as he has successfully brought us together on a number of issues."

Both the Water Works Board and the city have hired their own teams of lobbyists and political consultants to both monitor and help fight the legislation.

A companion House version of the legislation from Rep. Paul Demarco, R-Homewood, has not yet been introduced, but Demarco has said he will present it this session.

As chairman of the committee, Scales in December proposed a resolution calling for compromise on the legislation.

She said reform provisions, such as limiting board pay and mandating public hearings for rate increases. But she questioned the fairness of expanding the board to include other counties and other appointing authorities.

Ultimately, the full council passed a resolution opposing the entire legislation.

The council last month was also set to consider its own rules to institute board member term limits and require the appointment of a non-city resident to the utility, but never brought the issue to a vote.

The Republican-led legislation is certain to bring a fight. Democratic members of the Birmingham and Jefferson County Legislative Delegation have promised a fight to kill the bills comparing it to "guerrilla warfare."

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Alabama lawmaker wants classrooms to begin each day with prayers offered in Congress

The Associated Press

February 12, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Alabama — An Alabama lawmaker is seeking to let public school teachers begin each day by reading opening prayers that were given in Congress.

The House Education Policy held a public hearing Wednesday on the legislation.

The bill would set aside 15 minutes at the start of each school day to study the procedures of Congress, and give a verbatim reading of a congressional opening prayer.

Bill sponsor, Rep. Steve Hurst, says teachers could choose a prayer that related to the day's lesson. He says teachers might choose a prayer that was said on a particular day in history.

Opponents say the proposal is unconstitutional.

Susan Watson, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Alabama, says the proposal is teacher-led prayer being dressed up as a civics lesson.

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NRA president criticizes gun regulation, Alabama 'game check'

Times Daily

February 13, 2014

Mary Sell

MONTGOMERY — Jim Porter, president of the National Rifle Association and an Alabama native, was at the Montgomery Statehouse this week talking to lawmakers about gun and hunting rights and the organization's work on state and federal levels.

Wednesday evening, he spoke with members of the Alabama House's Rural Caucus, a bipartisan group of lawmakers.

Some of his comments follow.

On hunting rights:

"One thing that is very troubling to me, in many states, is that we have to fight hunting rules and regulations that are onerous, that are driving people away from hunting," Porter said. "They're just not going to do it."

"It troubles me that some of these things we're doing, even in this state, are going to take the little guy out of hunting. It's too expensive and they're not going to do it."

Porter criticized a new state "game check" program, which requires that hunters report to the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources the deer and turkeys they kill within 24 hours, or risk a fine. That rule was voluntary this year, but will be mandatory in the 2014-15 hunting season. Conservation officials have said it will help track the number of deer and turkeys in the state and offer county-by-county kill counts. Many states have similar rules.

"I expect this type of rule in New Jersey or Connecticut, but I don't expect it in the state of Alabama," Porter said. "To me, it is too much government intervention in our lives and I think it's extremely bad policy. It's going to drive hunters away and land owners are not going to do what the law requires. It is going to do the one thing lawmakers never want to do, pass a law that does not have the respect of the public and won't be followed."

On Forever Wild:

"In every legislature in this country, we are passing rights to access public hunting lands (legislation)," Porter said. "Just like the Forever Wild legislation was so important, because it had to do with access to hunting land."

Since it was established in 1992, Alabama's Forever Wild Land Trust has purchased more than 227,000 acres of land for public use, including hunting.

"We are looking to take that model of Forever Wild to other states."

On the NRA's "friendly incumbent" policy in politics:

"If you're our friend, we will fight for you and we'll get you elected," he said. "If you're our enemy, we'll get you beat. It's just that simple. ... We protect and work for and support our friends and we beat our enemies."

The NRA has about 5 million members, and that number is growing, he said.

On regulating where firearms can be carried:

“I refute the notion that giving someone a gun is going to make them a bad person,” he said. “And that’s basically what a state is saying when it regulates your rights – we don’t trust you.”

On court fights:

The NRA is involved in multiple court challenges to what it sees as anti-Second Amendment laws, including Chicago’s ban on gun sales, which was overturned by a federal judge in January.

“We just had a favorable ruling out of Chicago, of all places, by an appointee of President Obama who agreed with us and said the City of Chicago’s ordinances that banned the sale of firearms in the city are unconstitutional. He said that you have an individual right to keep and bear arms.”

Porter was named NRA president in May 2013. He’s a Birmingham attorney and his father was NRA president from 1951-1961.

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Alabama Democrats appear to continue adding candidates after deadline passes

Yellowhammer News

February 12, 2014

Cliff Sims

In early January, Alabama Secretary of State Jim Bennett announced that both major parties had to qualify their candidates by February 7th. The deadline was much earlier than usual, but the Secretary of State’s office was working to comply with federal laws concerning military and overseas voters. The abrupt change was due to ongoing litigation with the U.S. Department of Justice, who had gotten involved after Alabama previously failed to give military voters overseas enough time to get their ballots in.

“Though we do not have yet an order from the court, we have agreed with the Department of Justice to move our deadlines up considerably to get ballots to the Absentee Election Managers in each county,” Alabama Secretary of State Bennett said at the time. “This will allow ballots enough time to be sent to military and overseas voters well before the federal deadline, which is 45 days before the date of the election.”

Bennet said he had been in constant contact with both major parties leading up to the decision, and both of them agreed it was necessary.

As the Feb. 7th deadline passed, both parties failed to qualify candidates in certain races. That is not unusual because some districts lean so heavily toward one party that it’s difficult for the other party to find a candidate willing to run.

The final list of candidates for both parties was reported by multiple news sources, including the Associated Press, whose list can be found on numerous sites (Washington Times, ABC, etc.). The Alabama News Network posted an identical list of candidates on their site as well.

The candidate lists from numerous media outlets reflected what was shown on the Alabama Democratic Party's own spreadsheet.

But today, the Party released an updated candidate list with Democrats Burton LeFlore and Avery Wise running in Alabama's 1st and 6th Congressional Districts respectively. The new spreadsheet included the words "subject to amendment" at the top of the candidate column.

The Alabama Secretary of State does not certify the list of qualified candidates until March 13. An official in the Secretary of State's office said Wednesday that they essentially have to take each party's word for it that their candidates qualified ahead of the deadline.

So in spite of the Feb. 7 deadline, will Democrats continue "amending" their list of candidates for the next month?

Alabama Democratic Party Chairwoman Nancy Worley

Alabama Democratic Party Chairwoman Nancy Worley

Bill Armistead, Chairman of the Alabama Republican Party, told Yellowhammer that the move is indicative of Democrats' behavior on both the national and state levels.

"President Obama thinks he can change the rules and legislate from the Oval Office and apparently Nancy Worley thinks she can just make up the rules as she goes, too," said Armistead. "This is not the way America runs its elections."

Armistead said he plans take the appropriate action once the party is able to research the matter further.

A phone call seeking comment from Alabama Democratic Party Chairwoman Nancy Worley was not returned.

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Former Democratic state Rep. Angelo 'Doc' Mancuso hopes to revive political career in Alabama Senate

Al.com

February 12, 2014

Steve Doyle

COURTLAND, Alabama - Former Democratic state Rep. Angelo "Doc" Mancuso is attempting to revive his political career.

Mancuso, who represented parts of Madison, Limestone and Morgan counties in the state House from 1998 to 2002, has qualified to run for the Alabama Senate District 4 seat held by Republican Paul Bussman.

District 4 covers all of Cullman County plus parts of Lawrence, Winston and Marion counties. Mancuso is unopposed in the June 3 primary election.

"I will work to improve our schools, recruit new jobs and industry and secure funding to build new roads throughout the district," Mancuso said in a Wednesday news release.

A 58-year-old dermatologic surgeon from Courtland, Mancuso said another priority if elected will be "making quality healthcare available to all Alabamians."

Mancuso was active on health policy issues during his term in Montgomery, serving on the Alabama Health Committee and Governor's Task Force on Teen Smoking. He was also one of 10 physicians nationwide invited to participate in a Healthcare Policy Fellowship.

Mancuso switched parties and ran as a Republican for the open 5th Congressional District seat in 2008, finishing behind Wayne Parker and Cheryl Baswell Guthrie in the GOP primary.

He announced last fall that he was considering entering the lieutenant governor's race as a Democrat.

"The Alabama Republican Party is running a national agenda instead of focusing on what's happening in this state," Mancuso told AL.com in late September. "Government works best from a centrist point of view, and I had a reputation in the House of crossing the aisle and talking to both groups."

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Alabama school board taking over Selma schools

The Associated Press

February 12, 2014

SELMA (AP) — State Superintendent of Education Tommy Bice says a new leadership team should be in place at the Selma schools by the last week of February.

Bice says state education officials are assembling the team because the state Board of Education voted unanimously to take over the Selma city school system.

The takeover follows the arrest of a Selma High School teacher on charges of inappropriate sexual conduct with a student and an investigation by the state Department of Education. That investigation found the Selma system failed to adequately investigate allegations of inappropriate sexual behavior and failed to enforce policies on graduation requirements and testing procedures.

District Attorney Michael Jackson, who brought the charges against the teacher, says whatever the state does to help the schools will be a good thing.

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Alabama asks for license numbers to curb fraudulent returns

The Associated Press

February 13, 2014

Phillip Rawls

Alabama is taking a new approach to protecting taxpayers against crooks filing fraudulent income tax returns using stolen identifies.

The state Department of Revenue said those filing their individual and joint tax returns electronically should include their driver's license number or non-driver's license number and their date of birth. That applies to the Form 40 long tax return, the Form 40-A short return, and Form 40-NR for non-residents.

"It's not big brotherish," State Revenue Commissioner Julie Magee said.

She said the additional information is for protection against identity theft and fraudulent tax returns. She said the information can be validated quickly using records from the state Department of Public Safety, and it will not affect the normal processing of a tax return.

At the National Association of Tax Professionals in Appleton, Wis., spokeswoman Abby Crawford said the organization is not aware of any other state using driver's license numbers to address identity theft.

At the Federation of Tax Administrators in Washington, Deputy Director Verenda Smith said the national organization of state tax officials is also not aware of any other state doing it, but Alabama may start a trend. She said states are trying a variety of ideas — some visible to the public and some not — to reduce fraudulent returns, but it is difficult.

"It's a problem like chasing a virus. It morphs every time you touch it," she said.

In a report issued last year, the Federal Trade Commission said Alabama ranked 12th among states for identity theft complaints of all types, with an average of 82.5 complaints per 100,000 residents during 2011.

In an interview Tuesday evening, Alabama's chief tax official said the problem of people filing fraudulent state income tax returns is not as widespread as it is with federal tax returns. But she said her department gets hundreds of calls each year from Alabamians who have tried to file their returns electronically and had them rejected because someone already has filed a return using their name and personal information. Those fake returns use made-up numbers and claim a refund larger than the legitimate taxpayer would receive. She estimated the state is losing millions each year due to fake tax returns.

"Before a tax refund is issued from a taxpayer's account, it is reasonable for a taxpayer not only to expect, but also to demand that the department takes every precaution that it can to ensure that

the refund is a legitimate refund and not a fraudulent refund issued to an identity thief,” Magee said.

Magee said some online tax preparation services already require customers to submit their driver’s license numbers as a security precaution.

She said the driver’s license information is not being sought on traditional paper returns because identity theft is mostly a problem with tax returns filed electronically.

A spokesman for the Internal Revenue Service said driver’s license numbers are not required on federal income tax returns. Instead, the IRS assigns a special personal identification number to victims of identity theft to provide security on their next returns. The IRS said it expects to provide more than 1.2 million taxpayers nationwide with the special number for this tax season. That’s double the number from a year ago.