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FULL TEXT

Friday is the last day to request absentee ballot for July 15 runoff

The Associated Press

July 10, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Alabama -- Friday is the last day to request an absentee ballot for Alabama's runoff election on Tuesday.

Alabama's chief election official, Secretary of State Jim Bennett, says many registered voters will be away on summer vacations next week, and they can request absentee ballots before leaving town.

Absentee ballot information can be obtained from a state website.

Bennett also reminds voters that the runoff will be the second election where voters need to show a photo ID. Acceptable IDs include an Alabama driver's license, an Alabama non-driver ID, a passport or an employee ID issued by the federal government, Alabama government, or city or county in Alabama. Voters casting an absentee ballot will need to include a copy of their photo ID with their ballot material.

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Albritton, D'Olive debate taxes, economy in GOP runoff for Senate District 22

Al.com

July 9, 2014

Brendan Kirby

The Republican primary runoff in the race for Alabama District 22 features a pair of lawyers with similar views on many issues, but former state Rep. Greg Albritton said there is a big difference over taxes.

In June, Albritton edged Bay Minette lawyer Harry D'Olive in a five-man field, but both fell well short of the 50 percent needed to avoid a runoff. The winner of Tuesday's contest will face Democrat Susan Smith in the November general election. The district covers Escambia County and parts of Clarke, Conecuh, Choctaw, Monroe, Washington, Mobile and Baldwin counties.

Albritton, who lives in Conecuh County and has a solo law practice, said he is steadfastly against raising any taxes while D'Olive has been open to taxing Internet sales.

"I don't believe we can do any tax increase on the public," Albritton said. "The economy is too fragile."

D'Olive said he opposes taxing Internet sales and merely has pointed out that others have suggested doing so as an option. In an interview with AL.com/Press-Register reporters and editors, he appeared to go further.

"A lot of people have discussed the Internet sales tax and the amount of money that might bring in," he said at the time. "Of course, there are others who are vehemently opposed to that. So that would be a struggle. But it may be one of the answers."

More similarities than differences

The tax issue notwithstanding, there are more similarities than differences between the two men. Both have solo legal practices in their hometowns. Albritton does a little of everything, while D'Olive concentrates primarily on probate law.

Both oppose expanding Alabama's Medicaid program and oppose the Common Core State Standards Initiative that seeks to equalize teaching methods and standards throughout the country.

Both also have experienced victory and defeat at the polls during their political careers. D'Olive, who comes from one of Baldwin County's oldest families, lost an election bid the year after winning appointment as probate judge to finish the term of his ailing father in 1993. He also lost a probate judge race in 2012. He won a race for mayor of Silverhill but gave up the post after about a year to go to law school. Prior to that, he had been a Baldwin County sheriff's deputy for 15 years.

After serving in the U.S. Navy and getting a law degree, Albritton won a race for the state House of Representatives in 2002. He lost a re-election bid four years later, though after redistricting altered the composition of his district. He has touted the fact that he has lived in five of the district's eight counties.

Albritton and D'Olive agree that improving the economy of the largely rural district is the top priority, but they have different ideas about how to achieve that goal. Albritton said the state should eliminate burdensome regulations and streamline government.

"Most of the problem, from my perspective, is that regulations are stifling job creation at every level – state and federal," he said.

Albritton said the state has too many boards and commissions regulating a whole range of industries. Some of those are unnecessary and serve to suppress opportunities for people wanting to break into those fields, he said. He said he agrees with some of the conclusions of a study released earlier this year by Troy University's free-market think tank, the Manuel H. Johnson Center for Political Economy.

Albritton praised efforts by Gov. Robert Bentley and the Legislature to make government more efficient by eliminating duplication and combining agencies. One of the biggest examples is a move to place various state law enforcement agencies under a public safety director.

"The state has not done all that it can, nor has it done all that it should," he said.

D'Olive stresses industrial recruitment

D'Olive said the state needs to step up efforts to recruit new businesses. He has identified luring manufacturers to a Baldwin County government-owned "mega site" north of Bay Minette as a prime opportunity.

He said he supports offering tax incentives to attract industry but added that it is just as important for the state senator to "just be an active part" of the recruitment effort.

"It's some of both," he said. "The tax incentive packages are making the state more economically friendly."

On the budget, D'Olive promised to "look at cutting the wasteful spending," although he offered few specifics.

D'Olive cast himself as a fresh face with new ideas, noting that Albritton lost his re-election bid for the Legislature in 2006.

"Voters chose not to return him to the House. He's had an opportunity," he said.

Including "in-kind" contributions, Albritton has raised more money than D'Olive, \$89,901 to \$70,650. Albritton's support largely has come from political action committees tied to the Poarch Band of Creek Indians and Alfa Mutual Insurance Group. D'Olive has suggested the support from Alfa could compromise Albritton's ability to represent the district on homeowners insurance issues. Albritton has denied the accusation.

Thanks to a late fundraising surge, D'Olive actually has spent more money, edging Albritton \$53,532 to \$47,173, according to campaign finance reports.

The winner of Tuesday's runoff figures to be a favorite in the general election now that the GOP-controlled Legislature has made the district much more Republican-leaning after redistricting. The winner of the general election will earn a salary tied to the state's household median income.

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Fitzgerald Washington of Buffalo Rock named labor commissioner by Gov. Robert Bentley

Al.com

July 9, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Fitzgerald Washington, general sales manager for The Buffalo Rock Company, will join Gov. Robert Bentley's cabinet as Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Labor.

Bentley's office announced the appointment today. It is effective Aug. 4.

Washington will replace Tom Surtees, who announced his retirement in June.

"Fitzgerald will play a fundamental role as we work to provide employment opportunities for Alabamians looking for a job," Bentley said in a statement. "I appreciate his willingness to serve in my administration, and I know he will be an honest and dedicated labor commissioner."

Washington has worked for Buffalo Rock for 15 years. He was corporate marketing and sales director before being promoted to general sales manager in 2002.

Washington served as chairman of the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama in 2013. He helped create the Minority Business Council to help minority-owned businesses in west Alabama.

"My mission as director is to continue the department's efforts to help unemployed Alabamians find a job and ensure certain unemployment compensation benefits are available to them," Washington said in a statement. "The governor's overall mission is job creation, and the Department of Labor will work hand-in-hand to help the governor with that mission."

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Could law prohibiting dues payments by payroll deduction be the end of AEA? Today in Alabama politics

Al.com

July 10, 2014

Leada Gore

A newly enforced law will bring greater scrutiny to the activities of the Alabama Education Association and could be the beginning of the end for one of the most active players in state politics.

At least, that's what state GOP leaders are hoping.

Alabama Republican Party chief Bill Armistead said in a recent blog post the law will prohibit organizations like AEA from receiving dues through payroll deductions unless they certify the money is not being used for political purposes, including lobbying or campaign donations.

"The state should have never been in the business of helping a political organization collect dues that would be used for political purposes," Armistead said.

Republicans pushed through a measure mandating the change in 2010. AEA challenged the law but a federal court stay on enforcement of the act was lifted earlier this year and the law went into effect recently. The change means AEA can no longer use payroll deduction to collect dues from its 95,000 members, who will instead have to sign up for a bank-draft to cover dues.

AEA's presence in state elections is huge. In recent primary races, AEA pumped about \$7 million into various campaigns.

Armistead said the switch to bank drafts will hurt AEA's membership.

"The dues will now be right in front of them, instead of automatically taken out before they received their paychecks," he said. "For an organization... with the goal of electing candidates who would be blindly loyal to the AEA, this could mean rough waters ahead."

"Rank and file members of the AEA are hardworking teachers and support personnel who want what is best for the children," Armistead said. "The teachers' union has historically held little accountability to its members, instead relying on scare tactics to force their cooperation.

Armistead then reiterated a theme Republicans have employed before to stress the philosophical differences they said exists between AEA and its rank-and-file members.

"The special interest group is far more interested in attempting to regain power than they are in protecting the students, teachers and school administrators of our state. The dues of our hard-working educators should not be a fundraiser for politicians who promote values far off from their own," he said.

Here's what else is making headlines in Alabama politics today:

Independent poll puts Palmer 30 points ahead of DeMarco, with caveats, a week from the runoff

Congressman Byrne seeks input on illegal immigration through online survey

Albritton, D'Olive debate taxes, economy in GOP runoff for Senate District 22

Fitzgerald Washington of Buffalo Rock named labor commissioner by Gov. Robert Bentley

More than 20 mayors in the 6th District endorse Paul DeMarco in runoff

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Officials say end of federal highway fund would be disaster

The Anniston Star

July 9, 2014

Brian Anderson

Alabama's road projects could come to a standstill on Oct. 1 if Congress fails to find a solution for a depleted federal highway trust fund, a state official said Wednesday.

Last week, U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said states would be hit with a 28 percent cut in funding starting in August if Congress fails to shore up money for highway funding. Despite the federal government transferring \$9.7 billion from the general fund to the highway fund at the beginning of the year, the account is still expected to be out of money by September, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation website.

Ronald Baldwin, chief engineer with the Alabama Department of Transportation, said the state received more than \$700 million from the federal government each of the last two years. A shortfall in the highway fund would mean big cuts to that check, he said, and would likely immediately end any plans for new construction projects in the state.

“We’re confident Congress will come up with a solution,” Baldwin said Wednesday. “If they don’t, it would be a disaster.”

"Anytime there’s a budget cut, we’re all going to feel the effects of that." -- Anniston Public Works Director Bob Dean.

Or a crisis, said Beth McGinn, public relations director with the Washington D.C.-based advocacy group Transportation Makes America Work, which represents the interests of the highway infrastructure industry. McGinn said the highway trust fund receives money from a national gas tax of 18 cents per gallon. McGinn said there are several reasons the fund is running out, including the emergence of fuel efficient vehicles, people traveling less due to the economy, and a lack of increase to the 18 cent tax in the last two decades. Over that same time, construction material prices have risen by 118 percent. McGinn said that since 2008, Congress has only acted by creating short-term fixes to the problem.

“We’re advocating that Congress find a responsible, sustaining and transparent solution,” McGinn said. “The gas tax has worked for several years, but there are other solutions out there.”

McGinn said that in Alabama, 68 percent of highway and bridge projects are funded by the federal government. Baldwin said barring any plans from Congress to fix the fund depletion, the Alabama Department of Transportation would have no choice but to abandon any new road construction projects, using what money would trickle down to the state to pay off previous projects.

“Road projects might take two to three years, or longer, to complete,” Baldwin said. “So, what little money we would get, would have to go to paying off those already completed projects.”

The budget cuts would also hit local governments hard. Anniston Public Works Director Bob Dean said that while the city doesn’t receive annual allocations from the federal government or the state, it relies on matching grant funds to complete road projects. If state money dried up, it’s unlikely Anniston would receive money to fix bridges or repave roads, he said.

“Anytime there’s a budget cut, we’re all going to feel the effects of that,” Dean said. “That’s going to hit all levels of government.”

Calhoun County Engineer Brian Rosenbalm said the county receives more than \$300,000 annually from the federal government. While a big source of the county’s highway funds comes from its own 2 cent sales tax, a lack of federal dollars would likely halt most, if not all, long-term road projects.

“If we’re talking about a small cut, we could adjust and manage,” Rosenbalm said. “But if you’re saying, ‘Holy cow, that’s being cut in half,’ I don’t know what we would do.”

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Raytheon's Alabama-made Standard Missile-6 makes naval history

Al.com

July 9, 2014

Leada Gore

A U.S. Navy ship has used an Alabama-made Raytheon missile to destroy a target in the longest-distance surface –to-air strike in naval history.

The tests, announced this week by the company, included the destroyer U.S.S. Paul Jones using a Standard Missile-6 interceptor to take out a cruise missile target flying over the horizon. In separate tests, other SM-6s were fired from the John Paul Jones to intercept targets traveling at supersonic speeds.

The SM-6 destroyed the targets in each case.

Raytheon isn't revealing the exact distances involved in the test but said it achieved a double milestone of intercepting a supersonic target and using a network of systems – including sensors, aircraft and ship-borne weapons – to destroy a cruise missile beyond the horizon.

"If you want to defend against cruise missile attacks, the Standard Missile-6 is your weapon of choice," said Mike Campisi, Raytheon's SM-6 senior program director. "The missile's ability to use networked sensors to engage threats beyond the ship radar's horizon makes it the most advanced extended range area defense weapon in existence."

The SM-6 is one of two missiles produced at Raytheon's integration and testing facility at Redstone Arsenal. In June, Raytheon was awarded a \$275 million contract for the procurement of 93 additional SM-6s. The company has already delivered more than 100 SM-6 to the U.S. Navy.

The \$75 million, 70,000 square-foot facility, which opened in November 2012, produces SM-6 and a second version, the SM-3.

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Defense secretary to visit Fort Rucker on Thursday

The Associated Press

July 10, 2014

FORT RUCKER, Ala. (AP) — Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel is scheduled to visit Fort Rucker in southeast Alabama on Thursday.

The Dothan Eagle reports (<http://bit.ly/1tqN7jF>) that Hagel is expected to talk to soldiers at the Army base about the installation's role in the nation's defense.

Hagel spoke Wednesday at Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay in Georgia, where he said more attention must be paid to the nuclear forces as key to national security.

Hagel's visit to the Georgia base marked the start of a two-day trip that includes Fort Rucker and Eglin Air Force Base in Florida.

The trip is designed to underscore some of Hagel's budget priorities, including some that have gotten slammed by Congress, as members continue to debate the spending plan.

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U.S. Secretary of Interior calls Birmingham's parks 'gems,' says country's green space could suffer if national fund not renewed

Al.com

July 9, 2014

Kelsey Stein

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama – People outside Alabama are well-versed in the state's role as the epicenter of the civil rights struggle, but many are unaware of its commitment to the outdoors and its wealth of green space, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior said Wednesday.

Secretary Sally Jewell visited two parks in the Birmingham area, first touring Red Mountain Park.

"This is a gem 3 miles away from city hall, with hiking trails, biking trails," she said. "It's a place that tells more of the history of Birmingham than people know, the history of producing iron that helped us win WWII... There's so much history and archaeology to learn from Red Mountain Park."

Jewell then visited East Lake Park, where she addressed a gathering of people intent on preserving – and improving – parks and recreational space throughout the state.

"You have the vision and foresight here in Birmingham to recognize that green spaces like this keep our communities healthy and keep our kids creative," she said. "Birmingham is way ahead of the curve when it comes to parks and open spaces."

She lauded the city, its leaders and various outdoors-focused organizations for their efforts to maintain places like East Lake Park that are accessible to people who live in the densely populated city center.

You have the vision and foresight in Birmingham to recognize that green spaces keep our communities healthy and keep our kids creative. - Sally Jewell

Jewell's visit highlighted the upcoming 50th anniversary of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which supports parks and recreational spaces throughout the United States. The fund, created in 1965, is set to end in 2015 unless it is renewed by Congress.

The fund is paid for by royalties from offshore oil and gas development and supports conservation, clean water and outdoor recreation projects across the country.

If you have visited a park, played softball or baseball, gone hunting or fishing, or participated in a wide range of outdoor activities, the fund's fate should be of utmost importance, said Wendy Jackson, the executive director of the Freshwater Land Trust.

"(The fund) is a program that touches every American, and many know nothing about it," she said.

Jewell recently announced that \$43.38 million from the fund would be shared this fiscal year. Alabama's share is \$683,000.

Jim Byard Jr., the director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, noted that Alabama has received \$66 million over 50 years to fund nearly 900 projects throughout the state.

Birmingham is an especially philanthropic city, Jewell said, but parks cannot operate and thrive on volunteers and donations alone.

"Philanthropy should be a margin of excellence but not a margin of survival for lands," she said.

Birmingham Mayor William Bell is a member of Mayors for Parks, a bipartisan coalition of mayors from across the country lobbying to renew the fund. The coalition is a project of the City Parks Alliance.

Bell described the city's parks as "crown jewels" of the area that must be maintained with cooperation between the government and the private sector.

"We want to first of all maintain the green space that we have, but we definitely want to be able to expand it," Bell said. "Right now Birmingham per capita has more green space than any other city our size, and we want to continue to move in that direction."

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ASU trying to dig itself out of huge financial hole

Montgomery Advertiser

July 10, 2014

Josh Moon

After a nearly five-hour meeting of the Alabama State University executive committee on Wednesday evening, one thing was crystal clear — ASU is in terrible financial shape.

How bad?

"I would've voted to downgrade us had I been on that (Moody's Investors Service) committee," said Trustee Herbert Young, chairman of the school's finance committee.

Young was referring to a recent downgrade by Moody's of ASU's credit rating — the third such downgrade in nine months. Prior to that action, Moody's held a conference call with ASU officials, including Young and university president Gwendolyn Boyd, to discuss factors that were concerning to Moody's.

Chief among those concerns was ASU's significant debt and running yearly deficits.

"Right now, if we continued going at the rate we were going, we wouldn't be able to pay our debt service for the next year and a half," Young told the executive committee. "I'm not sure how we got into this shape, but we have to figure out a way out of it."

Young and other trustees noted again that the forensic audit of the school is a major factor in its problems. That audit, which Young said was approved by the ASU board when Gov. Robert Bentley requested it, is now approaching its 20th month with no end in sight.

A preliminary report released last October by the auditing firm raised serious questions, and that report, along with the uncertainty of what a final report will hold, was cited by Moody's in all of its downgrades.

"We have to get a final report," Young said. "It's that simple. I don't care what it says, who gets indicted, whatever — we have to get something final so we can fix the problems and move forward. Otherwise, it's going to continue to hurt us. The unknown is worse."

But as trustee Robert Gilpin noted, final report or not, ASU's financial situation would likely have resulted in a downgrade.

In fiscal year 2013, which ended last October, ASU ran a deficit of \$6.5 million — the third consecutive year of deficits. Young said the outlook is much better for the year ending this October, saying if the school could simply hold off hiring personnel for 80 days, it might be able to put some money into reserves.

But that is easier said than done.

Boyd presented the board with a number of hires that she and her staff have deemed "critical hires," including personnel in the school's information technology department that could help it avoid a \$286,000 software upgrade fee and dorm directors whose absence could be considered a liability.

"These are not random people we're bringing in here," Boyd said. "These are necessary hires for the university. They're critical to the daily operations. We have to operate and serve the students."

Trustees went through the proposed hires with a fine-tooth comb, and similarly picked through other expenses.

In one terse exchange that lasted several minutes and took on the appearance of a cross-examination at times, trustee Marvin Wiggins went down a checklist of items, asking Boyd about their costs. That list included the cost of Boyd's inauguration that will be held in September, several events surrounding that inauguration and her car allowance.

Wiggins claimed Boyd might be in violation of state law because she is often driven to events by ASU campus police officers — an expense Wiggins estimated to be over \$30,000. If so, her then accepting a car allowance of \$1,000 per month, which is provided by her ASU contract, could technically be considered a violation of the law.

"You can do one or the other but you can't do both," Wiggins told Boyd.

Boyd fired back: "That's fine. I'll just walk."

In the middle of the search for savings, Wiggins also proposed a \$100,000 allotment for the board of trustees to use at their discretion to hire necessary personnel or pay for events or trips. His proposal was approved to be passed on to the full board.

But other trustees, Young in particular, were skeptical of its chances.

Asked about the exchange with Wiggins after the meeting, Boyd said, "He had questions, and I guess this is the place for those. I have nothing to hide."

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Independent poll puts Palmer 30 points ahead of DeMarco, with caveats, a week from the runoff

Al.com

July 9, 2014

Madison Underwood

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama – A Montgomery campaign and communications firm has released an independent poll of the Alabama 6th District Republican runoff between Paul DeMarco and Gary Palmer and found Palmer with a 30-point lead over DeMarco. The poll is somewhat surprising, considering DeMarco led the seven-candidate June 3 primary field by 13 points.

The poll by the firm Cygnal found DeMarco to have support from 29.3 percent of respondents, and Palmer with support from 59.6 percent – a 30.3 percent difference in Palmer's favor. DeMarco had 19.1 percent "definite" support to Palmer's 46.8 percent "definite."

Palmer lead in voter favorability as well – 75.2 percent of respondents viewed Palmer "favorably" and 12.8 percent saw him unfavorably. 51.3 percent of respondents viewed DeMarco "favorably," and 37.5 percent saw him unfavorably. The unfavorability level for DeMarco is a jump from Cygnal's May 27 pre-primary poll, which had DeMarco's favorability/unfavorability at 52.5/28.6.

DeMarco's campaign does not think highly of the poll.

"That's a laughable poll," DeMarco campaign manager Rick Journey told AL.com. "If Gary's supporters really believe that poll, they should take the day off and not show up for the runoff. I have always said this would be a close race. We take nothing for granted."

The survey also broke results down to the county level, and found Palmer leading in every county in the district.

Brent Buchanan, a managing partner at Cygnal, did offer some caveats about the poll, noting that a low turnout could skew the results.

"As has been seen in other unpredictable turnout elections nationally in the past few months, these results could end up being well outside the margin of error," Buchanan wrote in a memo accompanying the poll results. "However, this level of spread among candidates backed up by a large margin difference in favorability leads us to believe we have the order pegged correctly. A drastically lower turnout should benefit DeMarco though, because he has a deep and sophisticated ground effort supported by nearly every elected official in the district."

Cygnal 6th District Republican Runoff Poll - July 7 & 8, 2014

Who would you support?	Number	Percentage
Definitely DeMarco	124	19.1%
Probably DeMarco	66	10.2%
Definitely Palmer	303	46.8%
Probably Palmer	83	12.8%
Undecided	72	11.1%

Cygnal has already had some success in projecting the Alabama 6th District Republican primary. A pre-primary poll in May by Cygnal was able to correctly project the order of the candidates in the runoff and project DeMarco and Palmer coming in first and second, respectively, to make it into the runoff. That May poll was significantly off on DeMarco's lead in the primary – it projected DeMarco at 19.8 percent of the vote, but he actually garnered 32.7 percent on June 3 – but Cygnal noted Wednesday that "undecided voters tend to break toward the most well-known, well-liked candidate," which was DeMarco at the time.

The most recent Cygnal poll was conducted by landline telephone July 7 and 8 and included responses from 647 voters. It has a margin of error of 3.84 percent.

"This was landline, because the cell-only contingent of GOP primary voters is so low," Buchanan said, when asked about methodology. "We do cells in many of our polls, but it's more a general election thing because of different demographics."

Cygnal has offices in Montgomery, Washington, D.C., and Austin, Texas.

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Jacksonville knifemaker to partner with Remington, 10 local jobs likely

The Anniston Star
July 9, 2014

Remington Outdoor announced Tuesday a partnership with Jacksonville-based knifemaker Bear & Son to create a line of collectible cutlery that will launch in August. The partnership could lead to 10 new jobs, officials say.

“We think it’s really positive for our business and the community both,” said Ken Griffey, president of Bear & Son, which currently employs around 80 people in both manufacturing and contract work. “We will be able to sell more knives and hire more folks. We are trying to hire 10 people to get this thing up and started right now.”

Griffey said the companies have discussed the partnership for two years, but it became reality in the last two months.

“We have been working on this for a long time and planning ahead of time,” Griffey said. “We will actually start shipping some of the new products by the first of next month.”

In a statement released on July 8, Remington announced the line will launch with an updated version of the Remington Bullet knife, which the companies have manufactured together since 2006. Knives will be added to the Remington Sportsman Series, as well as the Remington Defense Tactical Knives. Additions will also be made to the 700 and 870 series.

With the announcement of one partnership between the two companies came another. Bear & Son will also become Remington’s exclusive licensee for cutlery in 2015.

“We are going to hit it hard this year and even harder next year when the full contract gets started,” Griffey said.

Efforts to reach officials with Remington on Wednesday were unsuccessful, but the company announced the partnership in an emailed statement.

“With a history dating back to 1920 of producing only the finest knives, it was critical for Remington to pick the right partner,” Kevin Graff, senior vice president and general manager of business and consumer development for Remington, was quoted as saying in the statement. “The dedication, professionalism and commitment to quality at every level of Bear & Son have become clear to us over the years of our collaboration.”

Don Hopper, executive director of the Calhoun County Economic Development Council, said the announcement is good news for the area.

“I don’t know what the true economic impact is, but it has to be great news,” he said. “I think it is another sign that the state of Alabama continues to be open for business.”

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Byrne proposes eliminating alternative energy program; more modest cuts draw veto threat

Al.com

July 9, 2014

Brendan Kirby

U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne on Wednesday unsuccessfully sought to eliminate funding for a renewable energy initiative. The White House threatened to veto the bill because of more modest cuts to the program.

The veto threat issued Wednesday comes as Congress debate the Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2015. The White House expressed its displeasure with a proposal to spend \$546 million less than the administration proposed for the Department of Energy's Office of Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

Byrne, R-Fairhope, argued that the cuts do not go far enough. He said the program unwisely spends money on alternative energy sources that are costly and make up only a tiny fraction of the nation's energy needs.

"At a time when our economy continues to recover and many Americans continue to struggle to make ends meet, including paying their energy bills, we must focus on reasonable energy strategies that allow for the most affordable and reliable energy resources for consumers and businesses alike," he said on the House floor.

The House, which rejected Byrne's amendment, is expected to vote this week on the \$34 billion spending bill. The bill funds the Department of Energy, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and provides money for some Interior Department programs and several independent agencies, such as the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The veto statement issued by the White House on Wednesday said the administration is "strongly opposed" to the cut.

"This reduced funding level will stifle Federal investment in innovative clean energy research and development (R&D) at a time of significant global competition and progress," the statement reads.

The White House also indicated that the bill would excessively restrict nonproliferation contacts with Russia and prevent the development of lower-cost methods for disposing plutonium waste. In addition, the White House said, the bill would put the nation's nuclear-powered fleet at risk and jeopardize the Navy's ability to train nuclear-qualified sailors.

The administration did express appreciation for the bill's "support for offshore wind technology demonstrations and for the Clean Energy Manufacturing Innovation Institutes.

But Byrne argued that program allows the government to invest millions of taxpayer dollars on "high-risk research-and-development schemes" for green energy projects that have a low chance of paying off.

"The government should not be subsidizing the research-and-development initiatives of individual companies," he said. "Competition and innovation have been key aspects of private sector success from day one, in the energy sector and other parts of our economy, and the government should not take the role of the private investor."

Byrne cited examples of a \$2.5 million grant to a Massachusetts company to work with Green Mountain Coffee to reduce the energy used in roasting coffee beans, and millions of dollars given to large chemical and auto companies. Ford Motor Co., for instance, received a subsidy to develop a new sheet metal forming tool.

"Now I have nothing against those companies, but why should the government be picking and choosing winners and losers?" Byrne asked.

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America's most influential - and controversial - space lawmaker could be Alabama's Sen. Richard Shelby

Al.com

July 9, 2014

Lee Roop

WASHINGTON – Who's the member of Congress driving the discussion about America's space program this summer? A good argument could be made that it's U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Tuscaloosa).

A technical provision Shelby inserted in the NASA 2015 funding bill is drawing widespread discussion and, in some cases, opposition from other lawmakers, editorial writers and others in America's space community. The Shelby provision is what you need to understand to know what's driving the debate about the space program this summer.

Shelby wants the three companies receiving NASA appropriations to develop space taxis to the International Space Station to submit "certified cost and pricing data" on their use of federal dollars. Those companies now are SpaceX, Sierra Nevada Corp. and Boeing, but their number could be trimmed later this year.

Shelby's rule would basically implement so-called "cost-plus" budgeting instead of the flat appropriations NASA has been making to its commercial partners. Under cost-plus contracts, companies bill NASA for what each phase of a project costs plus a percentage for profit. The method is common in government contracting, but it means time and overhead for the project and more bureaucracy for the contractor. Under flat appropriations, the company keeps the profit if it can develop its project for less than the government has appropriated.

Shelby says he just wants to make sure the money NASA gives the three competing space companies is actually going to develop the commercial rockets and spaceships America needs to take American astronauts to the space station. But the commercial space industry sees the accounting requirements as a hassle that will actually drive up costs and slow down development.

On June 30, Space News, a leading space website, published an op-ed saying America doesn't have time for typical business procedures when it is racing to get its crews off Russian rockets.

The Houston Chronicle weighed in this month, too, in an editorial headlined "Rockets' red tape" that says Shelby's rule "threatens to kill the goose that could lay the golden egg." By that, the paper means commercial space development. The Houston paper says Shelby is protecting the Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Ala.

NASA and the White House don't like Shelby's rule, either, but the requirement is in the law as it came out of committee and awaits action on the Senate floor. To get rid of it, House and Senate negotiators will have to compromise after the budget measure passes the Senate and goes for reconciliation with the House budget.

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Carly's Law father asks: Is potato salad more important than saving a child's life?

Al.com

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Martin J. Reed

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- It's not the rare neurological disorder causing a barrage of seizures and other health issues in his 3-year-old daughter, Carly, that's generating the sick feeling in Dustin Chandler's stomach.

It's potato salad. More than \$56,000 worth at last count.

The Birmingham-area father who helped create the state legislation approved this year known as Carly's Law that authorizes a study of a marijuana-derived medicine for treating seizures has been hard at work on projects to help children and their families.

The Pelham police officer has been stirring support for development of an all-inclusive playground in Pelham for children with practically any disability. He's been trying to raise \$50,000 with Birmingham-area radio personality Matt Murphy to help find a cure for CDKL5, which affects Carly and about 600 or 700 other children with documented cases worldwide.

Their fundraising campaign to benefit the International Foundation for CDKL5 Research has raised about \$1,805 on their YouCaring.com webpage over the last month or so.

Meanwhile, a page on Kickstarter.com to raise money for "making potato salad" has generated nearly \$57,000 as of Tuesday night after just a few days from more than 4,500 donors.

"I've got a 3-year-old daughter that cannot talk. She is lying on the floor and she can't sit up. She can't walk and say mommy or daddy. And she has seizures all day. And potato salad?" Chandler said in an interview Tuesday night.

"It's a kick-in-the-gut kind of day," he said about learning that so many people will donate for someone to make potato salad. "It's a kick in the gut for my daughter. It's a kick in the gut for children fighting for their lives."

Chandler doesn't want to believe that people will throw away money to some guy from Columbus, Ohio, who states on Kickstarter.com: "Basically I'm just making potato salad. I haven't decided what kind yet."

But he can't deny the dollars generated for making potato salad over another cause such as trying to save children's lives.

"This is the reality. It's a kick-in-the-gut kind of day because I know the reality my daughter is faced with and her reality is not good. It is so hard for people to understand that," he said. "You fight so hard for every single inch that you get and you find out a story like this, it makes me want to fight harder. I am determined to get the \$50,000."

Chandler along with Murphy, Pelham Mayor Gary Waters and Pelham City Councilman Ron Scott, with possibly others, are planning on skydiving Sept. 27 to raise money for CDKL5 research.

Every single dollar raised for the cause will support CDKL5 research that could lead to a cure, Chandler said.

"Obviously CDKL5 is what I want to raise money for, but there are thousands of rare disorders that children are dying from out there. It's not about potato salad," Chandler said. "We're fighting for a human being, a soul that God gave us that's our responsibility. It blows my mind that potato salad could take off like that."

Like spinach for Popeye, potato salad is giving Chandler strength.

"It's mental anguish for a lot of these parents fighting every day for your kid and we're doing our best to bring awareness to it," he said. "It's a kick in the gut but it makes me more determined. It makes the fire in my belly even hotter to fight for these kids."

Anyone who wants to donate to the CDKL5 fundraiser can access the YouCaring.com campaign by following this link.

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Huge cubera snapper could smash 26-year-old Alabama state record by more than 32 pounds

Al.com

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Jeff Dute

Brett Rutledge of Mobile caught this 84.90-pound, pending Alabama state record cubera snapper while fishing for king mackerel 45 miles south of Dauphin Island on Tuesday. If confirmed, it will smash the existing record by more than 32 pounds. (Courtesy Brett Rutledge)

Brett Rutledge and David Simms were slow-trolling for king mackerel in 170 feet of water about 40 miles south of Dauphin Island when a line baited with a live hardtail and cast behind the boat got hit.

Rutledge of Mobile, grabbed the rod and eventually landed a huge cubera snapper that weighed 84.90 pounds on certified scales at the Alabama Marine Resources Division office on Dauphin Island.

If confirmed by MRD, Rutledge's fish will smash by more than 32 pounds the current record of 52 pounds held by Grand Bay's Michael Crawley since 1988.

"At first I thought it was a big amberjack because I'd caught quite a few jacks earlier. But when it ran away from the wreck we were fishing, I immediately thought it was a shark," said Rutledge, who, besides being an avid recreational fisherman, holds a commercial fishing license. "Then I got a visual on it and told David, 'Get the gaff!'"

It took about 30 minutes to finally get the big fish alongside Rutledge's 26-foot Panga since it had hit a king mackerel rod fitted with a relatively small Shimano Speedmaster reel spooled with only 30-pound-test monofilament line.

"When David got the gaff in it, he said he couldn't get it over the side, so I had to put down the rod and help him," Rutledge said. "As soon as it hit the deck I knew it was over 60 or 70 pounds. I told him, 'That one's going to have a shot at being a state record.'"

The fish was nearly 4-feet long and had a similar stomach girth, he said.

Rutledge, who fishes often with his brother-in-law, Marcus Kennedy, on the "Kwazar," is no stranger to seeing record-book fish hit the deck.

He held the Alabama records for scamp and black snapper at separate times. He was on board when Marcus Kennedy caught a blue marlin that at 792 pounds stood as Alabama's largest for 25 years before being broken last year.

He also helped land the huge 948-pound tiger shark his nephew Tyler Kennedy caught a couple of years ago that's still a record for any shark weighed at the Outcast Mega Shark Tournament.

Even though he's seen big cubera and caught smaller specimens in Belize several years ago, Rutledge said catching one this huge is probably his most exciting day on the water, rivaling the then-state record scamp that at 29 pounds also smashed the existing 21-pound record

"I've been around some pretty big stuff caught," Rutledge said. "I'll have to say this was probably one of the most exciting fish because I've never caught one off Alabama before and I know how rare it is to catch one this big."

Rutledge said MRD biologists confirmed that the fish was a female since it had ovaries and tests on the fish's earbone indicated it was 36 years old.

Large cuberas are mostly loners, according to the Florida Museum of Natural History, but larger aggregations occur during spawning, which usually peaks in June.

Why she was near the surface in 170 feet of water is a mystery, though Rutledge said he'd trolled up several big red snapper, which are cubera cousins.

"She hit maybe 30 seconds after the hardtail splashed into the water, so she obviously was up in the water column for some reason," he said. "The wreck we were fishing does come up off the bottom a pretty good bit. The top of the structure is still pretty deep, but maybe that had something to do with it."

Interestingly, Rutledge's cubera could be only the second biggest weighed at an Alabama-based scale in the last five years.

In 2009, Lee Windham weighed in a 95.2-pound cubera snapper at Zeke's Landing in Orange Beach.

Windham reported at the time that his fish had been caught 25 miles southeast of Perdido Pass.

Windham's fish did not qualify for Alabama state-record recognition since the fact they'd left from and returned to Florida through Pensacola Pass violated Alabama's stipulation that state-record fish can only be validated by anglers leaving from and returning to an Alabama port no matter where the fish was caught.

Windham's fish was 21 pounds lighter than the Florida state record cubera, which at 121 pounds still holds the top spot.

The all-tackle world record cubera snapper was weighed in Louisiana in June 2007 and tipped the scales to 124 pounds, 12 ounces, according to the International Game Fish Association.