



Speaker's Press Clips
Friday, July 11, 2014

- *Montgomery Advertiser*: [Central Alabama VA lost 900 patient X-rays since 2009](#)
- *Montgomery Advertiser*: [Email warned VA leadership about unethical scheduling](#)
- *Al.com*: [State education board to consider elevating standards for new teachers](#)
- *WSFA*: [AL first responders seek statewide emergency communications system](#)
- *Al.com*: [Chuck Hagel, defense secretary, warns of sequester's budget cuts while visiting Fort Rucker](#)
- *Dothan Eagle*: [Hagel talks funding, aviation role at Fort Rucker](#)
- *Al.com*: [Gov. Robert Bentley to lead industry-hunting trip to air show near London](#)
- *AP*: [Complaints lead to new student enrollment form](#)
- *AP*: [Montgomery students to get free breakfast, lunch](#)
- *Al.com*: [Gov. Robert Bentley to speak to nation's governors about economic development](#)
- *Times Daily*: [\\$9M contract for rehab facility approved](#)
- *Al.com*: [Merrill receives endorsement from the area's state representative in race for secretary of state](#)
- *Al.com*: [Jim Perdue, 21 other probate judges endorse Reese McKinney in secretary of state runoff](#)
- *Al.com*: [Sen. Richard Shelby says Obama administration's lack of immigration enforcement will cost U.S. billions more](#)
- *Al.com*: [U.S. House adopts Congressman Byrne's amendment to defund Obama 'ocean grab'](#)
- *Opelika-Auburn News*: [Planning commission approves downtown master plan](#)
- *Birmingham Business Journal*: [Huntsville's Space & Rocket Center among top 10 space-themed attractions in U.S.](#)
- *New York Times*: [Suit Against Obama to Focus on Health Law, Boehner Says](#)

FULL TEXT

Central Alabama VA lost 900 patient X-rays since 2009

Montgomery Advertiser

July 11, 2014

Kala Kachmar

At least 900 unread patient X-rays taken at Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System facilities since 2009 had been lost until recently, and top administrators who knew about the problem tried to cover it up, according to documents obtained by the Montgomery Advertiser.

Some of the lost X-rays showed possible malignancies and abnormalities that required medical attention.

More than 200 recent X-rays were found around April, not long after they were lost.

But when radiologists read the 654 older X-rays, some as old as five years, they found many showed problems needing medical attention.

Seven X-rays showed possible malignancies, one is abnormal, seven are considered major abnormalities, 119 are abnormal with attention needed, 25 are major abnormalities with no attention needed and 139 are minor abnormalities, according to an updated version of a May 1 CAVHCS Veterans Health Administration Issue Brief.

A study has not yet been done to determine the impact losing these X-rays had on patient health.

Email warned VA leadership about unethical scheduling

Staff began noticing in October 2012 that there was a problem with X-rays missing from the computer system, according to the original issue brief from May 1, which was modified on May 5 and July 8.

CAVHCS Director James Talton notified the VA's Southeast regional chief medical officer, who is in charge of VA systems in Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina, that unread imaging exams were intermittently falling off the "unread list" in the system, according to the brief.

Regional staff and administrators determined that there wasn't enough memory on radiologists' workstations, and the recommendation was to increase the memory, according to emailed documents provided to the Advertiser by unnamed VA officials who requested anonymity for fear of losing their jobs. However, X-rays continued to disappear off the unread list.

Anticipating a new radiology system that was supposed to be purchased for the whole region, CAVHCS did not pursue its own new system, the brief said.

Disabled veterans lose funds from unpublicized benefits

On April 30 of this year, a provider couldn't find an X-ray for a patient and notified IT staff, who discovered that X-rays that haven't been read in the first eight days "fall off" the system, according to the brief.

On May 1, the staff member changed the settings from eight days to five years, and about 900 unread X-ray exams showed up on the list, the brief said.

The current brief includes no indication of the problems that occurred between October 2012 and April 2014.

A May 6 email from Stephen Holt, the regional chief medical officer, said the May 5 version of the brief needed a substantial rewrite before it could be passed along, and asked that all the references to 2012 be taken out. The brief also indicates that clinical and institutional disclosure of the problem was not needed.

The email said the reference to workstation issues in 2012 is "unrelated and begs unnecessary and unrelated questions."

The final version, dated July 8, was sent to the regional office in Atlanta on Wednesday, according to emails obtained by the Advertiser. It doesn't contain any references to the problems in 2012 and does not indicate that any CAVHCS staff knew about the problem until April 2014.

The modified brief also recommends a root cause analysis review, which is a blame-free patient safety mechanism to identify process issues that contributed to a problem. However, the brief issue form doesn't have anything checked off on whether disclosure is needed.

According to the final version of the brief, CAVHCS will be working with other facilities in Birmingham, Columbia, S.C., and Charleston, S.C., to establish a network so each facility can access and interpret X-rays. CAVHCS has also hired two radiologists, one of which will start next week, according to the brief.

An email Holt sent Thursday shows that the next step is to conduct clinical reviews to see whether the delayed readings affected patients. Staff members are also trying to find X-rays older than five years that might not have been read.

Attempts to reach Holt and Talton were unsuccessful Thursday.

+++

Email warned VA leadership about unethical scheduling

Montgomery Advertiser

July 10, 2014

Kala Kachmar

The director of the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System was alerted to concerns about changes being made in scheduling records to create falsified wait times for veterans more than eight months before he took action, according to emails obtained by the Montgomery Advertiser.

In June, an audit by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General showed that employees in the central Alabama system, including Montgomery and Tuskegee, had manipulated records to conceal long waiting periods for veterans seeking medical care.

In a June 6 email to all CAVHCS employees, director James Talton said the facilities were identified for investigation based on information employees provided during access review visits from the inspector general's office about three weeks earlier.

But April 2013 emails obtained by the Advertiser show that an employee emailed Talton after a doctor expressed concerns that scheduling records were being done so it appeared veterans received faster access to care than they actually did.

On Tuesday, Talton said any "ambiguous statements" staff members emailed him about scheduling problems were "not actionable."

"If I'm going to take action or investigate something, there has to be something to chase," Talton said. "The numbers are wrong based on — what? They can be wrong for a variety of reasons. The schedulers need to be trained so the numbers appear accurately."

Talton said the first time he received anything he could take action on was in the last week of December, when an employee brought to his attention paper waiting lists being used by staff to keep track of patients seeking appointments.

Using paper lists and delaying the scheduling until a slot is available instead of entering appointments into the scheduling system right away makes it look like the patient demand is being met when it's not.

Talton said in January after the holidays, he initiated a fact-finding investigation on the paper waiting lists. He said administrative action was taken against some employees, and in some cases, those actions are still pending. Some were reassigned from their managerial positions, he said.

Talton said to his knowledge, the use of paper lists was discontinued. He also said it was only happening in primary care, not in any other areas, such as specialty care or mental health.

Two employees who work at CAVHCS, who did not want to be identified for fear of losing their jobs, said paper waiting lists were also being used for scheduling dental and mental health appointments.

"You'll find pockets of compliance and outliers also," he said. "Will I swear up and down that no one is using them? No."

Talton also said paper waiting lists have been in existence for years, and that it's not a new problem. He said his calendar has a one-hour block for "management by walking around," and he's never seen a paper waiting list during his inspections of the facilities.

"The thing about paper waiting lists that people miss is you don't know they exist until you see them," he said. "The idea that the VA is sitting back and letting paper wait lists [be used] — that's just not true."

Talton said the primary reason for the long waiting lists is a shortage of providers, which includes doctors, nurse practitioners and physicians' assistants.

Even with the manipulated records, the CAVHCS has the eighth-longest average wait time out of 141 VA systems nationwide, according to the audit. The central Alabama system is one of 84 VA facilities nationwide identified by the audit for unethical scheduling practices.

Talton, who has been working at CAVHCS since 2011, said he began working on improving wait times and access problems as soon as he started.

He said the access has improved significantly since he took over, but it's been worse in the last six months because of a loss of providers, he said.

When he took the job, Talton said he knew he was "walking into a mess." But he said he's been focused on achieving the best outcomes for veterans, improving access, improving employee processes and improving employee performance.

Talton said the media attention CAVHCS has been getting is helping him get a more in-depth look at the action he needs to take to appropriately lead the organization. But he said employees are feeling the additional workload.

"The amount of additional workload in responding to the requests and the additional correspondence is taking a lot of work out of the organization," Talton said. "The staff feels it and work is slowing down in some areas."

One example, he said, is if there are a number of complaints regarding clinical care, the clinical staff has to stop taking care of patients to research and respond to the complaint.

"I want to be able to continue taking care of veterans," he said. "We're here to take care of veterans and I don't care about anything else."

+++

State education board to consider elevating standards for new teachers

Al.com

July 10, 2014

Evan Belanger

MONTGOMERY, Alabama -- The Alabama State Board of Education will consider next month elevating standards for would-be teachers.

State Superintendent Tommy Bice said this week the board will consider at its next meeting Aug. 13 the adoption of new cut scores for Praxis tests, which determine whether college graduates are eligible to teach in Alabama classrooms.

"We're continue to look at our expectations and standard increasing," he said.

The board has already made some changes to how teachers pass the tests, requiring those seeking elementary certification to pass each content area individually.

Prior to that, test takers could fail one content area but make the cut anyway due to their overall average across all content areas.

While individual cut scores to be considered were not yet available, Bice said the changes are part of an ongoing effort to improve teacher education programs in Alabama as well as the performance of teachers across the state.

"The goal of this whole thing is to ensure that there is a student-ready teacher and a school-ready leader in every school and classroom in the state," he said.

That means the state department will be working closer with colleges that train teachers, providing more information about how their graduates do the classroom.

According to Bice, standards for teacher preparation programs have long been about paperwork and checklists that demonstrate students have completed the required programs to become teachers.

"Well, it really doesn't matter if you've done all those things if it doesn't impact learning and that's the big shift," Bice said.

Bice emphasized that new teachers won't be judged on the basis of student test scores alone, saying there is "multiple criteria being looked at so we can really make informed decision."

Across the board, educational officials are also evaluating the entry process for teacher preparation programs and the licensing process for teachers, Bice said. They're also working on mentoring programs for teachers.

Bice's comments come after a controversial report last year from the National Council on Teacher Quality.

That report gave some of Alabama's most prominent universities poor marks for the quality of their teacher preparation programs, labeling the nation's teacher preparation colleges "an industry of mediocrity."

However, university officials said the report was "fundamentally flawed" because it did not consider teachers' performance on college assessments or their classroom performance after graduation.

Bice formed a special commission in July to determine what changes, if any, would improve the quality of teacher preparation programs in Alabama, according to a spokeswoman for the state department.

+++

AL first responders seek statewide emergency communications system

WSFA

July 10, 2014

Hannah Lane

MONTGOMERY, AL (WSFA) -

In times of emergencies or disasters, communication is critical for first responders. Right now, though, first responders in different areas of Alabama don't have a way to communicate with each other, even if they're in the same part of the state.

Leaders believe that will soon change.

Governor Robert Bentley created the First Responder Wireless Commission two years ago and ever since, members have been working to come up with a solution for a statewide communications system.

The system would provide a gateway for the agencies radios to link up and be able to communicate. State law enforcement and local first responders say communication is always an issue when arriving on the scene of an emergency.

Some counties have already implemented the program the state plans to use, Project 25, or are working to get the system up and running.

For the program to be fully operational across the state, officials say it will cost \$160 million. Although it is expensive, officials are certain every resident would benefit from the statewide communication system.

"This will save lives," says Charles Murph, a member of the First Responder Wireless Commission. "This system is robust and redundant, so when an officer is making a stop out on the interstate he or she doesn't have to worry about 'well if I keep my radio up to talk to a dispatcher will they be able to hear me?' We know it is going to work.

Local leaders are excited about the benefit too.

"It will not only give us the capability to speak all over the county and get full coverage," says Ernie Baggett, EMA Director for Autauga County, "but it would also allow the other departments who may come over in case of an emergency disaster, the other agencies that would come in, it would help them collaborate together and work together and communicate well."

Officials say once the program is up and running it will cover 95% of the state. They say there will be a few places it can't reach but most areas should be covered.

Right now officials are trying to come up with the money to pay for this system and they're working with lawmakers for a good solution.

If approved by legislatures, it could take only two years to get the system up and running.

+++

Chuck Hagel, defense secretary, warns of sequester's budget cuts while visiting Fort Rucker

Al.com

July 10, 2014

Jim Stinson

OZARK, Alabama -- Chuck Hagel, U.S. defense secretary, flew into Fort Rucker on Thursday to thank soldiers for their service while also taking questions from soldiers and talking policy with the troops.

Hagel's main concern, as he addressed the town hall of soldiers, appeared to be budget cuts caused by budget laws known as "sequestration."

Speaking before at least 200 Army soldiers, Hagel said that unless Congress changes the budget cuts made by the 2011 law, the Department of Defense will have to cut \$50 billion a year from their base budget. That's in addition to the \$490 billion cuts the Defense Department is implementing now over 10 years.

Last year, the Defense Department had to cut \$37 billion, Hagel reminded soldiers.

The sequestration meant pilots couldn't fly and in many cases, could not train soldiers. It also meant soldiers had to be temporarily furloughed from their jobs, Hagel said.

Hagel said the Pentagon has been making the case in budget presentations that future sequestration budgeting could mean very abrupt cuts that will be less "thoughtful" than past cuts.

"I can't do that," said Hagel. "No secretary of defense can do that because I would never send ... send a man or woman into war if we didn't think you were ready or capable. That would be the greatest failure of leadership ever, if we did that."

Sequestration, passed in 2011 as part of the Budget Control Act, could mean fewer Pentagon purchases of helicopter, planes and ships. That prospect is not appealing, said Hagel.

In May 2013, the Army reversed course when it became clear a \$224.8 million sequestration-related cut would result in a cut of 37,000 flight hours and 500 training positions at Fort Rucker. In April 2013, the Army stopped transferring officers into helicopter training school there due to uncertainties about how many positions were available.

Hagel also pointed out that the war in Afghanistan is the nation's longest, at 14 years. And with an all-volunteer force, to boot, he said.

Hagel made brief opening remarks when he arrived at the base in Ozark, Ala., thanking the troops for their service and thanking their families for also making sacrifices while they served.

"Aviation is shifting. I don't have to tell you that," said Chuck Hagel.

Hagel, a former Republican U.S. senator from Nebraska, served in Congress from 1997 to 2009. President Obama tapped Hagel for secretary of defense after Leon Panetta stepped down following the 2012 elections.

As a young man, Hagel served in the Vietnam War, something he reminded the troops of.

Hagel then took three questions from the soldiers, two of whom who had budget-related and troop-supply questions, and one who asked about the situation in Iraq.

Fort Rucker is home to the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence. The base is the fifth-largest employer in Alabama, and trains more than 25,000 Army Aviation soldiers a year.

Appealing to the base's aviation and helicopter culture, Hagel said defense budget cuts could threaten the modernization of U.S. Army and Air Force flight equipment.

"Aviation is shifting. I don't have to tell you that," said Hagel.

On Iraq, Hagel seemed to rule out using ground troops for an attack on ISIS terrorists making their way through the Middle Eastern nation. But he did not rule out air strikes and surveillance in Iraq.

Hagel warned the soldiers the world still has very dangerous hot spots.

The media was not allowed to interview soldiers. After Hagel took questions, the soldiers lined up to receive an official Defense Department coin from Hagel himself.

Hagel toured three military bases over two days, stopping in Eglin Air Force Base in north Florida earlier Thursday, and Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay in Georgia on Wednesday afternoon.

+++

Hagel talks funding, aviation role at Fort Rucker

Dothan Eagle

July 10, 2014

Lance Griffin

FORT RUCKER -- The last time the secretary of defense visited Fort Rucker, he talked about funding increases for the Army Aviation post.

“As the central place for the training of Army helicopter pilots, I can say Fort Rucker will get a significant share,” Robert Gates said in April of 2009 when the United States was fighting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Thursday, current Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel beat a different drum.

The defense budget is in the early stages of a \$490 billion cut over 10 years. Sequestration has cut the budget even further. Hagel told a group of soldiers Thursday during a town hall meeting that the country would continue to field a strong defense, but funding would continue to be a concern.

“We’ve been at war for 13 years straight. The country has never done that with an all-volunteer force,” Hagel said. “Coming out of a conflict, there is always a restructuring, a reposturing.”

Funding and troop strength were also concerns for soldiers present at the town hall. Hagel took three questions from members of the Army Aviation Captain’s Career Course. Two of them dealt with force size.

“Aviation is shifting. I don’t have to tell you that,” Hagel said. “The health of our force is the top priority. Our budget problems are very real. It’s forcing us to make some hard choices.”

Hagel also appeared to bristle at reports that U.S. troop strength would shrink to pre-World War II levels.

“Can you equate what a soldier can do today, compared to what a soldier could do in 1940?” Hagel said. “When you look at what is possible today, the capability, technology, training, leadership, motivation ... our ships, capacity, helicopters ... we can do more than ever before with fewer personnel.”

Hagel quickly noted that his comments should not be taken as an endorsement of sequestration.

“We’re already cutting our budget \$490 billion over 10 years. We got a little reprieve from sequestration last year but still had to cut another \$37 billion. It hurt your training. You weren’t able to fly. It affected our readiness. It’s the law now and it’s coming back unless Congress does something.”

Hagel’s town hall was the last stop of the day before returning to Washington. He toured several areas of the post and received briefings on Army Aviation’s ongoing training changes. The military is in the process of changing air frames for entry training and making other changes as well.

Hagel, a Vietnam veteran, thanked Fort Rucker soldiers for their role.

“What you do is essential. I think it’s been made pretty clear. I saw it first-hand when I was in Vietnam in 1968. The ‘copters would take infantry in the jungles and would hover four or five

feet above the ground and drops us in. I established a significant appreciation for what you do early on in life.”

Hagel’s town hall lasted about 27 minutes.

The visit capped a two-day, three-installation visit for Hagel. He visited King’s Bay Naval Submarine Base in Georgia on Wednesday and Eglin Air Force Base in Florida earlier Thursday.

+++

Gov. Robert Bentley to lead industry-hunting trip to air show near London

Al.com

July 10, 2014

Dawn Kent Azok

MONTGOMERY, Alabama -- Gov. Robert Bentley, along with elected officials and business recruiters from across Alabama, aims to sell the state and build its aerospace and aviation sectors at the Farnborough International Air Show near London next week.

Recruiters hope to capitalize on past successes, namely the giant Airbus airplane manufacturing plant that's taking shape in Mobile, by drawing more suppliers and support businesses.

But communities elsewhere in the state also have a stake in the mission as economic developers look to lure more aerospace research and development centers, like the one announced last year by Boeing Co. in Huntsville.

READ MORE: Alabama's aerospace sector ready for global stage at 2014 Farnborough International Air Show

The Alabama Department of Commerce has budgeted a net cost of \$100,000 for marketing the state at Farnborough.

"It is estimated that it would cost at least four times this amount to visit each company separately in their respective global locations," the department said in a statement.

The Commerce Department's cost for such trips in the past has included set-up of the state's exhibition space, as well as travel expenses for a small group. Most members of the larger delegation hail from cities, counties and companies and do not travel on the state's dime.

In a statement today, Bentley emphasized the importance of Farnborough as an opportunity to meet face-to-face with leaders of the world's largest aerospace and aviation companies.

"Companies like Boeing and Airbus already know the business climate in Alabama, and have created good jobs for Alabamians. My goal for the air show is to create more jobs in this sector for the people of Alabama," the governor said.

Bentley will leave for England on Saturday and return Wednesday. Starting Monday, the Alabama delegation is expected to be involved in more than 20 meetings with companies.

Those representing the state will include Alabama Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield, two members of the department's business development team and another Commerce staff member to manage the state's exhibition space at the show.

In all, more than 90 elected, civic and business leaders statewide are going to Farnborough. Six elected Mobile County officials are expected to attend, as is a group of six officials and staff members from the city of Birmingham.

Last year, the state's trip to the Paris Air Show -- a similar event to Farnborough and held on alternating years -- cost the state \$86,609, according to records provided by the Commerce Department following the event.

That covered the travel expenses of seven people, as well as the set-up of a booth at the show. The entire delegation of those from Alabama numbered about 90.

Alabama's aerospace/defense sector includes more than 300 companies, about 83,000 employees and names such as Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, GE Aviation and GKN Aerospace. In addition, NASA has a major presence in Alabama with Huntsville's Marshall Space Flight Center.

Canfield said Airbus' selection of Alabama two years ago made a powerful statement about the state's capabilities and infrastructure. Now, the state is involved in nearly every segment of the industry, from passenger jet assembly to engineering, research and advance manufacturing.

"At the same time, we are prepared for research centers like Boeing's and for next-generation technologies, such as 3-D printing," he said in a statement.

+++

\$9M contract for rehab facility approved

Times Daily

July 10, 2014

Mary Sell

MONTGOMERY — The Alabama Department of Corrections is extending through August 2015 its contract with a New Jersey company that runs a drug rehab and education facility for state prisoners in Shelby County.

The \$9 million extension puts the total contract, established in 2012, at about \$27.5 million.
Marriott Blue Mondays (Trade)

According to ADOC, the Alabama Therapeutic Education Facility in Columbiana is a joint effort between the department, the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education and Community Education Centers Inc. of New Jersey.

Officials call it a hybrid facility, privately run with ADOC oversight.

In fiscal year 2013, 634 inmates graduated from various Community Education programs, according to ADOC. The department paid Community Education \$7.06 million that year.

While the goal is to keep inmates from returning to prison once they're released, specific recidivism rates weren't available Thursday. A Community Education spokesman referred the question to ADOC.

Kristi Gates, ADOC's spokeswoman, said a rate for just that one facility wasn't available because from there, inmates go to work release programs throughout the state. Work release centers are minimum security and in 2012 had a re-entry rate of about 32.7 percent.

Sen. Cam Ward, R-Alabaster, who chairs the state's Prison Reform Task Force, called the Columbiana facility a model program and said he's seen numbers that show its recidivism rates are considerably lower than the ADOC average.

The new \$9 million contract was approved Thursday by lawmakers on the Legislative Contract Review Committee. There was no public discussion or questions.

Ward, who is not on the contract review committee, said cost works out to be not much different than the \$42.50 ADOC spends per day on other inmates. Alabama's is the lowest daily spending in the country, Ward said.

He described the Community Education programs as intense.

"There's no sitting around. They're constantly working, and it's a regimented schedule they have to abide by," he said.

There's a huge demand for the programs, Ward said, but expanding it further is cost prohibitive.

Corrections receives the second-largest chunk of the state's general fund budget, after Medicaid. The department will receive \$394 million in the 2015 budget. That's about \$2 million less than last year. Corrections Commissioner Kim Thomas had asked for a \$42 million increase.

Two years ago, The New York Times reported Community Education, which runs several large halfway houses in New Jersey, in 2010 had "severe financial difficulties" and contemplated filing for bankruptcy. It also reported Community Education kept staffing at its New Jersey facilities at minimal levels to save money.

Asked about staffing in Alabama, CEC spokesman Christopher Greeder said via email the facility "has always met its contractual obligation for staffing requirements."

Community Education Centers recently made \$2,500 contributions to the campaign funds of two Alabama lawmakers from Shelby County: Ward and Rep. Mike Hill, R-Columbiana.

Ward on Thursday said the work with CEC was established before he was elected and the facility is not in his district.

+++

Complaints lead to new student enrollment form

The Associated Press

July 10, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama's school superintendent is telling all Alabama public school systems to start using a new student enrollment process that makes clear a Social Security number or birth certificate is not necessary for enrollment.

Superintendent Tommy Bice sent school systems a standardized enrollment form after the Southern Poverty Law Center complained that more than 70 percent of Alabama's school systems have been using enrollment practices that violate federal prohibitions against denying or discouraging the enrollment of immigrant children. The law center said many of the previous forms required a Social Security number or birth certificate.

Southern Poverty Law Center attorney Jay Singh commended Bice on Thursday "for taking action to ensure that all children — regardless of immigration status or birthplace — have equal access to Alabama's public schools."

A spokeswoman for the state Department of Education said this was the first time the department has sent schools a standardized enrollment form to use. The form makes clear that giving a Social Security number is voluntary, and Bice directed all schools to use it for the upcoming school year.

In a letter accompanying the form, Bice said, "A birth certificate is not required for enrollment." He said schools can use other documents for verification of age, such as religious or medical records, an adoption record, or an affidavit from a parent.

Bice also told school officials that an Alabama driver's license is not required for proof of residency. "You may request a driver's license, but must accept other forms of documentation such as a utility bill or residential lease," he wrote.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has been involved in immigration issues for several years. It successfully challenged a provision in Alabama's 2011 immigration law that required public schools to verify the immigration status of newly enrolled students.

+++

Montgomery students to get free breakfast, lunch

The Associated Press

July 11, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Montgomery Public Schools officials say students will receive free breakfast and lunch at school through a federal program supporting districts with a 40 percent or higher poverty rate.

Al.com reported (<http://bit.ly/1rc4NLB>) Thursday that the free meals being offered this school year are part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Students will have to pay for additional items they buy with their breakfasts and lunches.

Superintendent Margaret Allen says the program will boost academic achievement by reducing the number of hungry children at school.

Allen says studies have shown students who receive proper nutrition perform better academically. Although some of the district's families may not live below the poverty line, Allen says they might skip meals to try saving money.

+++

Gov. Robert Bentley to speak to nation's governors about economic development

Al.com

July 10, 2014

Dawn Kent Azok

Gov. Robert Bentley will speak Friday about Alabama's strategic economic development plan at the summer meeting of the National Governors Association in Nashville.

Bentley, who is chair of the NGA's Economic Development and Commerce Committee, will talk about state efforts to reward innovation that has the potential to create jobs, his office said today.

"Alabama's economic development plan is unique and has enabled our state to strategically recruit new industries, create jobs and foster a business climate so small and medium enterprises can compete in global markets," Bentley said in a prepared statement.

READ MORE: Alabama lands nearly 17,000 new jobs and more than \$4.4 billion in capital investment in 2013

The state's strategic plan, Accelerate Alabama, targets 11 business sectors and focuses on recruiting new industry, retaining and expanding existing business and renewing job creation through research and development.

Jim Hudson, founder of Hudson Alpha Institute for Biotechnology in Huntsville, will join Bentley for a roundtable discussion.

The NGA's Economic Development and Commerce Committee will meet at 3 p.m Friday at Nashville's Omni Hotel.

+++

Merrill receives endorsement from the area's state representative in race for secretary of state

Al.com

July 10, 2014

Mark McCarter

HUNTSVILLE, Alabama – John Merrill's 43rd visit to Madison County on his campaign journey served two purposes on Thursday.

First, it was to collect the endorsement from his colleagues who serve the area in the Alabama House of Representatives.

Second, it was a "get out the vote" message, with a mid-July runoff election that will likely not inspire record voting numbers.

Merrill, a state representative from Tuscaloosa, is facing former Montgomery County Probate Judge Reese McKinney in the July 15 runoff for the Republican nomination for Alabama secretary of state. The winner will face Democrat Lula Albert-Kaigler in the general election Nov. 4.

Merrill was joined outside the Madison County courthouse for a press conference in which his candidacy was endorsed by Rep. Mike Ball, Rep. Wayne Johnson, Rep. Mac McCutcheon, Rep. Jim Patterson, Rep. Dan Williams and Rep. Phil Williams.

"What we want to do is encourage people to come back and participate," said Merrill, who received 47.7 percent of the votes cast in Madison County in the June primary. "That's the reason why I'm here today, because we want to make sure the people in this area know we need their vote, we desire their vote and we would be honored to have their vote again.

That's the reason (his colleagues) came out, to raise awareness for the run-off."

McCutcheon, who served alongside Merrill on the Rules Committee in the House, spoke for the group.

"He and I have gotten to work very closely," McCutcheon said. "I have seen it first-hand that he is a hard worker, a dedicated worker for the people of Alabama."

McCutcheon noted Merrill's involvement in the 2010 ethics reforms and "the legislation (that was involved) there were so many issues that come through the secretary of state's office. We have a man who knows first-hand what these pieces of legislation are about ... He knows what needs to be done in the secretary of state's office."

Merrill called himself "a proven conservative reformer, a man who an ability and a desire to get things done in Montgomery. I am definitely and clearly the most conservative candidate in the race."

Merrill said that he had declined pay raises and in fact accepted a pay cut while McKinney "accepted nine pay raises in 14 years as probate judge."

Merrill said that he has been part of a legislature that has "cut wasteful spending in Montgomery by \$1 billion in the last four years. My opponent has expanded his office by creating new positions, and increased his budget almost \$1 million over that time."

Only a few hours before Merrill received the endorsement from the local delegation, Crenshaw County Probate Judge Jim Perdue endorsed McKinney, joined in the endorsement by 21 other probate judges. Perdue ran in the initial primary election, receiving 22 percent of the vote to 40 percent for Merrill, 38 for McKinney.

+++

Jim Perdue, 21 other probate judges endorse Reese McKinney in secretary of state runoff

Al.com

July 10, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Crenshaw County Probate Judge Jim Perdue and 21 other Republican probate judges today endorsed Reese McKinney in Tuesday's runoff for the GOP nomination for secretary of state.

Perdue finished third behind state Rep. John Merrill and McKinney in the June 3 primary.

Perdue and some of the other judges joined McKinney for a news conference at the state Capitol to announce the endorsements.

McKinney faces Merrill in Tuesday's runoff. Merrill has also received a number of endorsements.

The winner will face Democrat Lula Albert-Kaigler in the general election Nov. 4.

Crenshaw County Probate Judge Jim Perdue discusses his Republican campaign for secretary of state after a meeting with supporters in Montgomery, Ala., on Wednesday, April 30, 2014.

Perdue is among three candidates in the primary, which is scheduled for June 3. (AP

Photo/Phillip Rawls)

Crenshaw County Probate Judge Jim Perdue (AP Photo/Phillip Rawls)

Perdue said he was supporting McKinney because he has "integrity, experience and a servant's heart."

McKinney said he was honored to have the endorsements and said that if elected he would work with probate judges to make sure Alabama has honest elections. The secretary of state is the state's chief election official, while the probate judges manage elections in their counties.

"The secretary of state's office is like a probate office on steroids and Reese McKinney is the one to handle that job," Autauga County Probate Judge Al Booth said.

McKinney also picked up an endorsement this week from the Conservative Christians of Alabama.

Merrill has been endorsed by many groups. Some of those include the Business Council of Alabama, National Rifle Association, Home Builders Association of Alabama, Alabama Farmers Federation and Alabama Association of Realtors.

+++

Sen. Richard Shelby says Obama administration's lack of immigration enforcement will cost U.S. billions more

Al.com

July 10, 2014

Leada Gore

Alabama's senior Senator said he is concerned the White House's request for billions of dollars to care for illegal children flooding across America's border may be just the first such request made by the Obama administration.

Shelby spoke to Fox News before Senate hearings related to the growing crisis on the border, where as many as 50,000 young illegal aliens have crossed into the U.S. since October. The children are being detained at U.S. military bases and President Barack Obama is asking for \$3.7 billion for housing and increased border security.

Shelby, R-AL, said the government will have to borrow the money and "it won't be the end."

"That's \$15,000 for each child that's here. That's a lot of money. We need to send them back as soon as we can," he said. "Today it is 50,000 (children), tomorrow it could be 100,000 and then 700,000."

Shelby said the children, most of them teenagers, are being encouraged to come to the U.S. by their parents.

"We need to be mindful these are children. We have humane thoughts in us. At the same time, we have laws and we ought to enforce the laws," he said.

You can watch the interview below:

+++

U.S. House adopts Congressman Byrne's amendment to defund Obama 'ocean grab'

Al.com

July 10, 2014

Brendan Kirby

The U.S. House of Representatives on Thursday adopted an amendment offered by Rep. Bradley Byrne to cut off funding for an executive order issued by President Barack Obama that the congressman contends amounts to an "ocean grab."

Byrne, R-Fairhope, along with Rep. Bill Flores, R-Texas, offered the amendment to the Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2015. The amendment passed on a voice vote.

Byrne voted in the 253-170 majority to pass the entire \$34 billion spending bill, which 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.

Byrne's amendment, if it becomes law, would prohibit the government from using federal funds to implement an National Ocean Policy, created by executive order in 2010 and requiring various agencies to work to together to – in Byrne's words – "zone the ocean."

Byrne said in a floor speech Thursday that it negatively impacts the use of marine resources and harms the inland economy.

"You've heard of a land grab; well this is an ocean grab," he said.

The amendment was the second time Byrne tried to change the bill as the House debated it this week. On Wednesday, the House rejected his effort to eliminate funding for an alternative energy program that he called wasteful and argued subjected taxpayer funds to risky investments in private businesses.

The National Ocean Council coordinates some two dozen different agencies with the goal of reconciling competing interests, like recreation, offshore energy exploration and fishing. But Byrne said the council has no statutory authority and threatens to harm many of those industries.

"This has the potential to be devastating for coastal communities, such as in my district – a coastal district located on the Gulf of Mexico where the previously mentioned industries play a critical role in our economy," he said.

Byrne added that the administration has failed to provide detailed spending reports. In addition, he said, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers recently wrote a rule that expands jurisdiction under the Clean Water Act by redefining "navigable waterways."

Said Byrne: "Essentially, a drop of rain falls on your land could cause the federal government to have jurisdiction over your property under the notion that this drop will eventually wind up in the ocean."

Byrne said the people and industries most affected by the policy have no representation in the rule-making process. He depicted the policy's creation as a prime example of Obama's excessive use of executive order to bypass Congress.

"The president has indicated that he was using his pen and his phone to create policy against the will of Congress, and the National Ocean Policy is a perfect opportunity for him to do so," he said.

Byrne said states still would be free to protect their own waters.

"In my coastal communities, we do meet together, and the federal government is not a good partner," he said. "In fact, it is has been a hindrance to our ability to use our waters because there are people in the federal government who, unfortunately, believe that the oceans belong to the government and not to the people."

As to the bill, itself, Byrne's spokesman noted that it increases funding for the Army Corps of Engineers by \$25 million. Press secretary Seth Morrow said Byrne believes that will have a positive impact on public safety and economic growth.

+++

Planning commission approves downtown master plan

Opelika-Auburn News

July 10, 2014

Kristen Oliver

The Auburn Planning Commission approved a request for the adoption of the Auburn Downtown Master Plan at its regular meeting Thursday.

The plan is designed to build on the concepts and policies contained within CompPlan 2030 and to establish a vision for enhancing and growing downtown Auburn, according to the city website.

"One of the findings of CompPlan 2030, which was adopted just a couple years ago, was the need to really try to grow downtown," said Forrest Cotten, planning department director.

Cotten said while Auburn has experienced tremendous growth over the past several years, the urban core remained "static." He said downtown will have to grow and improve in order to remain the heart of the city.

The commission viewed a presentation by Cotten at the Thursday meeting, during which Cotten described several implementation categories for the Auburn Downtown Master Plan. These

include growth and development, housing and mixed-use buildings, walkability and streetscapes, parking, green spaces, identity and more.

Cotten said the plan involves breaking the city into five types of focus areas: traditional downtown, downtown expansion, urban neighborhood near Felton Little Park, urban neighborhood near downtown west and urban neighborhood's requiring preservation.

"One of the exercises we had with the public, in one of the three major input meetings, we asked people, 'If you had so many dollars and we gave you a list of priorities, what would you spend your money on?'" Cotton said. "Surprisingly, at least to me, Felton Little Park was the number one priority of the citizens."

He displayed renderings of possible updates within these areas, including the park and its surroundings, but he said these are not changes that would take place this year or even next. They are possibilities for the city far into the future.

With the approval of the commission, the Auburn Downtown Master Plan will go to the City Council for approval Sept. 9, Cotton said.

"This will go to the council for their approval, and then we can actually start to get into the meat and potatoes of not just the improvements, but some of the zoning regulations that will need to be drafted to facilitate this vision down the road," he said.

+++

Huntsville's Space & Rocket Center among top 10 space-themed attractions in U.S.

Birmingham Business Journal

July 10, 2014

Huntsville's U.S. Space & Rocket Center ranked No. 9 on TripAdvisor's top 10 best space-themed attractions in the U.S.

TripAdvisor.com named the U.S. Space & Rocket Center a "must-see" while visiting the Rocket City.

"Since 1970, this facility has showcased the past, present and future of human spaceflight," a news release said. "On display, travelers can view America's first satellite, Explorer I, the Apollo 12 moon rock and the Apollo 16 command module."

The report ranked the top 10 space-themed attractions in the U.S. and its space tourism survey of more than 2,200 U.S. respondents.

To see other top 10 attractions, [click here](#).

+++

Suit Against Obama to Focus on Health Law, Boehner Says

The New York Times

July 10, 2014

Jonathan Weisman

WASHINGTON — Speaker John A. Boehner’s lawsuit against President Obama will focus on changes to the health care law that Mr. Boehner says should have been left to Congress, according to a statement issued Thursday by the speaker’s office.

By narrowly focusing the legal action on the Affordable Care Act, Mr. Boehner will sidestep the more politically problematic issue involving Mr. Obama’s executive action offering work permits for some illegal immigrants who were brought to the United States as children.

Last month, Mr. Boehner announced his intention to seek legislation allowing the House to sue the president over his use of executive actions, a reflection of charges by congressional Republicans that the president has overreached his authority. On Thursday, Mr. Boehner said the lawsuit would specifically challenge the president’s decision to delay imposing penalties on employers who do not offer health insurance to employees in compliance with the Affordable Care Act.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

RELATED COVERAGE

[Boehner to Seek Bill to Sue Obama Over Executive Actions](#) JUNE 25, 2014

“The current president believes he has the power to make his own laws — at times even boasting about it,” Mr. Boehner said in his statement. “He has said that if Congress won’t make the laws he wants, he’ll go ahead and make them himself, and in the case of the employer mandate in his health care law, that’s exactly what he did.”

“If this president can get away with making his own laws, future presidents will have the ability to as well,” the speaker added. “The House has an obligation to stand up for the legislative branch, and the Constitution, and that is exactly what we will do.”

Representative Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic leader in the House, called the suit a “legal boondoggle doomed to fail.”

“This lawsuit is just another distraction from House Republicans desperate to distract the American people from their own spectacular obstruction and dysfunction,” Ms. Pelosi said in a statement.

Mr. Boehner sought to clarify that he was not challenging Mr. Obama’s right to issue executive orders, only his right to change legislation without congressional approval. Republican leaders have carefully avoided challenging the president’s 2012 executive order concerning young illegal immigrants, although until Thursday, Mr. Boehner had refused to rule out such a challenge.

“In 2013, the president changed the health care law without a vote of Congress, effectively creating his own law by literally waiving the employer mandate and the penalties for failing to comply with it,” Mr. Boehner said. “That’s not the way our system of government was designed to work. No president should have the power to make laws on his or her own.”

The House Rules Committee has scheduled a hearing on Wednesday to consider the legislation that would authorize the lawsuit.