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FULL TEXT

GE Aviation to make upgrades to Auburn plant

The Associated Press

July 15, 2014

AUBURN, Ala. (AP) — Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley says GE Aviation plans to upgrade its manufacturing capabilities in Auburn.

Bentley said in a statement Tuesday that it will make the Auburn plant the first of its kind to mass produce additive components for the jet propulsion industry.

The governor said GE will invest \$50 million in the existing 300,000-square-foot facility to prepare for the additional work.

Bentley said production of additive components will begin in 2015.

The governor said the plant will also continue to manufacture precision, super-alloy machined parts for jet engines.

GE has hired more than 70 people at the Auburn facility since it opened in April 2013.

Bentley said that based on current demand for jet engines, GE expects to hire 300 people when the plant is fully operational later this decade.

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Science and Engineering Services announces \$70 million expansion, 450 new jobs in Huntsville

Al.com

July 15, 2014

Lucy Berry

HUNTSVILLE, Alabama – Science and Engineering Services said this morning it will spend nearly \$70 million expanding its manufacturing operations in Huntsville – a move that will create 450 new jobs in the Rocket City.

SES leaders, Gov. Robert Bentley, Alabama Department of Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield, Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle and others announced the development today at the Farnborough International Airshow in London.

SES will span more than 1.3 million square feet of hangar, manufacturing and integration space in four facilities in Huntsville when the five-year expansion is complete.

"Huntsville remains a strategic hub in the aviation industry and SES is proud to be a part of this community," SES Senior Vice President for Aviation Derek Paquette said in a statement. " ... The expansion of our facilities and capabilities will allow us to even better support our customers and ultimately, the young men and women who fly, drive or operate the products we develop."

SES, which is based in Maryland, operates two Huntsville locations on Pulaski Pike and Dunlop Boulevard. The company offers maintenance, repair and overhaul services for helicopters, airplanes, ground combat systems and unmanned aerial vehicles.

Work on the expansion project, which is expected to begin immediately, will include the construction of hangar bays, new office space, a parking lot, aircraft parking spaces and a new helipad to support commercial and military clients.

Details on incentives were not immediately available, but a news release said the Madison County Commission, Tennessee Valley Authority, Huntsville Utilities and Chamber of Commerce of Huntsville/Madison County assisted with the project.

The SES news is the third high-profile jobs announcement in Huntsville this year. In February, Remington Outdoor said it will create 2,000 new jobs with the opening of a gun manufacturing plant in Jetplex Industrial Park, while Verizon Wireless will add 300 customer-service positions at its Call Center in Huntsville.

Only seven months into 2014, Battle said it is already an "excellent year for Huntsville and all of Alabama."

"With this announcement, SES is demonstrating what we've been saying for quite some time now," he said in a statement. "In Huntsville, you can do your research, development, engineering and manufacturing all in the same location. This systems approach is why Huntsville continues to be on the radar for companies looking to innovate and create."

Earlier today, the state announced GE Aviation will spend \$50 million to build a new 3-D printing operation at its facility in Auburn.

SES Chief Executive Officer E.J. Sinclair said the expansion will benefit existing customers, as well as new programs supporting the DoD, aircraft original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and foreign military customers.

SES, which currently employs 750 in Huntsville, serves mainly the U.S. Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security and other international governments.

"The announcement of SES is great news for Huntsville and the entire state," Governor Robert Bentley said. "We have positioned ourselves to be a leader in aerospace and aviation, and the SES expansion is further proof of that success. I appreciate the leaders at Science and Engineering Services LLC for the investment in Alabama, and I look forward to the company's continued success in Huntsville."

City of Huntsville Director of Urban Planning Shane Davis and Business Relations Officer Harrison Diamond will hold media interviews to discuss the SES project later this morning at City Hall.

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Sen. Del Marsh opposes tax increases, says state workforce can be cut by 9 percent

Al.com

July 14, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- The top-ranking member of the Alabama Senate said today he opposes any tax increases and said a leaner government and economic growth are the keys to salvaging the state budget.

Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, was asked whether lawmakers should consider any proposals to raise new revenue after Gov. Robert Bentley mentioned that possibility in an Associated Press story this weekend.

"I'm not going to support any tax increase," Marsh said. "In fact, I look at this as a further opportunity to right-size government."

Marsh said the state work force has been trimmed by about 11 percent during the last four years, mostly by attrition. He said he thought it could be reduced by about another 9 percent.

"I'm going to do what I can to right-size government," Marsh said.

Jennifer Ardis, communications director for Bentley, said the governor is also opposed to tax increases.

"The governor's goal is to not raise taxes, period," Ardis said. "We know there is a revenue issue in the next budget year. But it's very early and the governor is looking at all options to make up the revenue shortfall."

Ardis said the governor is also looking at further efforts to streamline government.

Rachel Adams, spokeswoman for House Speaker Mike Hubbard, said Hubbard has not had any discussions with the governor about plans for new tax revenue.

"Given the fact that a large percentage of our Republican legislative candidates have taken pledges against new taxes, any broad-based levies would likely be difficult to pass," Adams said in a statement. "It would be appropriate for the Governor to sit down with Speaker Hubbard, Senate Pro Tem Del Marsh and the rest of the legislative leadership at some point before the next session to discuss the General Fund budget needs and how to best meet them without violating the conservative principles that all of us, including Gov. Bentley, believe in deeply."

[Related: Cigarette tax increase one suggestion for boosting Alabama General Fund]

For budget years 2013-2015, the Legislature has relied on \$145 million from the Alabama Trust Fund to balance the General Fund. But all of the \$437 million voters approved for that purpose in 2012 has been used.

That means the Legislature either has to have new revenue or make cuts when it develops the 2016 budget early next year.

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Del Marsh: State workers could be cut 9 percent; Legislative leadership said they do not expect new taxes to address a projected \$200 million deficit in the state's General Fund.

Montgomery Advertiser

July 14, 2014

Brian Lyman

The leader of the Alabama Senate on Monday emphatically rejected the possibility of new taxes to address a looming budget shortfall in 2015, instead saying the answer could be further reductions in the state's work force.

Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, said he believes part of the funds to close a gap in the state's \$1.8 billion General Fund budget, which pays for most non-education programs in the state, could be found by cutting another 9 percent of the state's workforce

"I'm not going to support any tax increase," he said. "I look at this as a further opportunity to right-size government."

The senator said he expected the elimination of any positions to occur through attrition.

The state workforce has been reduced 11 percent since 2011, and Mac McArthur, the director of the Alabama State Employees Association, said the result has been increased workloads for state employees. McArthur said additional cuts could affect the delivery of services and leave state departments out of compliance with certain federal guidelines.

"I don't know how you sustain 9 percent cuts, or any significant cuts, period," he said.

Last week, Gov. Robert Bentley said that he was "looking at all possibilities" to balance next year's General Fund. Jennifer Ardis, a spokeswoman for Bentley, said Monday that it was "still very early" to talk about the budget, which will not be submitted to the Legislature until March.

"The governor said all options were on the table," she said. "That certainly does not mean the governor has made up his mind one way or another about those options. His goal is to not raise taxes, period."

The General Fund gets most of its funding from non-growth revenue sources, and has been in a perpetual state of crisis for the past seven years, due to flat growth and mounting costs in the state's Medicaid and Corrections programs. Lawmakers building the budget next year will have

to deal with the loss of \$145 million borrowed from the Alabama Trust Fund, and the potential loss of \$50 million in one-time money used in the budget this year that may or may not be available for the FY 2016 budget, which begins on Oct. 1, 2015.

Other measures Marsh said were on the table included consolidation of the state's two budgets; removing earmarks that tie up more than four-fifths of the state's tax revenue and the elimination of some deductions and exemptions.

Marsh declined to name specific exemptions, saying he was not trying to pick on any particular industry. Alabama's tax code lists numerous deductions and exemptions for a large number of entities.

Other proposals may run into difficulty. Much of the revenue earmarked in law is reserved for education. In the past, education budget chairs have rejected unification proposals — including one floated by Bentley — fearing that the accelerating costs in Medicaid and Corrections, combined with lawmakers' unwillingness to create new sources of revenue, would take away money from schools.

Rachel Adams, a spokeswoman for House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, said the speaker had not discussed the possibility of new tax revenue with Bentley.

"Given the fact that a large percentage of our Republican legislative candidates have taken pledges against new taxes, any broad-based levies would likely be difficult to pass," she said in a statement.

Marsh also rejected the possibility of any tax cuts next year, and suggested that lawmakers should look carefully at any economic incentives that may be proposed in the future.

"If we've got this budgetary crisis, we need to look at what we're giving industries, and we need to encourage industries to come," he said. "But we've got to look at the whole picture, and how one thing could affect everything else."

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Sens. Arthur Orr, Del Marsh plan to review Alabama tax policy

Al.com

July 14, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Some key leaders in the Alabama Senate are planning a review of state tax policy and how some industries are treated differently.

Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, the chairman of the state Senate's General Fund budget committee, said he wants a full review of tax credits and exemptions as the state looks at ways to close a projected funding shortfall next year.

Orr said the Legislative Fiscal Office is going over state tax laws in detail and will give him a report in August or September.

"Before we consider any type of tax increases we need to evaluate why a lot of exemptions, credits and deductions have been given in years past," Orr said. "They're going through the tax code with a very, very fine tooth comb to evaluate each decision."

Orr said he had gotten a preliminary list from the LFO but declined to say what it includes because he hasn't had a chance to research it.

Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh said he wants to look at state tax law and make sure industries are treated equitably and in a way that promotes free markets.

Marsh said he believes there are problems with the tax but he declined to elaborate.

"I would argue that we're not a true free market state," Marsh said. "You look into the tax law and look at how many different organizations have a different tax deal and ask yourself, 'Is that a free market?' "

"I'm going to look at all of the tax policy of the state, who gets tax exemptions and why. I want to see the whole picture."

AL.com asked Orr and Marsh the possibility of tax increase proposals today because Gov. Robert Bentley told the Associated Press in a weekend story that the state might have to consider them because of an expected shortfall in the General Fund budget next year.

Jennifer Ardis, the governor's spokeswoman, stressed today that the governor's goal is to avoid tax increases.

"We know there is a revenue issue next year," Ardis said. "But it's very early and the governor is looking at all options to make up the revenue shortfall."

Marsh said he flatly opposes any tax increases.

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Cigarette tax increase one suggestion for boosting Alabama's General Fund

Al.com

July 14, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Gov. Robert Bentley told the Associated Press in a story published this weekend that state leaders need to consider looking for new revenue.

The state has borrowed \$437 million from the Alabama Trust Fund to balance the General Fund the last three years.

But none of that money will be left for the fiscal year 2016 budget.

The Legislature and the governor, Bentley or his Democratic opponent, Parker Griffith, will have to begin crafting that budget early next year.

"We are looking at all possibilities right now for the next four years because we have to. That's my job," Bentley told AP.

He also said: "It's always my desire not to raise taxes, but I also know we have to have revenue."

Bentley had previously said that reducing crowding and other problems in Alabama's overfilled prisons will cost money.

Rep. Steve Clouse, R-Ozark, chairman of the House Ways and Means General Fund Committee, said he would support a "moderate increase" in the cigarette tax, something in the range of 20 cents to 30 cents a pack.

"That could potentially raise somewhere in the \$65 to \$75 million range," Clouse said.

Clouse said he would not want a cigarette tax increase so large that it would hurt Alabama retailers in competition with border states.

The Legislature has used \$145 million from the Alabama Trust Fund each of the last three years to balance the General Fund.

Voters approved that transfer from the ATF in 2012. Last year, the Legislature passed a bill requiring payback of the \$437 million by 2026.

The payment due in fiscal 2016 will be \$15 million.

"So that's a \$160 million deficit just from those two items," Clouse said.

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Defense Department cuts to cost Maxwell AFB 31 jobs

The Associated Press

July 15, 2014

Maxwell Air Force Base will lose 31 jobs as part of the military's plans to save \$1.6 billion under a Defense Department directive to slash its costs and staff by at least 20 percent, but the base has fared well compared to those in other parts of the country.

The Air Force said Monday it will eliminate nearly 3,500 positions over the next five years.

The plan calls for significant reductions at major Air Force commands around the country, including 742 positions at Joint Base Langley-Eustis in Virginia.

Other major cuts include 372 positions at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio; 292 at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois; 429 at Joint Base San Antonio; 275 at Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado; and 238 positions at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii.

Other installations losing positions under the plan announced Monday include 167 at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana; 27 at Hill Air Force Base, Utah; 19 at Joint Base Charleston, South Carolina; and 22 at Hurlburt Field, Florida.

The Air Force also said its headquarters staff would lose 734 positions, including 522 positions in the National Capital Region.

Of the 3,459 positions being eliminated worldwide, 923 of those are coming from personnel who provide installation and mission support. The Air Force is creating a new center to handle much of those responsibilities, which will have a staff of 350. The Air Force has not specified where that center will be located, although it will report to Air Force Materiel Command, which is headquartered at Wright-Patterson.

The Air Force said it plans to pursue the cuts sooner, rather than later.

"We are aggressively pursuing reductions within the first year, rather than spread them out over five years as allowed by DoD," Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James said in a statement. "It's better for airmen because it provides them predictability and allows us to re-stabilize our work force sooner."

The Air Force has not said how many of the positions being eliminated will be civilians, but it said would offer early retirement and voluntary separation incentive pay program to get civilians to leave.

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Alabama Secretary of State's office again hitting the road to issue free photo voter IDs

Al.com

July 14, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- The Alabama Secretary of State's office is hitting the road again starting next week with a mobile unit to provide free photo voter IDs.

The cards are for voters who don't have a driver license or other form of photo ID needed to vote under the state's photo voter ID law, which was in effect for the first time in the June 3 primary.

[Related: What you need to know about the photo ID requirement.]

In a news release, Secretary of State Jim Bennett announced a schedule of visits by the mobile unit from July 22 to Oct. 8.

The unit will be on the road a total of 18 days. It made 93 stops before the June 3 primary.

"Some counties recommended that we return to a few more areas and serve the voters there," Bennett said in the news release.

Voters can also get the free photo IDs at their county Board of Registrars office or the Secretary of State's office.

Almost 3,000 free photo voter IDs have been issued, Bennett said.

Next week, the mobile unit will be in Franklin, Lawrence and Colbert counties.

-- July 22, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Red Bay Senior Center, Red Bay.

-- July 23, 8 a.m. to 10 a.m., North Courtland Senior Center, Courtland.

-- July 23, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Gattman Park, Muscle Shoals.

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'You have permission to break the rules,' Bice tells educators at statewide conference

Al.com

July 14, 2014

Sally Pearsall Ericson

MOBILE, Alabama -- Plan 2020, the State Board of Education's effort to improve the graduation rate to 90 percent by 2016, is working, and that's because more teachers are thinking outside of the traditional classroom models, said Tommy Bice, state superintendent of education.

Bice was the keynote speaker Monday at the opening session of the statewide MEGA Conference for educators, held at the Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center.

He noted improvements in the statewide graduation rate, from a baseline of 72 percent in 2012 to 74 percent in 2013. That's 1,800 more high school graduates in the first year of the Plan 2020 initiative, he said, and if that trend continues, the goal of reaching a 90 percent graduation rate by 2016 is within reach.

"We are now at an 80 percent graduation rate, the highest it's ever been," he said. "You made more of a difference in these two years than we did in a decade."

Bice repeatedly urged the 1,800-member audience to continue coming up with innovative ways to motivate students, without fear of reprisal from the state education department. "Let me give you permission to be as creative as you need to be," he said.

"Serve children, not programs or a legislative agenda."

The theme of the professional development conference was "Every child a graduate – every graduate prepared," and 2,700 educators were expected to attend sessions offered throughout the week. The conference includes exhibits from 116 vendors.

Bice showed the audience several photos and videos from his visits to schools across the state, including Castlen Elementary School in Mobile County, where he watched fifth-graders create code during a computer science lesson.

RELATED: Watch teens from Mobile, Baldwin schools rock the house at MEGA Conference opening session

He repeatedly urged the teachers to reject the status quo. Imagine a policy environment that encourages and rewards creativity, he said, and allows room for risk and even failure. "There is not a successful business in this state that does not build risk and loss into its business plan," he said.

Technology is changing how, when and where kids learn, he said, illustrating his point by asking everyone to stand up, bring out their smartphones, and take selfies. "Kids can learn anywhere at any time. ... There is nothing in state law that says school has to happen between the hours of 8 a.m. and 3 p.m.," he said.

"It's up to us to imagine what that might look like."

He also told the teachers not to worry about test results: "We're not so worried any more about getting to the dadgum test."

Test scores should not be used for anything except to help teachers make better instructional decisions, he said – a declaration that garnered widespread applause.

But Bice's most strongly emphasized message to the educators was to put their students first and foremost. Don't be afraid to shake things up at school, no matter who might put up a fuss about it, he said.

"I challenge you and give you this homework; whatever role you play, think about the children you serve," he said. "What are we going to do to create a learning environment so that we can be successful? You have permission to break the rules and call me later.

"We'll continue to see achievement soar if you're willing to step out and do what's right for our kids."

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Alabama insurance marketplace options to increase

The Associated Press

July 14, 2014

Phillip Rawls

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabamians looking for health insurance will likely have more choices in the second year of the insurance marketplace.

United Healthcare has filed plans with state and federal regulators to offer coverage in all 67 counties during the second year of the program, state Insurance Department spokesman Mark Flower said Monday.

United Healthcare took a wait-and-see approach during the first year and did not offer individual plans in any county.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama spokeswoman Koko Mackin said it again intends to offer individual plans in all 67 of the state's counties. She said no major changes are planned from what the Birmingham-based company offered in the first year.

Humana spokesman Mitch Lubitz said the company has applied to continue offering plans in the three counties it serves now: Jefferson, Shelby and Madison.

"That is where Humana has a solid business presence and provider network in Alabama," he said Monday.

Fowler said the state Insurance Department reviews the plans to make sure they comply with state regulations, but the final approval is up to federal regulators.

Blue Cross dominates the health insurance business in Alabama, with about a 90 percent market share. United Healthcare is second with about 5 percent.

According to the federal government, 98,870 Alabamians selected a plan during the first year of the exchange. That exceeded the government's goal of 82,000.

Open enrollment for the second year of the marketplace begins Nov. 15 and ends Feb. 15. Coverage can start as early as Jan. 1.

Alabama's health insurance marketplace was set up by the federal government because Alabama officials chose not to create a state-run exchange under the federal health care law.

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Airbus CEO: Alabama was the most business-friendly state we could find

Yellowhammer News

July 14, 2014

MOBILE, Ala. – Construction work on the Airbus Alabama passenger jet production facility is moving forward on schedule, with the steel skeleton of a logistics center soon to rise near the assembly hangar already standing at the Mobile Aeroplex at Brookley site.

Two of the project's chief figures – Airbus Group Inc. Chairman and Chief Executive Allan McArtor and Hoar Program Management President Mike Lanier, who is overseeing the work – said the \$600 million A320 Family Assembly Line will be ready for production to begin in Alabama during summer 2015.

With the sprawling assembly hangar as a backdrop, the men recently discussed how the construction work is unfolding at Mobile Aeroplex, which was selected as the home for Airbus' first U.S. assembly facility two years ago.

McArtor also discussed job-training initiatives that will help Airbus assemble its 1,000-strong workforce and outlined reasons the global aviation giant selected Alabama for this key project.

Allan McArtor, CEO of Airbus Americas (Right), and Mike Lanier, President of Hoar Program Management (Left), discuss the progress of Mobile, Alabama's Airbus A320 Family Assembly Line.

Allan McArtor, CEO of Airbus Americas (Right), and Mike Lanier, President of Hoar Program Management (Left), discuss the progress of Mobile, Alabama's Airbus A320 Family Assembly Line.

Q: Give us a progress report on the Assembly Line construction project. Is it moving forward along the timeframe that you previously stated?

McARTOR: From the Airbus perspective, the Assembly Line project is right on time, right on schedule, right on budget, and we could not be more pleased with the performance of our contractors and Hoar Program Management.

LANIER: We set out on a timeline over a year and a half ago and things are coming together just like we expected them to.

Q: Is everything still on track with the first customer delivery in 2016?

McARTOR: Airbus committed to delivering to our first customer in April 2016. JetBlue plans to accept the first airplane out of here, and we are right on track to do that. We expect to be ready to begin assembling airplanes about this time next year, in the early summer of 2015 and deliver that first airplane in 2016.

Q: Allan, can you comment on why Airbus selected Alabama and how that partnership is developing?

McARTOR: Airbus was looking to fill out its global strategy of industrial presence in Europe, China and the United States. We were looking for an industrial home, and we looked at states all over the United States and around the coastal community. We wanted an airport, we wanted lots of real estate, and we wanted a deep-water port. So when we narrowed it down to the finalists, Alabama to us was the most business-friendly state we could find.

We found in Alabama a willingness to work with us, a willingness to train our employees, proven history with the automobile industry and the aerospace industry that was already in Alabama, and a state and local government that was going to be our partner.

The other good decision we made was picking our construction partner in Hoar Program Management. We could not have picked a more professional and more personable group with whom to work.

Q: Airbus has made initial hires and sent some of them to Germany for training. What's next for them and the other employees?

McARTOR: We have made several initial hires and they are now in Hamburg, Germany, going through on-the-job training. They will be there for several months and then they come back and they get familiar with this facility. By that time we'll be operational, so they can get used to the jigs and tools and equipment and this Assembly Line, which will be the most efficient one we have in all the Airbus facilities. And then, it'll be their job to help train additional employees, so we are pretty excited about it.

Q: Mike, what's it like for your firm to be at the center of a project that's considered so important to the future of Alabama?

LANIER: It's been really exciting to be a part of this huge project. Airbus created such a buzz when they announced in July 2012 that they were coming. I tell people it's like being married to a super model — everybody wants to know what it's like working with a big global firm like this. But seriously it's a great honor for all of our teammates to be a part of this, and the contractors we brought on board.

We've got a very, very high percentage of Alabama firms involved in the project, which was a goal that Airbus wanted us to achieve, and we've been able to do that. We take great pride in employing as many Alabama firms as we have.

Q: From a construction standpoint what's the most interesting aspect of this project?

LANIER: We have learned how airplanes are built, how an Assembly Line building like this functions. To support our customers, we had to learn how they build airplanes — not down to the minute details but how the big pieces all come together in this building for a complete aircraft to roll out the other end.

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Ala. group works to spare historic sites from sale

The Associated Press

July 14, 2014

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Alabama Historical Commission officials say they're working to save some of the state's historic sites from being sold despite an audit outlining the possible sale of some landmarks.

Commission Director Frank White told Al.com on Monday (<http://bit.ly/1rbxWZV>) that a five-year plan to cut costs and boost revenue are expected to help the organization stave off sales of popular historical properties. If sales do become necessary White says Fort Morgan, Old Cahawba and the state Capitol building won't be among the sites being considered.

A recent state audit indicated the commission could carry a negative cash balance in fiscal year 2015. The commission owns 13 historical properties that are open to the public and has faced budget cuts since 2008.

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Experts: Alabama farmers can capitalize on world food demand

Times Daily

July 14, 2014

Mary Sell

MONTGOMERY — The worldwide demand for food is expected to increase by at least 70 percent, if not double, by 2050, experts say.

Agriculture leaders in Alabama say they want to prepare for that demand now.

“We know Alabama will have an opportunity to play a bigger role in (food supply) nationally as well as globally, so we want to do some planning to hopefully help our growers and producers (get) in a position to capitalize on that,” state Agriculture Commissioner John McMillan said this morning at a day-long strategic planning conference at the Capitol.

Agriculture and forestry are the state’s largest industry, but there’s room for growth, McMillan said. It will require more advanced farming technology and methods.

“We’re going to have to be able to produce more on the same acreage,” McMillan said. “Irrigation is a perfect example ... Alabama is way behind other states, and particularly our sister states, with the amount of irrigation we have. (Irrigation) can triple and quadruple production on a per acres basis, especially in a dry year.”

In 2012, lawmakers approved a one-time tax credit to reimburse farmers 20 percent, up to \$10,000, for installing an irrigation system, including digging a well or building a reservoir to capture water during rainy winters and springs.

Karis Gutter, deputy undersecretary for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farm and Foreign Agriculture Services, said today that the world’s population is expected to grow by about 30 percent by 2050 to more than 9 billion people.

A rapidly increasing middle class in places like India and China are also factors in the projected food demand, officials said today.

Gutter said Alabama is “primed” to help meet that demand for products such as rice, grain and cotton. The U.S. wants to gain better commercial access to some of these developing countries, and states like Alabama can help them eat.

He mentioned catfish, one of Alabama’s larger products, as having increasing demand abroad.

For more on this story, see Tuesday’s editions.

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County schools get money for food; grant will provide students with fresh fruits, vegetables

Tuscaloosa News

July 13, 2014

Jamon Smith

The Tuscaloosa County School System this month earned a \$93,571 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture that will be used to provide students at several schools with fresh fruits and vegetables.

The schools that will participate in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program this coming school year will be Holt, Maxwell, Matthews and Flatwoods elementary schools.

“We’re definitely excited about getting the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program grant from USDA,” said Kimberly Jackson, director of child nutrition for the system. “What we hope to do is expose children from those schools to different types of fruits and vegetables and to increase both fruit and vegetable consumption within those schools.

“We’re going to partner with teachers and administration to provide both fruits/vegetables and classroom activities to reinforce the fruit or vegetable that is being featured that week.”

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program was created in 2002. The program provides free fruits and vegetables to elementary school students to combat childhood obesity, foster healthier eating habits and introduce them to a variety of produce that they may not typically have the opportunity to eat.

The program is targeted at elementary schools with the highest percentages of students who receive free and reduced price lunches.

The grant money will be used to purchase fruits and vegetables that will be served to students for free during the school day outside of breakfast and lunch.

According to the county schools grant application, system officials plan to distribute the fruits and vegetables to students three times a week.

Some of the produce they plan to serve are snow peas, turnip roots, fennel, jicama, asparagus, Asian pears, dates, papaya, star fruit and sugar cane.

Students will be served the produce at a centralized kiosk in a hallway at their schools. They can eat the snacks in their classrooms or during recess.

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Rep. Barry Moore asks judge to put case on hold while he appeals to higher court

The Associated Press

July 14, 2014

OPELIKA, Alabama — An Alabama legislator indicted in a government corruption investigation is asking a Lee County judge to put his case on hold while he appeals to a higher court.

Republican Rep. Barry Moore of Enterprise has requested that Circuit Judge Jacob Walker III stay the proceedings while Moore seeks a review of his case by the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals.

Moore is turning to the appeals court because Walker rejected Moore's challenge to the indictment against him and the attorney general's appointment of retired St. Clair County District Attorney Van Davis to handle the grand jury that returned the indictment.

Moore was arrested in April on charges of perjury and giving false statements to law enforcement. He has pleaded not guilty. He won his primary election in June.

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White House says immigrant children facing danger will stay in US, Alabama lawmaker fights for quicker deportations

Al.com

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Leada Gore

Rep. Mo Brooks addresses the crowd at Monday's Chamber of Commerce of Huntsville and Madison County Washington update. (Contributed photo/Patricia McCarter)

Immigrant children who face mortal danger in their home countries will likely be allowed to stay in the U.S., the White House said Monday.

More than 50,000 unaccompanied minors - mostly from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras - have crossed the country's southwestern border since October. The White House is seeking \$3.7 billion to care for the children and beef up border security.

The children are currently being held at four U.S. military bases at a cost about \$262 a day, per child.

Obama administration officials earlier said most of the children arriving in the U.S. from other countries will be deported.

"Based on what we know about these cases, it is unlikely that most of these kids will qualify for humanitarian relief," White House spokesperson Josh Earnest said last week. "It means that they will not have a legal basis for remaining in this country and will be returned."

In a press conference today reported by The Hill, Earnest said the children's claims will go through the immigration process and their fates will be determined by an immigration judge and asylum officials.

"What that means is it means that if an immigration judge determines that they face a credible threat of death upon their return to their home country, then, again, I'm not an immigration judge, but it is likely that the immigration judge will find that that person should be granted humanitarian relief," he said.

Earnest's comments come as Republican lawmakers are pushing to change a 2008 law that allows children from Central American countries to be treated the same as young immigrants from Mexico and Canada, who aren't entitled to an automatic hearing.

Alabama Rep. Mo Brooks, R-Huntsville, is among the co-sponsors of a bill, the Expedited Family Reunification Act, which would allow for the quicker deportation of people who cross the border into the U.S. The bill, introduced by Rep. Matt Salmon, R-Az., makes exceptions for children who are victims of slavery or sex trafficking.

Brooks said the legislation would amend the 2008 measure to speed up the process and lower costs associated with housing the children.

"Of the president's recently requested \$3.7 billion from American taxpayers to address the current immigration crisis, \$1.8 billion of the borrowed funds would go to house and care for these children while they wait years for their deportation hearings," Brooks said. "This legislation would give immigration agents the ability to quickly and humanely return these children to their families without the need for lengthy deportation proceedings.

"Immediate deportation of illegal alien children is much less expensive," Brooks added.

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Huntsville attorney Richard Raleigh named president of the Alabama State Bar

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Brian Lawson

HUNTSVILLE, Alabama -- Huntsville attorney Richard Raleigh was sworn in Saturday as the new president of the Alabama State Bar.

Raleigh is a managing shareholder with the firm Wilmer & Lee.

"It is a distinct honor to serve as the next president of the Alabama State Bar, and I'm looking forward to continuing the good work that has already been enacted by leadership before me," Raleigh said in a news release.

Raleigh is the 138th president of the 17,600 member organization.

During Saturday's ceremony, Lee Copeland of Copeland, Franco, Screws & Gill in Montgomery was installed as the bar's president-elect. Copeland will serve one year in that role before assuming the presidency in July 2015.

A native of Griffin, Ga., Raleigh's practice focuses on litigation, including "employment litigation, government contract litigation, trade secret litigation and general corporate litigation."

He is a 1992 graduate of the University of Alabama and he graduated from the University of Alabama School of Law in 1995.

Raleigh is a Distinguished Military Graduate and U.S. Army ROTC Scholarship Graduate at The University of Alabama, and entered the United States Army Judge Advocate General's Corps where he served in Germany, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia.

In 2000, Raleigh returned to Alabama to join Wilmer & Lee P.A., which represents business, government and individuals throughout Alabama and the Southeast.

Raleigh began his service with the bar in 2004 as a member of the Board of Bar Commissioners for the 23rd judicial circuit and has held a number of leadership positions within the organization. In addition to his nine years as a bar commissioner, he has also served on the Mandatory Continuing Legal Education Commission, Disciplinary Panels, Executive Council and various committees and task forces within the bar.

Raleigh and his wife, Shannon, live in Huntsville with their twin six-year-olds, Sarah Medders and Tripp.

Raleigh is a graduate of the Alabama State Bar Leadership Forum, serves on the Council of the Alabama Law Institute, is a Fellow of the Alabama Law Foundation and received the President's Award for Meritorious Service to the Alabama State Bar for his work with the Volunteer Lawyers Program.

He has worked with several organizations in his local community including the Huntsville-Madison County Bar Association, Downtown Rotary Club, National Children's Advocacy Center, Downtown Forty-Seven, Boys & Girls Club of America and the Old Town Historic District Association.

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Israel and Hamas Consider Egyptian Proposal for a Cease-Fire in Air Attacks

New York Times

July 14, 2014

Isabel Kershner

JERUSALEM — Israel and its main militant Gaza adversary weighed an Egyptian cease-fire proposal late Monday, signaling a possible de-escalation of a week-old aerial battle that has left nearly 200 Palestinians dead from Israeli bombs and has sent hundreds of Gaza rockets deep into Israeli territory.

A senior government official in Israel, which has been preparing for the possibility of a ground invasion of Gaza, said it was seriously considering the Egyptian proposal. The initial reaction of Hamas, the dominant militant group in Gaza, was less committal, but was not an outright rejection.

An Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Ambassador Badr Abdelatty, said: “We hope it will be acknowledged. We are in close contact with everyone.”

Adding weight to the efforts, Secretary of State John Kerry was expected in Cairo as early as Tuesday, according to officials in the region and the Egyptian state news agency.

The senior Israeli official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the delicate diplomacy, said a meeting of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s security cabinet had been called for early Tuesday morning to discuss the proposal and that it was “being considered very seriously.”

Hamas, which had said it was prepared to fire rockets indefinitely, appeared to want better terms. Sami Abu Zuhri, a Hamas official in Gaza, wrote on his Facebook page: “The responses of resistance will continue until the demands of our people are achieved. Any unilateral Israeli cessation has no value in the light of the large crimes and the disastrous humanitarian situation.” Osama Hamdan, a spokesman for the Islamic group, was more dismissive. He told CNN’s “The Situation Room” that Hamas did not receive the proposal directly from the Egyptians. That, he said, meant it was “an initiative for the media — it’s not a political initiative.”

One of Hamas’s demands has been the opening of the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt, but the Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesman said the proposal refers only to crossings “between Israel and Gaza.”

Here are approximate locations of 19 major airstrikes that resulted in deaths since Israel began its air campaign on Tuesday. The Israeli military says it has struck more than 1,100 targets since it started the operation in response to waves of rockets being fired from Gaza.

Egypt is widely considered the natural regional mediator in such conflicts. But Egypt's relations with Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, have turned bitter since the military ouster last year of Egypt's elected Islamist president, Mohamed Morsi, a leader in the Brotherhood. Under the new president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, a former general who led the military takeover, Egypt has shut down most of the tunnels beneath its border with Gaza that were both an economic lifeline for the Palestinian coastal enclave as well as a major channel for weapons smuggling.

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Tony Blair, the special envoy of the quartet of Middle East peacemakers, which included the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia, welcomed the Egyptian proposal in a statement. He said: "The hope is that this cease-fire will allow us to put in place such a long-term strategy for the future in Gaza and the West Bank. The international community will give its full backing to such an initiative."

International entreaties for a cease-fire intensified in recent days amid growing alarm over the rising death toll in Gaza, but there was no letup in the hostilities on Monday. At least 14 Palestinians were killed on the seventh day of Israel's air offensive aimed at quelling the rocket fire, bringing the total death toll in Gaza to about 180, many of them civilians. An airstrike on a house in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip killed a girl, 4, her father and her uncle, according to Gaza health officials.

Pierre Krähenbühl, the commissioner general of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in Gaza, which assists Palestinian refugees, said in a news briefing that he was "deeply alarmed and affected by the escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip and the devastating human and physical toll it is taking on civilians, including Palestine refugees."

According to a statement issued by his office, Mr. Krähenbühl called on the Israeli Army to "put an end to attacks against, or endangering, civilians and civilian infrastructure, which are contrary to international humanitarian law." He also called for an end to rocket fire from Gaza aimed at Israel, which the United Nations has described as indiscriminate.

In a telephone interview, the commander of Israel's 107th Squadron, which is engaged in Gaza using F-16 fighters, said the air force was working methodically according to "a clear policy of minimum harm to civilians," but that everybody knew Gaza, a densely populated sliver of land, was not a "sterile area." Under military rules governing the interview, the squadron commander could not be identified by name.

Hamas has fired about 1,000 rockets at Israel over the last week, hitting new targets as far north as Hadera, about 60 miles from Gaza, and keeping millions of Israelis on alert and running for shelter at the wail of the sirens. On Monday one rocket struck a Bedouin village in the Negev desert and injured two sisters ages 15 and 10, one of them severely, according to the Israeli police.

Egypt helped broker the last cease-fire between Israel and Hamas that ended eight days of fierce cross-border fighting in November 2012, but the quiet lasted only about 19 months.

Israel has said that this time it wanted to achieve quiet for a long period of time, whether through military means or diplomacy, and ministers had called for Hamas to be stripped of its weapons. With Israeli forces massed along the Gaza border prepared for a ground invasion, some right-wing politicians criticized the cease-fire contacts, complaining that Israel had not finished the job.

Israeli officials have said that Hamas was looking for some kind of an achievement, a “victory image,” before giving up the fight. That may have come on Monday when it flew an unmanned aircraft from Gaza into Israel, apparently for the first time.

The Israeli military intercepted the drone, blowing it apart in midair just offshore from the Israeli port city of Ashdod with a Patriot surface-to-air missile, the military said.

The military wing of Hamas claimed on its website that it had sent “a number of drones” flying into Israel on “special missions,” saying that the aircraft were one of the “surprises” it had promised over the last week. It was not immediately clear whether the drone, intercepted about 14 miles north of the Gaza Strip, was carrying explosives or surveillance equipment.

“It was shot to smithereens,” said Lt. Col. Peter Lerner, an army spokesman.