



Speaker's Press Clips
Wednesday, January 8, 2014

- *Al.com*: [Job creation to surge in Alabama? Moody's estimates a tenfold jump](#)
- *Al.com*: [University of Montevallo hosts legislative preview forum on Thursday](#)
- *Al.com*: [Shelby County legislative delegation to participate in town hall meeting Wednesday](#)
- *Al.com*: [Sen. Cam Ward says of state prisons: 'We're dealing with a box of dynamite'](#)
- *AP*: [Alabama reaches agreement on voter registration](#)
- *Al.com*: [State Schools Superintendent Tommy Bice, legislators talk money, reform measures at education forum](#)
- *Al.com*: [Net revenues to state Education Trust Fund up \\$47 million so far this fiscal year](#)
- *Yellowhammer News*: [Poll: Greer holds commanding lead over potential Democrat challenger in HD2](#)
- *Al.com*: [With new chairman and lobbyist, Equality Alabama looks to build on 2013's LGBT milestones](#)
- *AP*: [Alabama AG announcing legislative goals](#)
- *Al.com*: [Attorney General Luther Strange seeks to quicken the pace of executions in Alabama](#)
- *Al.com*: [Sen. Paul Sanford backs legalization of marijuana-derived drug; Madison woman tells of daughter's need for CBD oil](#)
- *Yellowhammer News*: [Former legislator Steve Flowers challenges Dunn for PSC seat](#)
- *Tuscaloosa News*: [EDITORIAL: Religious freedoms must be protected](#)
- *Al.com*: [Alabama Department of Corrections inmates posting protest videos recorded on contraband cellphones](#)
- *Al.com*: [Alabama Death Row by the numbers](#)
- *Montgomery Advertiser*: [Sewell pushes for more black federal judges](#)
- *Montgomery Advertiser*: [Faulkner University president announces plans to retire](#)
- *Tuscaloosa News*: [Obama honors University of Alabama geologist as up-and-coming researcher](#)
- *Birmingham Business Journal*: [One Alabama city named promising tech hub to watch in 2014](#)
- *New York Times*: [Vote in Senate Starts Talks on Extending Unemployment Benefits](#)

- *Washington Post*: [Robert Gates, former defense secretary, offers harsh critique of Obama's leadership in 'Duty'](#)
- *Roll Call*: [Farm Bill Nearing Home Stretch](#)

FULL TEXT

Job creation to surge in Alabama? Moody's estimates a tenfold jump

Al.com

January 7, 2014

Alex Walsh

An expert in economic forecasting says Alabama is due for a big jump in jobs.

Alabama could add more than 29,000 jobs in 2014, according to data provided by Moody's Analytics. The projections estimate that Alabama will rank 30th in job growth over the course of the coming year.

That would be a big jump up from its most recent ranking. From November 2012 to November 2013, Alabama ranked 49th in total overall job growth. It grew jobs at a rate of just 0.15 percent. Only Alaska, where total employment shrank, had a smaller figure.

And if Alabama meets its projection, it will have seen an even bigger jump in job growth. Moody's expects the state to grow jobs at a rate of about 1.5 percent -- which would be 10 times faster than the most recently reported annual rate of growth for jobs in the state. And adding 29,000 jobs in 2014 would be more than a tenfold leap over the most recent annual addition of 2,800 jobs.

Moody's estimates that Illinois will suffer through the slowest job growth of any state in 2014. It estimates that jobs in that state will grow by about 1 percent. That's about the pace at which Illinois added jobs in the most recent 12 months, but that was enough to be ranked 35th among states.

To see all of Moody's job growth estimates, access Pew's newest infographic [here](#).

+++

University of Montevallo hosts legislative preview forum on Thursday

Al.com

January 7, 2014

Martin J. Reed

MONTEVALLO, Alabama -- The University of Montevallo's Student Government Association is hosting a state legislative forum on Thursday night to provide a preview of topics that lawmakers will consider this upcoming session.

The forum will begin at 7 p.m. on Thursday at the Anna Irvin Dining Hall on the University of Montevallo campus.

Organizers expect Alabama Sens. Slade Blackwell of Mountain Brook and Cam Ward of Alabaster, along with Alabama Reps. Mike Hill of Columbiana, Jim McClendon of Springville and Kurt Wallace of Maplesville to appear.

The forum will provide attendees with the opportunity to listen to the elected leaders talk about the legislative session. Audience members can also ask them questions.

Students, faculty, staff and community members are invited to attend.

+++

Shelby County legislative delegation to participate in town hall meeting Wednesday

Al.com

January 7, 2014

Kim Chandler

The Shelby County legislative delegation will participate in a town hall meeting Wednesday ahead of the 2014 legislative session.

The meeting is hosted by the Greater Shelby Chamber's Governmental Affairs Work Group.

"We want to encourage all of our citizens to come to this Town Hall Meeting. This is a great opportunity for them to ask us some questions and tell us what they think we need to be focusing on," Sen. Cam Ward, R-Alabaster, said.

The town hall meeting will be from 5:30 pm until 7:00pm on Jan. 8 at the County Services Building, 1301 County Services Drive, Pelham, AL 35124. There will be a question and answer session with attendees.

Seating is limited. People are encouraged to RSVP at 663-4542 or info@shelbychamber.org,

The legislative session begins Jan. 14.

+++

Sen. Cam Ward says of state prisons: 'We're dealing with a box of dynamite'

Al.com

January 7, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- The chairman of the Alabama Legislature's prison oversight committee said he expects nonviolent protests at several Alabama prisons to blow over but says

they are another sign the state needs to address the persistent problems of overcrowding and understaffing.

Sen. Cam Ward, R-Alabaster, said nobody wants plush accommodations for prisoners but said the current conditions make the prisons ripe for violence and federal takeover.

“We’re dealing with a box of dynamite in our prison system,” Ward said.

Ward said he thought the Department of Corrections was doing the best it could with limited resources. He said he would propose a joint resolution during the legislative session to ask The Council of State Governments to come in a study Alabama’s prisons and criminal justice system and propose ways to improve it. He said the CSG did that in Texas and the state adopted many of its recommendations with positive results. He said there would be no cost to the state for a CSG study.

Alabama has already worked at reforms, including the establishment of the Alabama Sentencing Commission in the late 1990s. The commission compiles data and has advised the Legislature on changes in sentencing laws to allocate more of the scarce prison space for violent offenders.

This week, some inmates at Elmore, Holman and St. Clair correctional facilities have refused to do their assigned prison jobs, such as kitchen, laundry or maintenance work, as a way to protest prison conditions and other issues. Department of Corrections spokesman Brian Corbett said fewer inmates participated in the work stoppage today.

In an incident unrelated to the protests, a St. Clair Correctional facility inmate was stabbed by another inmate Monday and was in critical condition at UAB Hospital. An inmate was stabbed to death by another inmate at the St. Clair prison in August. An inmate died at Elmore Correctional Facility in October after a fight with another inmate.

Ward said solving Alabama’s prison problem will be a long-term process, involving the use of more community corrections programs, pretrial diversion, drug courts and other alternatives to sending offenders to the state penitentiaries.

He said advocating for programs that will improve prisons is never politically popular. But he said failure to act could result in what has happened in California, where federal courts have ordered the state to release inmates.

“I would rather us as a Legislature deal with it ... as opposed to a federal judge coming in slashing and burning,” Ward said.

Legislators begin their annual session on Tuesday. The state General Fund budget, which supports prisons and many other agencies, is expected to be one of the toughest challenges facing lawmakers because revenues that support the fund have not kept up with rising costs.

+++

State Schools Superintendent Tommy Bice, legislators talk money, reform measures at education forum

Al.com

January 7, 2014

William Thornton

GADSDEN, Alabama -- Money and reform measures dominated the conversation during a two-hour education forum at Gadsden State Community College tonight featuring State School Superintendent Tommy Bice and four Etowah County area legislators.

Their audience of more than 100 was comprised of teachers and members of Delta Kappa Gamma, the society for women educators.

Bice was not able to attend the meeting in person but spoke by video conference for about 30 minutes. His message was largely positive, saying he believed the new education budget may be "the best we've seen in years."

He also said the state has made good progress toward its goal of a 90 percent graduation rate among students by 2020. To reach that goal, Bice said, the graduation rate must increase by two percent each year. Last year, the rate increased three percent.

"We think this year it will be significantly more than that, so we feel like we're way ahead," he said.

He said current reforms in education have done away with the mandated standardized testing that dictated much of the instructional time in the classroom. Instead, schools are trying to foster intellectual curiosity among students and concentrate more on teaching them how to use information, solve problems and work collaboratively.

He encouraged teachers to be more innovative in instruction, saying school districts need to come up with programs that will adapt to students' individual needs. He cited Mobile for using schooling in different locations and at non-traditional hours to help prevent dropouts. Decatur was also singled out for its partnership with Calhoun Community College for career tech education.

"Schools have lived in fear of the state department," Bice said. "I've got the keys to the whole building. We do not have this group waiting to come get you if you try something creative."

He also challenged lawmakers to give more budget flexibility to districts in order to create programs.

The legislative part of the forum featured House Minority Leader Craig Ford, (D-Gadsden) State Sen. Phil Williams (R-Rainbow City), State Rep. Mack Butler (R-Rainbow City) and State Rep. Becky Nordgren, (R-Gadsden). Each legislator was posed a question submitted in advance and given several minutes to answer.

Questions dealt with repaying the state's rainy day fund, cost-sharing for medical coverage and the Alabama Accountability Act.

Answers predictably broke down along party lines, but the tone was civil throughout. On how long the state should continue to repay the remainder of the \$437.4 million borrowed in 2009 to lessen education budget cuts, Nordgren argued that the state on its current schedule would have the sum paid off by July 2015. Besides, she said, the payment schedule is a constitutional measure with a timetable that must be adhered to.

Ford, the lone Democrat, said that timetable could be reset by a similar constitutional measure. In the meantime, the money used to repay it could instead benefit schools and teachers now. "Don't make them suffer in the meantime, in two years," he said. "That money's already in the bank anyway."

Williams countered by saying the legislature is seeing results that benefit education through fiscal responsibility. Alabama's education budget has not had proration in three years due to fiscal measures and the rolling reserve act, approved in 2011, he said. Before that, one-third of the state's education budgets were prorated.

Ford also attacked the Accountability Act, drawing applause when he said the law should be repealed and decrying the legislative process that passed it last year. The bill allows families with children zoned to failing schools to receive tax credits to help pay for attendance at private schools or other public schools.

"There's no good points to this piece of legislation," Ford said. "You can't fix it. That money can be spent a hundred different ways than the way it is now."

Williams, however, said a student's demographic status shouldn't dictate where they live, arguing that legislators have pursued policy with students and teachers' best interests in mind.

"I sit in these meetings in Montgomery, and I've never heard a legislator say, 'Let's see how we can balance the budget on the backs of teachers,'" Williams said.

+++

Net revenues to state Education Trust Fund up \$47 million so far this fiscal year

Al.com

January 7, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Net revenues to the state Education Trust Fund are up by 3.5 percent during the first quarter of the fiscal year.

Through December, the state reported \$1.38 billion in net revenue to the ETF, the main state funding source for public schools. That's an increase of \$47 million over the first three months of last fiscal year. The state's fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

Net income tax revenues, the biggest source for the ETF, are up by about \$22 million, 2.9 percent, to \$801 million.

Net sales tax revenues, the second biggest source, are up by about \$31 million, 8.1 percent, to \$412 million.

Net revenues for the state General Fund, which supports operating budgets for many state agencies, are up 8.7 percent, to \$446 million. That's an increase of \$36 million over the same three-month period last fiscal year.

+++

Alabama reaches agreement on voter registration

The Associated Press

January 7, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama could see more low-income citizens signing up to vote now that voter rights groups and state officials have reached an agreement ensuring people who apply for social services also receive voter registration applications.

The Alabama State Conference of the NAACP and others announced the agreement Tuesday. It calls for the state Medicaid Agency and the state Department of Human Resources to automatically distribute voter registration applications to people when they apply for social services, renew the services or file a change of address.

Citizens whose transactions are completely remotely, such as by computer, will be mailed voter registration applications.

Project Vote official Sarah Brannon said the agreement provides low-income residents with access to the voter registration that's guaranteed under the federal motor voter law.

Secretary of State Jim Bennett said Alabama needed to do a few things to come into compliance with the motor voter law and the agreement accomplishes that without having potentially costly litigation. "When you boil it down, it's about compliance with a federal mandate," Bennett said.

The agreement resulted from more than a year of negotiation between the voter rights groups and the state. The agreement calls for Bennett's office and the NAACP to monitor compliance.

"We look forward to working with the agencies while the agreement is in place to make voter registration a standard component of public assistance agency programs," said Bob Kengle, co-director of the Voting Rights Project of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

The groups said litigation in other states has resulted in an increase in voter registration by low-income residents. Ohio settled a suit over the issue in 2009, and voter registration applications

from public assistance agencies increased from an average of 25,000 per year to more than 200,000 per year.

Alabama's agreement runs through November 2016, which is when the next presidential election will occur.

+++

Poll: Greer holds commanding lead over potential Democrat challenger in HD2

Yellowhammer News

January 8, 2014

Cliff Sims

State Rep. Lynn Greer, R-Rogersville, who was first elected to the Alabama legislature in 1974, announced in mid-December that he would be seeking another term in 2014.

Since then, former Lauderdale County District Court judge Deborah Bell Paseur has indicated that she's weighing the possibility of running against Greer as a Democrat. Unfortunately for Paseur, a polling memo obtained by Yellowhammer News over the weekend shows that she would have a very difficult time unseating the popular incumbent.

The survey, which was conducted by nationally known public opinion research firm McLaughlin & Associates, shows Greer leading Paseur by 13 points in a head-to-head race, 49% to 36%, with 15% undecided. Among voters who have a firm opinion of both candidates, Greer's lead goes up to 15 points, 55% to 40%.

Rep. Lynn Greer, R-Rogersville

Rep. Lynn Greer, R-Rogersville

"This is important, as the most informed voters are gravitating towards Greer," pollster Jim McLaughlin wrote in the memo.

Alabama House District 2 is solidly Republican, but Independents are also breaking hard for Greer, 51% to 31%, with 18% undecided.

With both Republicans and Independents firmly in Greer's camp, it's tough to see Paseur gaining significant traction in the race.

"I am proud of the progress we have made in the legislature over the last four years," Greer said. "Alabama is leading the region in job creation, we have cut wasteful spending, passed new ethics laws and invested millions of dollars in new roads. We need to continue this progress over the next four years and we have to keep conservative leadership in Montgomery to make that happen."

The table containing Greer's head-to-head numbers against Paseur can be seen below. (Click to enlarge)

numbers

The McLaughlin survey polled 300 likely general election voters in Alabama's 2nd State House District. It has an accuracy of +/- 5.7% at a 95% confidence interval.

+++

With new chairman and lobbyist, Equality Alabama looks to build on 2013's LGBT milestones

Al.com

January 7, 2013

Jeremy Gray

When state lawmakers return to Montgomery on Jan. 14 for the 2014 legislative session, Equality Alabama is hoping to have a seat at the table and make heard the voices of Alabama's LGBT community.

"Last year, we worked tirelessly to accomplish our goals and to ... expand and energize equality, justice, and fairness," said Ben Cooper, the Birmingham attorney recently named to serve as EA's chairman of the board. "2013 clearly showed us that there is no limit to what we can accomplish together with continued support."

To help accomplish its goals, the organization has hired Jeff Martin to serve as a lobbyist for the upcoming session.

"We felt now was the time to begin conversations with those who shape public policy in Alabama about issues affecting LGBTQ individuals in their everyday lives, such as marriage, family and health care rights. Jeff will give us a voice in Montgomery and help us bring about positive changes for those we serve," a statement from the organization read.

Martin will focus on two specific pieces of legislation, Cooper said.

One is a bill by Rep. Patricia Todd, D-Birmingham, that would repeal an amendment to the state constitution that prohibits same sex marriage and another is a bill sponsored by Rep. Becky Nordgren, R-Gadsden, that would allow health care providers to refuse to perform procedures that "violate their conscience."

"Equality Alabama is particularly concerned about the inclusion of embryonic stem cell research in (Nordgren's) bill. A great deal of research is being done with HIV and AIDS, and researchers are hopeful that through stem cell research will lead to a "cure" wherein a patient's infected immune system can be replaced with new cells that cannot be infected," spokesman Michael Hansen said.

Among the highest priorities for the year, Cooper said, are the passage of non-discrimination ordinances by Alabama cities. An ordinance creating a human rights commission was sent to a Birmingham city council committee in 2013 but no action has been taken.

"We're working on getting feedback from the council and the city's legal department so we can craft a plan. We have our eye on other cities across the state this year, but I don't want to jump the gun on revealing which ones just yet," Hansen said.

Joining Cooper are four new board members: Gary Bishop, Ashley Jackson, Erle Moring, and Lauren Banks. Other board members are Michael Hansen, Robert Hernandez, Juliann Losey, Steven Romeo, and Fergus Tuohy (past chair).

Other officers are Patrick Scarborough, vice-chair; West Honeycutt, secretary; and Jay Barrett, treasurer.

"We will move Alabama forward this year. We will continue to gain ground towards progress, working together to improve LGBTQ Alabamians everyday lives," Cooper said.

And while 2013 was a watershed year for the LGBT movement nationally -- six states passed marriage equality laws and The U.S. Supreme Court struck down a key part of the Defense of Marriage Act -- Equality Alabama said it was also a great year for the LGBT rights movement in Alabama, too.

The organization recently released a list of memorable events in Alabama's LGBT movement for the year. Here are some of those:

1. 'Roll Pride, War Equal T-shirts designed to advance equal rights for LGBTQ Alabamians'
2. 'Alabama teens petition Legislature to repeal anti-homosexuality language in sex ed law'
3. In Alabama-Mississippi 'intolerance-off,' The Daily Show tests reactions to a gay couple, gets surprising reaction
4. 'Thousands Show Up To Support Marriage Equality'
5. Birmingham City Council committee endorses city-wide human rights commission
6. 'Magic City Acceptance': New project seeks to help Alabama's LGBT youth
7. 'Birmingham Mayor Bell Comes Out For Equality'
8. 'College Republican Stands Up For The Freedom To Marry'

+++

Alabama AG announcing legislative goals

The Associated Press

January 7, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange is traveling across the state to announce his agenda for the upcoming session of the Legislature.

A spokeswoman for the attorney general says he plans news conferences Wednesday in Mobile, Birmingham, Huntsville and Montgomery. Strange will be talking about his goals for the legislative session that starts Jan. 14.

The legislative session will be going on while Strange seeks another four-year term as attorney general. The session is due to end in April and the primary election is June 3.

+++

Attorney General Luther Strange seeks to quicken the pace of executions in Alabama

Al.com

January 8, 2014

Kim Chandler

MONTGOMERY, Alabama - Attorney General Luther Strange is seeking to accelerate the pace of death penalty appeals in Alabama, noting decades can go by before inmates see the execution chamber.

Strange said a bill to streamline the death penalty appeals process will be a top priority for him in the upcoming legislative session.

“It shouldn’t take decades through the appeals process to get justice for families,” Strange said in an interview.

The attorney general said death penalty appeals in Alabama currently “seem endless with excessive delays that serve only to prolong pain and postpone justice for the victims of these heinous crimes.”

Strange is announcing his legislative agenda today in a series of press conferences around the state.

He is also backing proposals that would make it a capital offense to kill someone at a school or day care and also to give state law enforcement the power to do wiretaps during murder, drug and other certain investigations.

Currently, a person given the death penalty has a series of direct appeals, first to the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals, and then to the Alabama Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court. After those are complete, the defendant can begin Rule 32 appeals, post-conviction appeals that look at other issues such as the trial lawyer's competence.

The proposed legislation, dubbed The Fair Justice Act, would run both sets of appeals simultaneously. Capital defendants would be required to file Rule 32 petitions within 180 days of filing their first direct appeal.

Strange said the proposal is similar to what Texas and Virginia have done.

The average stay on the state's death row has been nearly 16 years since the U.S reinstated the death penalty. However, the time between sentencing and execution is expected to increase since the inmates currently on death row have already been there an average of 13 years.

The longest-serving death row inmate in Alabama has been there for 34 years. Arthur Lee Giles was sentenced to death in 1979 when he was 19 years old.

The legislation is backed by district attorneys across the state.

"The Fair Justice Act takes a comprehensive approach to streamlining the appeals process in death penalty cases so that family members of victims will not have to suffer for decades awaiting justice to be done," St. Clair District Attorney Richard J. Minor said in a statement about the bill. Minor is president of the Alabama District Attorneys Association.

Strange said the expedited process would not infringe on defendants' rights.

"You get the same level of appeals, but you do them on a dual track," Strange said. The defendant would still have a round of federal appeals.

But the proposal is expected to draw opposition from death penalty opponents and others who say it will get quicker executions but not necessarily better justice.

The attorney general is also backing legislation:

- To allow state law enforcement the ability to do wire taps for investigations into murder, kidnapping, child pornography, human trafficking, sex offenses involving children under 12, and felony drug offenses. Alabama law enforcement organizations currently do not have the ability to seek wiretaps, although police in many other states do. The wiretaps would have to be approved by the court.
- To include murders at a school or day care in the list of crimes that can be prosecuted as a capital offenses.
- To let prosecutors grant immunity and compel testimony from witnesses. Alabama is the only state that allows the witness to decline immunity and thus to withhold testimony, according to the attorney general's office.

The 2014 legislative session begins as Strange is seeking a second term as attorney general. The session begins Jan. 14.

"We are proposing fair and sensible changes to make the system work better for everyone. We also send a clear message that we will not tolerate the slaughter of our children at schools, with

changes in the law that specify it is a capital crime to murder them and others who are particularly vulnerable," Strange said.

+++

Sen. Paul Sanford backs legalization of marijuana-derived drug; Madison woman tells of daughter's need for CBD oil

Al.com

January 8, 2014

Paul Gattis

HUNTSVILLE, Alabama - A Huntsville state senator on Tuesday night said he would support a bill in the state Legislature that would legalize the use of a marijuana-derived drug.

Paul Sanford

[View full size](#)

State Sen. Paul Sanford offered to be the Senate sponsor to a bill sponsored by Rep. Mike Ball of Madison that would legalize the use of CBD oil in Alabama. (AL.com file photo)

At the Madison County legislative delegation forum at Huntsville's city council chambers, Sen. Paul Sanford, R-Huntsville, told an overflow crowd he has offered to be the senate sponsor to a bill being crafted by state Rep. Mike Ball, R-Madison. Ball did not attend the forum.

The bill, known as Carly's Law, would legalize the use of cannabidiol, or CBD - an oil that comes from marijuana. The bill is named for a child in Inverness born with a rare genetic seizure disorder and reports have indicated its effectiveness of CBD oil in reducing seizures.

Sanford said supporting the legalization of CBD oil is not "opening the door" to legalizing marijuana.

"Once you realize that there is no component for people to be getting mind- and mood-altering off of it and it deals with some really unusual situations with some health issues, I just think it's the right thing to do," Sanford said in an interview with The Huntsville Times/AL.com following the forum.

One of those situations was spelled out by Gena Dalton, a Madison woman who told of her 17-month-old daughter, Charlotte. Dalton said her daughter had her first seizure when she was 7 months old and the seizures have grown more frequent ever since.

"It was the most terrifying moment of my life and I thought she was dying," Dalton told legislators of holding Charlotte after that first seizure.

Charlotte has since been diagnosed with Dravet syndrome, which Dalton described as a "catastrophic form of epilepsy."

Dalton said that if Alabama does not legalize the use of CBD oil, Charlotte's neurologist has recommended the family move to Colorado where the oil is legal.

I'm going to do what I think is the right thing to do. If it costs me an election, I'll be OK. I'll sleep well at night.

In Sanford, Dalton has a staunch ally.

"If my child was having 300 seizures a month and there was something I could give them that would cut it down to four, by golly, this gentleman would be making sure I got it," Sanford said. "And I'll be frank: If it meant I had to break the law, I would break the law so I wouldn't have to watch my infant child go through something like that.

"If that makes me a bad person, so be it. I think it would make me a great parent, to be honest."

Dalton told legislators that she was not seeking the legalization of marijuana. According to information she gave lawmakers, CBD oil contains 0.76 percent of THC - the euphoric element of marijuana. Street marijuana has no value for treating epilepsy, the handout said.

The handout also cited a National Cancer Institute study that found that a 1 percent concentration of THC produces the same euphoric effects as placebo.

"I'm not asking for the legalization of marijuana, whether medically or recreationally," Dalton told lawmakers. "What I'm asking you to consider is that CBD oil as a marijuana derivative should be considered much in the same way we use morphine, which is derived from opium."

Said Sanford, "A drug user is not going to be able to drink this stuff and catch a buzz. So what are we afraid of in that regard? We've got an all-natural product that's helping a real-world situation."

Dalton said conventional medicines have "horrific" side effects, such as slowing or stopping the mental and emotional development as well as causing liver damage, and that her daughter is developing an addiction to valium.

The CBD oil, Dalton said, "could potentially help her live a seizure-free life."

Sanford said he wants to do what he can to push the bill through the legislature - even if it costs him re-election.

"It can be potentially a hot-button issue but I've never been afraid of a hot-button issue -- whether it's an election year or not," Sanford said. "You'll get the same vote out of me the day before an election as it would be the day after an election. I'm going to do what I think is the right thing to do.

"If it costs me an election, I'll be OK. I'll sleep well at night."

+++

Former legislator Steve Flowers challenges Dunn for PSC seat

Yellowhammer News

January 8, 2014

Cliff Sims

Yellowhammer reported several months ago that former Democratic State Rep. Steve Flowers was considering running for the Alabama Public Service Commission as a Republican.

This morning Flowers will make it official. He's running for the PSC Place 2 seat currently held by embattled Commissioner Terry Dunn.

Flowers was elected to the Alabama House of Representatives in 1982. He boasted a perfect attendance record in the legislature for four consecutive terms before deciding to not seek re-election in 1998.

He now writes a column on state politics that runs in local papers around the state. He also teaches a class on southern politics at Troy University and hosts weekly television and radio shows produced by the university.

Other Republicans challenging Dunn have been on the campaign trail for several months. However, Flowers has roughly \$60,000 left in his old state campaign account to help him close the gap.

It will be worth watching to see how Flowers' candidacy is received by conservatives. He was initially elected to the Alabama legislature as a Democrat. He then ran as a Republican in 2002 and lost. Campaign finance disclosures show he's been periodically active since then donating to Democrats, including State Sen. Roger Bedford's U.S. Senate campaign in 2004 and The Alabama Democratic Party in 2005. Today, he's running again on the GOP ticket.

The PSC race is perhaps a bit more ideologically driven this year because of heightened awareness about environmental issues among conservatives. It's the main reason Dunn is in such trouble. Flowers' biggest challenge will be convincing the Republican base that he's one of them — a viable conservative alternative.

+++

EDITORIAL: Religious freedoms must be protected

Tuscaloosa News

January 4, 2014

It doesn't take a lot of backbone to defend someone's rights when you agree with them. It's a little bit harder to defend the right of those with whom you disagree.

We offer that reminder because many people do not agree with the Catholic Church's position on birth control. In fact, many Catholics use birth control while continuing to be active members of their parishes.

But it is without dispute that the Catholic Church opposes the use of birth control. Requiring Catholic organizations that provide services to the general public to provide their employees with insurance coverage for contraceptives is an unwarranted government intrusion, and it interferes with their religious liberty.

In this modern day, Catholic restrictions on birth control may make no sense to a Protestant, a member of another religion or an unbeliever. Jewish and Muslim prohibitions against eating pork may make no sense to barbecue-loving Southerners.

But both religious restrictions on birth control and dietary laws are established religious practices no matter how much they seem like a square peg in a round-hole culture. That means they are protected by the First Amendment. These Catholic organizations are affiliated with the church and are often under the control of the church leadership.

These organizations are expected to operate under the principles governing the Catholic Church. Forcing them to condone or support a practice that their church forbids infringes on their religious liberty. The Affordable Care Act does just that by requiring religion-affiliated organizations that serve the public to offer health insurance to employees that includes birth control.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor was correct to grant an injunction last week to nuns in Denver operating the Little Sisters

of The Poor Home for the Aged, a Catholic organization that sought an emergency stay of the contraceptive coverage requirement.

The White House wants the court to stop blocking the birth control provision. It issued a statement in response saying that its rules "strike a balance of providing women with free contraceptive coverage while preventing nonprofit religious organizations with religious objections to contraceptive coverage from having to contract, arrange, pay or refer to such coverage." That sounds nice because most people want women to have access to contraceptives if they desire it.

The problem with that stance is that religious liberty — the free exercise of religion — is guaranteed in the Constitution, the document on which this country is founded. The right to free contraceptives is part of a badly crafted recent piece of legislation. It is among the bones tossed out to the gaggle of special interest constituencies that President Barack Obama owes for his election. That's not enough reason to compromise protection of religious liberty. It is further evidence of what many perceive as this administration's disdain, if not outright hostility toward religious groups, particularly Christians.

We hope that the Supreme Court will side with Catholic organizations — and religious liberty — on this issue.

+++

Alabama Department of Corrections inmates posting protest videos recorded on contraband cellphones

Al.com

January 7, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Alabama state prisoners are not allowed to have cellphones, but that policy hasn't stopped some inmates from showing up on YouTube in recorded interviews talking about prison conditions and other issues.

Alabama Department of Corrections spokesman Brian Corbett said the videos, posted on the YouTube channel Free Alabama Movement, are part of the nonviolent protests taking place at three Alabama prisons. Inmates are protesting about not being paid for prison jobs, unsanitary conditions, overcrowding, sentencing and parole policies and other issues.

Corbett said disciplinary action is possible against those inmates involved in the videos because of the contraband phones.

The number of inmates refusing to work at prison jobs as part of the protest went down today, Corbett said.

At Elmore Correctional Facility, Corbett said all inmates who are assigned a job at the prison worked today. At Holman Correctional Facility, Corbett said fewer inmates refused to work today than on Monday. He said the number of inmates refusing to work at St. Clair Correctional Facility was about the same today as on Monday.

The inmates involved work in prison kitchens, laundries, maintenance and other jobs, including the license plate plant at Holman.

One of the complaints is that the inmates aren't paid for the work. Holman said inmates have never been paid for such prison jobs.

Some inmates receive a small amount, about 35 cents to 50 cents an hour, for other jobs that are through Alabama Correctional Industries. But that is a small percentage of inmate jobs.

Corbett noted that some of the issues raised in the protests have been outside the scope of the Department of Corrections, such as parole policies, life without parole sentences and other sentencing issues.

+++

Alabama Death Row by the numbers

Al.com

January 8, 2014
Kim Chandler

Number of Inmates on Death Row: 194

Average Age of Inmates on Death Row: 26

Number of Alabama executions since the U.S. reinstated the death penalty in 1976: 56

Longest a current inmate has been on death row: 34 years
Method of execution:

Lethal injection unless the inmate requests electrocution.

Source: Alabama Department of Corrections

+++

Sewell pushes for more black federal judges

Montgomery Advertiser

January 8, 2014

Mary Orndorff Troyan

WASHINGTON — Civil rights advocates are encouraging President Barack Obama to nominate an African-American to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which would be a first from Alabama.

The high-level court, one step below the U.S. Supreme Court, has had only two black judges in its history, both from Florida.

The latest opening — created when Judge Joel Dubina of Montgomery took semi-retirement in October — will be the first chance a Democratic president has had to appoint someone from Alabama to the 11th Circuit, which was created in 1981.

Race is a significant issue for the Deep South circuit, which has a combined black population of about 7.2 million. The 11th Circuit hears appeals from Florida, Georgia and Alabama, and is a source of many high-profile discrimination cases involving voting, employment and redistricting.

Rep. Terri Sewell, D-Birmingham, is the lone black member of Alabama's congressional delegation and said diversity should be a priority.

“I think now is not the time to falter on the president's commitment to diversifying the bench, and that is especially true on the 11th Circuit,” Sewell said Tuesday. “Alabama has some very talented African-American lawyers who should be considered.”

And U.W. Clemon, Alabama's first black federal judge who is now in private practice in Birmingham, is also hoping for a black nominee.

"It would be historic," Clemon said.

The Alabama Democratic Party and an advisory committee to Sewell have interviewed several black candidates for the 11th Circuit job, and many of their names have been forwarded to the White House for consideration.

Republican input

But the decision does not rest solely with Democrats. Federal judicial nominees must win confirmation by the U.S. Senate, a process that has been politically contentious for many years. And when the two home-state senators are from a different political party than the president, the politics are even more complicated. Traditionally, a candidate that does not have the support of his home state senators is unlikely to even be nominated.

In interviews Tuesday on Capitol Hill, Alabama GOP Sens. Richard Shelby and Jeff Sessions said they are working with the White House to find qualified nominees for the 11th Circuit and two other vacancies on lower federal courts in Huntsville and Montgomery.

"I'm interested in the best qualified nominees that we can get, realizing that we have a Democratic president and a Democratic Senate," Shelby said. "My idea is not to rubber stamp anybody politically because those are very important lifetime jobs. I think diversity is important, but qualifications should trump everything. Oftentimes you can have diversity and qualifications. I believe that."

Sessions is a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which reviews nominees. He declined to discuss any potential nominees or the issue of diversity.

"There are many factors one can consider in appointments but fundamentally I hope the president will nominate somebody who is committed to the rule of law, is hardworking and honest, and understands they serve under the law and under the Constitution and they're not above it," Sessions said.

There are eight judges on the 11th Circuit on active status: six white, one black and one Hispanic, according to the Federal Judicial Center.

So far in his presidency, Obama has nominated five people to the 11th Circuit. Two have been confirmed and three are pending in the Senate. Of the five, four are white and one is Hispanic. The lone black judge on the 11th Circuit now is Judge Charles Wilson from Florida, appointed by former President Bill Clinton.

Candidates

A possible contender for the 11th Circuit job is U.S. District Judge Abdul Kallon of Birmingham, who is black. Sessions and Shelby consented when Obama nominated him to his current job, and he was confirmed unanimously by the Senate in 2009.

“Should the president nominate him, he’d have my full support,” Sewell said. “He has shown himself to be an outstanding jurist.”

Elevating Kallon would create a third vacancy in Alabama, and leave the state with zero black federal judges. Judges Lynwood Smith of Huntsville and Myron Thompson moved to senior status, or semi-retirement, in August.

“To elevate one black judge to a higher court and give up racial diversity on the lower court is a return to the past and a major step backward, not forward,” Sewell said.

Sewell said her screening committee found a strong pool of several qualified black lawyers and judges.

“I want this White House and our senators to know the importance of the lower federal courts also being diversified,” Sewell said. “I would suggest we also fill some of those vacancies on the lower federal court with African-Americans as well, and that’s a point that I will continue to make.”

David Bositis, acting vice president of the Civic Engagement and Governance Institute at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, said a diverse bench in the South is critical because the region is dominated by mostly white, conservative state legislatures.

“Race still motivates a lot of politics and decision-making,” Bositis said. Having more black judges would bring “a sensitivity to issues involving African-Americans and justice,” he said.

The NAACP Legal Defense Fund, one of the groups that represented black residents of Shelby County in an effort to preserve key sections of the Voting Rights Act, is also calling for more black judges in Alabama.

“It is a historic moment in Alabama’s federal judiciary because of the number of vacancies and the stakes involved,” said Leslie Proll, director of the Washington office of the NAACP LDF.

+++

Faulkner University president announces plans to retire

Montgomery Advertiser

January 7, 2014

MONTGOMERY — Faulkner University President Dr. Billy D. Hilyer announced plans Tuesday to retire effective May 31, 2015, at the close of the 2014-2015 school year.

Hilyer has served as president for 28 years and is the university’s seventh president.

In a letter to the university's board of trustees announcing his retirement plans, Hilyer gave credit to past and current board members and to employees for Faulkner's growth during his tenure as president.

"I am grateful for our wonderful faculty and staff," Hilyer said. "For years I have received much too much credit, credit that was due the faculty. Much of the progress we have enjoyed through the years is the result of their hard work, often under difficult circumstances, their professionalism and good spirit."

Hilyer began his career at Faulkner University in 1974 as a part-time counselor and was named director of student services the following year. From there, he progressed to the dean of counseling services/registrar position, then to vice president of campus affairs/registrar, and in February 1986 to executive vice president. He was named president July 1986.

"I am grateful to the board of trustees for the unbelievable opportunity given me for almost 28 years now," Hilyer said in his letter. "Please know that I will continue to give my very best until the last day of my tenure as president and that my prayers will be with the board as you begin the search for the next president of this great institution."

A search committee to name the university's next president has already been formed, according to John W. Hill III, chairman of Faulkner's board of trustees. It is chaired by Dale Kirkland, also a member of the board of trustees, and includes Jim Campbell; Carlton Freeman; Chip Garrett; Jess Hall; Levon Henley; Billy Lambert; Louis Lester; and Carole Medley.

"(The board) recognizes there is no greater period of time or more important task before us than the selection of a new president," Hill said. "And through providence, and your support and prayers and President Hilyer's continued interest in the university, we will continue to grow and offer excellence in a Christ-centered institution of higher learning to the young of generations to come."

Upon stepping down as president, Hilyer will assume the new role of chancellor of the university.

"It will be my desire in that role to assist the new president in every way I can and to continue to fully support Faulkner University, while being relieved of the day-to-day administrative duties of the presidency," Hilyer said.

+++

Obama honors University of Alabama geologist as up-and-coming researcher

Tuscaloosa News

January 7, 2014

Ed Enoch

Samantha Hansen, a University of Alabama assistant professor of geological sciences, still plans to leave Nov. 4 for her second research season in Antarctica, where she will check earthquake-monitoring equipment in hopes of understanding the origins of Antarctica's longest mountain range.

Tuscaloosa News

By Ed Enoch

Staff Writer | The Tuscaloosa News

Published: Monday, January 6, 2014 at 5:00 p.m.

Last Modified: Monday, January 6, 2014 at 5:12 p.m.

University of Alabama geologist Samantha Hansen got a holiday surprise when she learned a couple of days before Christmas she was among 102 up-and-coming researchers recognized by President Barack Obama's administration for their innovative research and commitment to community service.

"I was deliriously happy, surprised and overwhelmed in a good way," she said.

Hansen, a UA assistant professor of geological sciences, is among the winners of the Presidential Early Career Awards for Scientists and Engineers, according to a release from the White House. Hansen is scheduled to receive the award at a Washington, D.C.-ceremony sometime this year, according to UA.

The award, given to nominees whose research is funded by or work for the federal government, is highest honor bestowed by the U.S. government on scientists and engineers in the early stages of their independent research careers, according to the White House release.

"The impressive achievements of these early-stage scientists and engineers are promising indicators of even greater successes ahead," Obama said in a statement released with the announcement of the awards. "We are grateful for their commitment to generating the scientific and technical advancements that will ensure America's global leadership for many years to come."

Hansen was aware of the award, but said she was unaware she had been nominated by the National Science Foundation, which awarded her a five-year \$715,000 CAREER grant that has funded her trips to Antarctica to research the formation of the Transantarctic Mountains.

"I didn't actually know I was going to get this," she said.

Hansen is studying the mountains using seismic sensors that use energy signals from earthquakes occurring worldwide to create images of the range, much of which is covered in deep snow and ice.

Hansen and two UA graduate students returned from her most recent trip to Antarctica last month to retrieve data. Hansen said she collected more than 200 gigabytes of data from the sensors.

The National Science Foundation and other similar federal departments and agencies that fund research or employ the scientists and engineers make the nominations annually for the awards. The nominations are based on early accomplishments that show great promise for assuring America's pre-eminence in science and engineering and contribute to the awarding agencies' missions, according to the White House.

The awards, established by President Bill Clinton in 1996, are coordinated by the Office of Science and Technology Policy within the Executive Office of the President.

+++

One Alabama city named promising tech hub to watch in 2014

Birmingham Business Journal

January 7, 2014

Yann Ranaivo

Techie.com has named Huntsville among the 10 most promising tech hub cities to watch for this year.

The website, which provides reviews and blogs on tech trends, mentioned the activities of Brandon Kruse, a native Huntsville entrepreneur who created the city's Small Business Meetup Group. Techie.com also talked about how Kruse is currently starting a new incubator to provide free office space to entrepreneurs to "invigorate the local scene."

"It is precisely this type of grass-roots techie sensibility that made it obvious to us here at Techie.com that Huntsville would have to make the list of 2014's most important emerging tech hubs," the website said.

Techie.com pointed to Cummings Research Park, which it said is a large hub of aerospace and military tech companies and the NASA Marshall Space Flight Center. Techie.com's review also included a mention on Huntsville incubator Biztech, which houses 10 to 15 early stage companies at any given time.

"Huntsville has a long history with NASA and the Department of Defense, and we have a tremendous number of engineers," Techie.com quoted Biztech CEO Gary Tauss as saying. "When the government budget goes down, all those people need something to do. So the thought is to develop an alternative economy that would help the region grow."

Techie.com said Huntsville provides some of the key provisions needed to house a successful Dot Cloud tech community. Those include the presence of formal incubators and co-working spaces and the organization of informal meetups. The website said the meetup group Kruse founded has grown quickly.

Other cities on Techie.com's list that are comparable in size or smaller than Huntsville are the Champaign-Urbana area in Illinois, Fort Collins, Colo., Sioux Falls, S.D. and Burlington, Vt.

+++

Vote in Senate Starts Talks on Extending Unemployment Benefits

New York Times

January 7, 2014

Jonathan Weisman

WASHINGTON — The Senate’s unexpected vote on Tuesday to advance legislation extending expired unemployment benefits touched off delicate negotiations to secure final passage in the chamber, even as Republicans and Democrats warily eyed the political motives behind the efforts.

The three-month extension of benefits passed with no room to spare, on a vote of 60 to 37, and some of the six Republicans who voted yes made clear that they wanted the \$6.4 billion cost paid for through cuts elsewhere in the budget.

Still, even getting the Senate on to the bill was a victory for President Obama and Democratic leaders, who have tried for weeks to steer away from health care and budget wrangling and onto pocketbook issues, which they say they will use to try to frame the 2014 elections. Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York, hailed the vote as a shift in “the tectonic plates of our politics.”

Republicans opposed to the extension will begin offering alternatives on Wednesday. Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, one of the Republicans’ potential presidential hopefuls, will speak about poverty and unveil proposals that he says will help the chronically poor without consigning them to a lifetime of government assistance. On Thursday, Representative Paul D. Ryan of Wisconsin, the Republican vice-presidential nominee in 2012, will also speak about a conservative approach to poverty.

A deal that widens Republican support for the unemployment extension would give Democrats weeks to pressure balking House Republican leaders, highlighting fractures in a party offering differing policy answers to poverty and income inequality. Democrats were not terribly optimistic that an accord could be reached, though they said that fiscally conscious Republicans also feeling heat from struggling constituents had been receptive to genuine negotiations.

“We’ll only know that after long discussions without preordained outcomes, and sometimes you only know when you call the vote,” said Senator Jack Reed, a Rhode Island Democrat and co-author of the unemployment bill, with Senator Dean Heller, Republican of Nevada. The senators represent the two states with the highest unemployment rates. “This is still a tough, tough struggle,” Mr. Reed added.

Tuesday’s vote merely got the Senate to consider the unemployment bill formally. The six Republicans who voted yes included moderates like Senators Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, but also conservatives from states with unemployment rates above the national average, like Senators Rob Portman of Ohio and Dan Coats of Indiana.

Leading voices in the Republican Party have questioned extending emergency unemployment benefits that were first passed in 2008, the height of the recession. Senator Rand Paul, a Kentucky Republican and possible presidential candidate in 2016, has warned that the benefits are a narcotic for the unemployed, lulled by handouts away from seeking work. Groups like the political action committee Club for Growth and the Heritage Foundation's political arm, Heritage Action, also warned Republicans against the extension.

Yet most Republicans put aside the "safety net as hammock" arguments, and enough of them were willing on Tuesday to begin the formal process of extending benefits.

"There was enough concern," Mr. Coats said, "and maybe some legitimate need to do some extension of unemployment benefits, that it shouldn't have been just shut down."

Mr. Obama, accompanied by unemployed Americans as he spoke in the East Room of the White House, tried to keep the pressure on congressional Republicans. "We've got to get this across the finish line without obstruction or delay," he said.

But Speaker John A. Boehner of Ohio made clear that in addition to demanding that an extension of expired benefits be paid for, he would also tie it to Republican priorities like building the Keystone XL oil pipeline, expanding exemptions from the Affordable Care Act and opening energy exploration on federal land.

"One month ago, I personally told the White House that another extension of temporary emergency unemployment benefits should not only be paid for but include something to help put people back to work," Mr. Boehner said after the Senate vote. "To date, the president has offered no such plan. If he does, I'll be happy to discuss it. But right now the House is going to remain focused on growing the economy and giving America's unemployed the independence that only comes from finding a good job."

The White House has labored since 2011 under the belief that bipartisan support in the Democratic-controlled Senate would steamroll the Republican House. That has not worked on an immigration overhaul, a broad transportation bill or a measure outlawing workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. But it has worked on narrower bills like the reauthorization and expansion of the Violence Against Women Act.

Republican leaders accused Democrats of manufacturing a political issue, hoping that the unemployment bill fails at Republican hands. Mr. Schumer said he feared that Republicans allowed the bill to go forward only to steer Democrats into a "cul-de-sac" or a "Mexican standoff" in which each side would offer its own measures to pay for the benefits but neither would compromise.

But leaders in both parties expressed openness to a negotiated settlement, and Democrats gave little indication that they would press for a quick vote. "Now the serious negotiations have to start," said Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Democrat of New Hampshire.

Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the Democratic leader, said he would wait for Republicans to approach him with proposals to pay for the extension, and Democrats said they were on strong enough political ground to pick which cuts were “reasonable.”

Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Republican leader, offered a glimpse of the stalemate that could develop. He suggested that the bill be paid for by a one-year reprieve from the mandate in the Affordable Care Act that uninsured people buy health insurance or face a tax penalty, as well as the reversal of a controversial measure in the budget that slows the growth of veterans’ benefits. Mr. Reid waved that off as a “nonstarter.”

Less partisan suggestions were also floated. Ms. Collins proposed that after a year, benefits should be linked to enrollment in job-training programs, a suggestion that she said Mr. Obama seemed to consider.

But the issue of extending unemployment benefits, and a separate push to raise the minimum wage, could easily turn into campaign themes. Senator Mark S. Kirk, Republican of Illinois, said Democrats wanted “to have Republicans vote no, so they can bash them in the next election.”

And Democrats did not exactly deny that. Representative Steve Israel of New York, the chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said, “If the Republicans refuse to pass unemployment insurance and cling to their opposition to increasing the minimum wage, these will be bookend issues for 2014.”

+++

Robert Gates, former defense secretary, offers harsh critique of Obama’s leadership in ‘Duty’

Washington Post

January 7, 2014

Bob Woodward

In a new memoir, former defense secretary Robert Gates unleashes harsh judgments about President Obama’s leadership and his commitment to the Afghanistan war, writing that by early 2010 he had concluded the president “doesn’t believe in his own strategy, and doesn’t consider the war to be his. For him, it’s all about getting out.”

Leveling one of the more serious charges that a defense secretary could make against a commander in chief sending forces into combat, Gates asserts that Obama had more than doubts about the course he had charted in Afghanistan. The president was “skeptical if not outright convinced it would fail,” Gates writes in “Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War.”

Obama, after months of contentious discussion with Gates and other top advisers, deployed 30,000 more troops in a final push to stabilize Afghanistan before a phased withdrawal beginning in mid-2011. “I never doubted Obama’s support for the troops, only his support for their mission,” Gates writes.

As a candidate, Obama had made plain his opposition to the 2003 Iraq invasion while embracing the Afghanistan war as a necessary response to the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, requiring even more military resources to succeed. In Gates's highly emotional account, Obama remains uncomfortable with the inherited wars and distrustful of the military that is providing him options. Their different worldviews produced a rift that, at least for Gates, became personally wounding and impossible to repair.

In a statement Tuesday evening, National Security Council spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden said Obama "deeply appreciates Bob Gates' service as Secretary of Defense, and his lifetime of service to our country."

"As has always been the case, the President welcomes differences of view among his national security team, which broaden his options and enhance our policies," Hayden said in the statement. "The President wishes Secretary Gates well as he recovers from his recent injury, and discusses his book." Gates fractured his first vertebra last week in a fall at his home in Washington state.

It is rare for a former Cabinet member, let alone a defense secretary occupying a central position in the chain of command, to publish such an antagonistic portrait of a sitting president.

Gates's severe criticism is even more surprising — some might say contradictory — because toward the end of "Duty," he says of Obama's chief Afghanistan policies, "I believe Obama was right in each of these decisions." That particular view is not a universal one; like much of the debate about the best path to take in Afghanistan, there is disagreement on how well the surge strategy worked, including among military officials.

The sometimes bitter tone in Gates's 594-page account contrasts sharply with the even-tempered image that he cultivated during his many years of government service, including stints at the CIA and National Security Council. That image endured through his nearly five years in the Pentagon's top job, beginning in President George W. Bush's second term and continuing after Obama asked him to remain in the post. In "Duty," Gates describes his outwardly calm demeanor as a facade. Underneath, he writes, he was frequently "seething" and "running out of patience on multiple fronts."

The book, published by Knopf, is scheduled for release Jan. 14.

[PHOTOS: A look at Robert Gates's career in government]

Gates, a Republican, writes about Obama with an ambivalence that he does not resolve, praising him as "a man of personal integrity" even as he faults his leadership. Though the book simmers with disappointment in Obama, it reflects outright contempt for Vice President Biden and many of Obama's top aides.

Biden is accused of "poisoning the well" against the military leadership. Thomas Donilon, initially Obama's deputy national security adviser, and then-Lt. Gen. Douglas E. Lute, the White

House coordinator for the wars, are described as regularly engaged in “aggressive, suspicious, and sometimes condescending and insulting questioning of our military leaders.”

In her statement, Hayden said Obama “disagrees with Secretary Gates’ assessment” of the vice president.

“From his leadership on the Balkans in the Senate, to his efforts to end the war in Iraq, Joe Biden has been one of the leading statesmen of his time, and has helped advance America’s leadership in the world,” Hayden said. “President Obama relies on his good counsel every day.”

Gates is 70, nearly 20 years older than Obama. He has worked for every president going back to Richard Nixon, with the exception of Bill Clinton. Throughout his government career, he was known for his bipartisan detachment, the consummate team player. “Duty” is likely to provide ammunition for those who believe it is risky for a president to fill such a key Cabinet post with a holdover from the opposition party.

He writes, “I have tried to be fair in describing actions and motivations of others.” He seems well aware that Obama and his aides will not see it that way.

While serving as defense secretary, Gates gave Obama high marks, saying privately in the summer of 2010 that the president is “very thoughtful and analytical, but he is also quite decisive.” He added, “I think we have a similar approach to dealing with national security issues.”

Obama echoed Gates’s comments in a July 10, 2010, interview for my book “Obama’s Wars.” The president said: “Bob Gates has, I think, served me extraordinarily well. And part of the reason is, you know, I’m not sure if he considers this an insult or a compliment, but he and I actually think a lot alike, in broad terms.”

During that interview, Obama said he believed he “had garnered confidence and trust in Gates.” In “Duty,” Gates complains repeatedly that confidence and trust were what he felt was lacking in his dealings with Obama and his team. “Why did I feel I was constantly at war with everybody, as I have detailed in these pages?” he writes. “Why was I so often angry? Why did I so dislike being back in government and in Washington?”

His answer is that “the broad dysfunction in Washington wore me down, especially as I tried to maintain a public posture of nonpartisan calm, reason and conciliation.”

His lament about Washington was not the only factor contributing to his unhappiness. Gates also writes of the toll taken by the difficulty of overseeing wars against terrorism and insurgencies in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Such wars do not end with a clear surrender; Gates acknowledges having ambiguous feelings about both conflicts. For example, he writes that he does not know what he would have recommended if he had been asked his opinion on Bush’s 2003 decision to invade Iraq.

Three years later, Bush recruited Gates — who had served his father for 15 months as CIA director in the early 1990s — to take on the defense job. The first half of “Duty” covers those final two years in the Bush administration. Gates reveals some disagreements from that period, but none as fundamental or as personal as those he describes with Obama and his aides in the book’s second half.

“All too early in the [Obama] administration,” he writes, “suspicion and distrust of senior military officers by senior White House officials — including the president and vice president — became a big problem for me as I tried to manage the relationship between the commander in chief and his military leaders.”

Gates offers a catalogue of various meetings, based in part on notes that he and his aides made at the time, including an exchange between Obama and then-Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton that he calls “remarkable.”

He writes: “Hillary told the president that her opposition to the [2007] surge in Iraq had been political because she was facing him in the Iowa primary. . . . The president conceded vaguely that opposition to the Iraq surge had been political. To hear the two of them making these admissions, and in front of me, was as surprising as it was dismaying.”

Earlier in the book, he describes Hillary Clinton in the sort of glowing terms that might be used in a political endorsement. “I found her smart, idealistic but pragmatic, tough-minded, indefatigable, funny, a very valuable colleague, and a superb representative of the United States all over the world,” he wrote.

[READ: The Fix on what Gates’s memoir could mean for a Clinton campaign]

March 3, 2011

“Duty” reflects the memoir genre, declaring that this is how the writer saw it, warts and all, including his own. That focus tends to give short shrift to the fuller, established record. For example, in recounting the difficult discussions that led to the Afghan surge strategy in 2009, Gates makes no reference to the six-page “terms sheet” that Obama drafted at the end, laying out the rationale for the surge and withdrawal timetable. Obama asked everyone involved to sign on, signaling agreement.

According to the meeting notes of another participant, Gates is quoted as telling Obama, “You sound the bugle . . . Mr. President, and Mike [Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] and I will be the first to charge the hill.”

Gates does not include such a moment in “Duty.” He picks up the story a bit later, after Gen. David H. Petraeus, then the central commander in charge of both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, made remarks to the press suggesting he was not comfortable with setting a fixed date to start withdrawal.

At a March 3, 2011, National Security Council meeting, Gates writes, the president opened with a “blast.” Obama criticized the military for “popping off in the press” and said he would push back hard against any delay in beginning the withdrawal.

According to Gates, Obama concluded, “‘If I believe I am being gamed . . .’ and left the sentence hanging there with the clear implication the consequences would be dire.”

Gates continues: “I was pretty upset myself. I thought implicitly accusing” Petraeus, and perhaps Mullen and Gates himself, “of gaming him in front of thirty people in the Situation Room was inappropriate, not to mention highly disrespectful of Petraeus. As I sat there, I thought: the president doesn’t trust his commander, can’t stand [Afghanistan President Hamid] Karzai, doesn’t believe in his own strategy, and doesn’t consider the war to be his. For him, it’s all about getting out.”

[READ: World Views: Gates was wrong on the most important issue he ever faced]

‘Breaches of faith’

Lack of trust is a major thread in Gates’s account, along with his unsparing criticism of Obama’s aides. At times, the two threads intertwine. For example, after the devastating 2010 Haitian earthquake that had left tens of thousands dead, Gates met with Obama and Donilon, the deputy national security adviser, about disaster relief.

Donilon was “complaining about how long we were taking,” Gates writes. “Then he went too far, questioning in front of the president and a roomful of people whether General [Douglas] Fraser [head of the U.S. Southern Command] was competent to lead this effort. I’ve rarely been angrier in the Oval Office than I was at that moment. . . . My initial instinct was to storm out, telling the president on the way that he didn’t need two secretaries of defense. It took every bit of my self-discipline to stay seated on the sofa.”

Gates confirms a previously reported statement in which he told Obama’s first national security adviser, retired Marine Gen. James Jones, that he thought Donilon would be a “disaster” if he succeeded Jones (as Donilon did in late 2010). Gates writes that Obama quizzed him about this characterization; a one-on-one meeting with Donilon followed, and that “cleared the air,” according to Gates.

His second year with Obama proved as tough as the first. “For me, 2010 was a year of continued conflict and a couple of important White House breaches of faith,” he writes.

The first, he says, was Obama’s decision to seek the repeal of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy toward gays serving in the military. Though Gates says he supported the decision, there had been months and months of debate, with details still to work out. On one day’s notice, Obama informed Gates and Mullen that he would announce his request for a repeal of the law. Obama had “blindsided Admiral Mullen and me,” Gates writes.

Similarly, in a battle over defense spending, “I was extremely angry with President Obama,” Gates writes. “I felt he had breached faith with me . . . on the budget numbers.” As with “don’t ask, don’t tell,” “I felt that agreements with the Obama White House were good for only as long as they were politically convenient.”

Gates acknowledges forthrightly in “Duty” that he did not reveal his dismay. “I never confronted Obama directly over what I (as well as [Hillary] Clinton, [then-CIA Director Leon] Panetta, and others) saw as the president’s determination that the White House tightly control every aspect of national security policy and even operations. His White House was by far the most centralized and controlling in national security of any I had seen since Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger ruled the roost.”

It got so bad during internal debates over whether to intervene in Libya in 2011 that Gates says he felt compelled to deliver a “rant” because the White House staff was “talking about military options with the president without Defense being involved.”

Gates says his instructions to the Pentagon were: “Don’t give the White House staff and [national security staff] too much information on the military options. They don’t understand it, and ‘experts’ like Samantha Power will decide when we should move militarily.” Power, then on the national security staff and now U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, has been a strong advocate for humanitarian intervention.

Another time, after Donilon and Biden tried to pass orders to Gates, he told the two, “The last time I checked, neither of you are in the chain of command,” and said he expected to get orders directly from Obama.

Life at the top was no picnic, Gates writes. He did little or no socializing. “Every evening I could not wait to get home, get my office homework out of the way, write condolence letters to the families of the fallen, pour a stiff drink, wolf down a frozen dinner or carry out,” since his wife, Becky, often remained at their home in Washington state.

“I got up at five every morning to run two miles around the Mall in Washington, past the World War II, Korean, and Vietnam memorials, and in front of the Lincoln Memorial. And every morning before dawn, I would ritually look up at that stunning white statue of Lincoln, say good morning, and sadly ask him, How did you do it?”

The memoir’s title comes from a quote, “God help me to do my duty,” that Gates says he kept on his desk. The quote has been attributed to Abraham Lincoln’s war secretary, Edwin Stanton.

At his confirmation hearings to be Bush’s defense secretary in late 2006, Gates told the senators that he had not “come back to Washington to be a bump on a log and not say exactly what I think, and to speak candidly and, frankly, boldly to people at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue about what I believe and what I think needs to be done.”

But Gates says he did not speak his mind when the committee chairman listed the problems he would face as secretary. “I remember sitting at the witness table listening to this litany of woe

and thinking, “What the hell am I doing here? I have walked right into the middle of a category-five shitstorm. It was the first of many, many times I would sit at the witness table thinking something very different from what I was saying.”

“Duty” offers the familiar criticism of Congress and its culture, describing it as “truly ugly.” Gates’s cold feelings toward the legislative branch stand in stark contrast to his warmth for the military. He repeatedly describes his affection for the troops, especially those in combat.

Gates wanted to quit at the end of 2010 but agreed to stay at Obama’s urging, finally leaving in mid-2011. He later joined a consulting firm with two of Bush’s closest foreign policy advisers — former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice and Stephen Hadley, the national security adviser during Bush’s second term. The firm is called RiceHadleyGates. In October, he became president-elect of the Boy Scouts of America.

Gates writes, “I did not enjoy being secretary of defense,” or as he e-mailed one friend while still serving, “People have no idea how much I detest this job.”

+++

Farm Bill Nearing Home Stretch

Roll Call

January 7, 2014

The long-delayed farm bill may finally be on a glide path to passage, after months of partisan wrangling raised doubts over whether such a day would ever come.

House and Senate conferees are tentatively scheduled to meet Thursday to begin the final process of approving a bill that can be voted on by both chambers, senators and aides said. Leadership aides in both chambers indicated that the long-stalled legislation, which faltered in the House last session, could be sent to the president’s desk by the Martin Luther King Jr. Day recess.

For weeks, Senate Agriculture Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., and House Agriculture Chairman Frank D. Lucas, R-Okla., have been engaged in one-on-one negotiations trying to bridge the gap between the two sides. They now believe they have made enough progress to bring the remaining issues to conferees for haggling.

“Sen. Stabenow thinks that sometime this week the conference could be completed. I hope that’s the case,” Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., told reporters Tuesday.

Beyond fighting over the final, contentious issues, there could be increased pressure on conferees to act swiftly on the bill — projected to reduce the deficit by about \$20 billion — as members eye potential offsets for a pending three-month jobless benefits extension.

Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., who said he is “hopeful” for a Thursday meeting, predicted several amendment votes will be held before members are comfortable signing off on the report. He

specifically cited a contested measure on country of origin labeling as one of the votes he expects.

“There will be a number of [amendments], some that will generate the final compromise and some that just won’t happen, but people won’t let go of until you have the vote,” Hoeven said.

“It’ll be the usual suspects.”

Two of the most controversial issues throughout the farm bill deliberations have been how to make cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly known as food stamps, and dairy production and pricing provisions that safeguard against significant fluctuations in the cost of milk.

The likely path forward on food stamp savings, first reported by CQ Roll Call in December, revolves around reforming the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program to eliminate abuse of the program by states.

The key is eliminating a loophole that enables states to help some low-income residents with nominal subsidies to pay for their heating in the winter in order to trigger much higher food stamp benefits. Some states, such as New York, will make a \$1 LIHEAP payment to low-income people to automatically qualify them for the maximum federal food stamps standard utility allowance for 12 months.

The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that raising the minimum energy subsidy states would be required to make to \$20 — a figure first proposed in the House farm bill — would be enough of a disincentive for states to stop using the loophole. That could save the government \$8 billion over 10 years. The Senate position has offered to require a minimum \$10 payment.

Several sources cautioned that there were still several significant compromises to be made, and a House GOP aide said that many of those issues are likely to be revealed on Thursday.

For example, a vote could come on what’s known as the “King amendment” — a provision sponsored by Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, that is intended to block California from applying its animal welfare standards to foods produced in other states.

“I would caution against saying that this means that everything’s done. It means we are very close to being done, but there are other steps in the process,” the aide added. “We hope in very short order we will be announcing a conference report, but that doesn’t mean the report would be voted on” at the conference meeting this week.

Rep. Marlin Stutzman, who lauded House GOP leadership’s decision last year to unbundle the farm bill’s agriculture and nutrition titles, is prepared to vote against any conference report that doesn’t maintain different authorizations.

“Now is not the time for Congress to take a step backwards by returning to business as usual,” Stutzman said in a statement to CQ Roll Call. The Indiana Republican’s office would not

confirm the extent of his own whip operation to find members who might join him in withholding their support on these grounds.

Meanwhile, one House Democratic aide said there could be a core group of holdouts for any farm bill that contains “one dollar of SNAP cuts,” with resistance coming from members who are typically outspoken on the issue: Reps. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., Jim McGovern, D-Mass., and Barbara Lee, D-Calif.

Congressional Black Caucus Chairwoman Marcia L. Fudge, D-Ohio, who was named to the farm bill conference committee as Democratic leadership’s surrogate against food stamp cuts, has been coy about how she’s balanced the need to work with her fellow conferees with representing her very liberal peers.