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Wednesday, July 2, 2014

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FULL TEXT

Alabama teachers' group loses main funding source

The Associated Press

July 1, 2014

Phillip Rawls

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — The future for one the largest and best financed organizations in the state, the Alabama Education Association, is uncertain now that its main funding source ended.

The group can no longer use payroll deduction to collect dues from its 95,000 members. Spokeswoman Amy Marlowe said most of the teachers, school support workers and administrators who are association members have used payroll deductions, but the organization has been busy getting them to sign up for bank drafts.

The group hasn't released how many have signed up, but Marlowe said, "It's our new way of life."

The payroll deductions for political organizations got prohibited by a state law that Republicans passed just a month after they took control of the Legislature in November 2010. Its enforcement was delayed until this week because of a legal challenge filed by the association.

"The law was absolutely targeted at AEA," Marlowe said.

The sponsor of the law, Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, said payroll deductions are almost out of sight and out of mind. With bank drafts, members will see the payment each month on their bank statements and may look more closely at what the teachers association is doing, he said.

"That's the biggest challenge AEA has. They are a liberal organization that supports other liberal organizations, and many of their members are not," Marsh said.

Marsh was one of several senators who supported the law and beat AEA-funded opponents in the Republican primary June 3. Association-supported candidates did beat five incumbent House members.

That election showed the financial influence of AEA with payroll deduction. It reported spending nearly \$7 million. In contrast, another large, influential group, the Business Council of Alabama, reported spending \$1.5 million.

Jess Brown, a political science professor at Athens State University, said the education association doesn't have the close personal relationship with its members that it had in the past, and the law will cause it to take a hit in membership, although it's too early to say how many.

"AEA will remain an influential player on Goat Hill, but the old gray mare ain't what she used to be," said Brown, who has been a member in the past.

Byrdie Larkin, a political science professor at Alabama State University, said ordinary citizens don't monitor the Alabama Legislature. She said the Republican-backed law won't weaken the association if its members believe it is doing a good job monitoring the Legislature and representing members' views at the Statehouse.

"When they have a strong history like the AEA, I don't think the Republican Party will be successful," said Larkin, who is a member of the American Federation of Teachers.

When Democrats controlled the Legislature, they passed a law that allowed members of public employee groups to have their dues and contributions to the groups' political action committees deducted from their paychecks. The 2010 law sponsored by Marsh ended that for any group that used the deductions for political activity. AEA challenged it in federal court and got a judge to block enforcement of the law until recently.

In a separate case filed in state court, a Shelby County judge ordered school systems to end payroll deductions to any PAC or membership organization unless those organizations certified by Monday that they were in compliance with the law and no longer involved in political activity. Marlowe said AEA couldn't have done that and still represented its members' interests.

"We are about the only voice of dissension left in town," she said.

A supporter of the 2010 law, Republican House Speaker Mike Hubbard of Auburn, said payroll deductions gave the association an unfair advantage over other lobbying groups that have to get members to write checks for dues.

"The end of AEA's payroll deduction is a win for Alabama taxpayers. It is simply unfair that Alabamians were spending their hard earned tax dollars to help advance any labor union's political agenda," he said.

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New Auburn University aviation center to focus on program, industry, economy

Opelika-Auburn News

July 1, 2014

Kristen Oliver

Auburn announced Tuesday plans for a new aviation center that will serve as a hub for instruction, research and outreach for the aviation and aerospace industries in Alabama, according to a release from the university.

Hutto, the new center director, said the center will help expand and create a multi-disciplinary approach to aviation and aviation education.

"The overall purpose of this center is to create new, expanded and enhanced opportunities for our students, and also to assist the state's efforts in recruiting, retaining and renewal of aviation and aerospace industries in the state of Alabama," Hutto said.

The center aims to promote economic development, Hutto said, and work with state and industry leaders to strengthen the two aviation programs at Auburn's Harbert College of Business, aviation management and professional flight management.

The university currently has an agreement with JetBlue Airways University Gateway program, a career-planning and aviation mentoring program for eligible students. Hutto said agreements

such as the one with JetBlue are the sort of initiatives and programs the center is designed to create.

Hutto said a steering committee was established to provide guidance for the center. It is comprised of university and industry leaders.

“We’re happy to announce Seth Hammett, who is currently serving as chief of staff for Governor Bentley, a former speaker of the house, well-known economic developer in the state of Alabama, former flight instructor here at Auburn and Auburn graduate, is going to be joining us,” Hutto said.

Joining Hammett on the committee will be official John McGraw, chair of the Auburn Aviation Management Advisory Board. Hutto said they are excited to have industry experts aiding the center’s implementation.

The center will be housed at the Auburn University Regional Airport and will oversee the university’s flight school. Hutto said it is their hope that students will be given more opportunities to learn from industry trends and to interact with potential employers.

“Auburn will support state leaders in recruiting new aviation and aerospace industry, retaining industry already in Alabama and renewing industry through research and innovation,” Hammett said in the university release.

Auburn has taught flight and aviation education since the early 1940s. The programs were under intense scrutiny from industry leaders and program alumni in 2013 when the university announced its intention to sunset the aviation management program. It has since announced its full support of both programs.

“This announcement today through the provost’s office is just a continuation of that strong tradition that will help grow and nurture the programs we have here at Auburn,” Hutto said.

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Team USA FIFA cows - udderly patriotic

Al.com

July 1, 2014

Bob Gathany

MONROVIA, ALabama - State Rep. Phil Williams and his wife Lisa wanted happy, no maintenance cows with personality, not the kind you have to get up at 4 a.m. to feed or milk. Since moving into their home on Old Monrovia Road people kept asking when they were going to get cows for their pasture. Last October they found their ceramic herd and had them shipped from Texas.

At first the happy cows became Breast Cancer Awareness cows. Since then they have been Thanksgiving cows, Christmas cows, New Years cows, St. Patrick's Day cows, Spring cows and Panoply cows.

With Team USA playing in the FIFA World Cup and the Fourth of July, the Williams decided on a two-for to celebrate both events with their happy all-American beef cows.

"It's a lot of fun to bring cheer to people driving by our house. And...it gives us a way of showing our American Spirit," Lisa said.

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Gov. Robert Bentley appoints members to new Alabama Workforce Council

Al.com

July 1, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- An Alabama Power Company executive will chair a new panel intended to help schools and colleges better prepare students for jobs in business and industry.

Gov. Robert Bentley named 28 people to the Alabama Workforce Council, which will be chaired by Zeke Smith, executive vice president of external affairs for Alabama Power.

The council will advise and support the state Board of Education, two-year colleges and four-year colleges and universities.

"Preparing Alabama workers for high-wage, high-demand jobs is our number one priority," Bentley said in a statement.

Smith said communication between industry and educators is important.

"I am optimistic the council will make a difference helping our educational leaders develop a robust workforce that can step right in and fill the needs of industry and business," Smith said.

The creation of the Workforce Council is one of the recommendations of the Governor's College and Career Ready Task Force, which was formed last year.

The council's other recommendations included streamlining workforce development functions, teaching students about job needs in business and industry, identifying unmet needs such as specialty skills in specific areas, and others.

The Workforce Council is scheduled to hold its first meeting July 21 in Montgomery.

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Roby seeks records related to VA complaints

Montgomery Advertiser
July 2, 2014
Kala Kachmar

U.S. Rep. Martha Roby has made a request to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for records that she says might shed light on allegations of neglect and mismanagement at the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System.

Roby, R-Montgomery, sent a letter to Sloan Gibson, acting secretary of Veterans Affairs, on Tuesday outlining the details of about 15 requests for documents, including employment records, contracts, policies, administrative reports, death investigations and settlement payments from lawsuits relating to medical care at local facilities.

Roby's office said the requests are directly related to communication she has had with patients, family members of patients, doctors and others who have come forward with information since a government investigation revealed reports about fraudulent attempts to hide appointment backlogs, falsified patient records and long wait times for veterans seeking medical care.

"The claims made are pretty alarming," said Todd Stacy, a spokesman for Roby. "And she wants to get to the bottom of it."

Stacy, who said Roby's office has been inundated with complaints for the past month or so, said the ultimate goal is to get care quickly, efficiently and up to the standard that veterans deserve.

"That's going to mean fundamental reforms throughout the VA, but specific to central Alabama. There are problems within CAVHCS that deserve some scrutiny," Stacy said.

Roby's requests primarily focus on data from 2011 to 2013, and include lists of contracted physicians, the number of patients each VA primary care provider has seen, a list of all surgeries conducted in that time period, the number of patients referred to local hospitals for X-rays and other data related to patient care.

There's also a request for descriptions of all investigations and inquiries conducted by the VA's inspector general regarding deaths in facilities from 2009 to 2013.

Stacy said Roby has not sought the information locally because of "trust issues" with the leadership of the central Alabama VA. In Roby's letter, she said the VA — both locally and nationally — has a reputation for being evasive, a reputation she said she has witnessed personally with the central Alabama VA.

Last month, Roby said she was misled by James Talton, the system's director, who told her VA employees had been fired for falsifying appointment records. Talton later said there had been a misunderstanding and that the employees were reassigned but not terminated, according to Roby.

"If a member of Congress cannot get straight answers from the VA, imagine what veterans and their families go through every day in trying to get assistance," Roby wrote in the letter. "I sincerely hope this reputation can be reversed."

Talton could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

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Congressman Byrne blasts Obama's intention to use executive orders to reform immigration

Al.com

July 1, 2014

Brendan Kirby

U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne on Tuesday blasted President Barack Obama's announcement that he would use his executive powers to bypass Congress on immigration reform.

"President Obama just doesn't seem to get it. Our founders clearly reserved the power to establish immigration laws to Congress, not the president," Byrne said in a prepared statement. "I am not even convinced the president actually wants immigration reform, but rather an issue to use on the campaign trail."

Obama on Monday offered no specifics but announced that he would issue executive orders by the end of the summer to change U.S. immigration law. For months, reform advocates have hoped Republicans who control the House of Representatives would agree to provide a path to citizenship for foreigners who entered the country without permission. But House leaders have made it clear that they will not bring the issue before the House this year.

"The failure of House Republicans to pass a darn bill is bad for our security, bad for our economy, and it's bad for our future," Obama said. "Drop the excuses."

But Byrne, R-Fairhope, suggested that Obama improperly is usurping the role of Congress.

"If President Obama was serious, he would start by enforcing the laws currently in place and work to build trust with those of us in the House," Byrne stated. "The president's refusal to enforce current law and unilateral actions to the contrary, make any discussion about reform nearly impossible"

Byrne indicated that the president cannot unilaterally change the law simply because he disagrees with it.

"If unilateral action was possible, don't you think House Republicans would have repealed ObamacCare, replaced the harmful sequestration defense cuts, and halted the Environmental Protection Agency's war on coal?" he stated. "But that is not how our government works. Our nation was founded on clearly defined powers outlined in the Constitution, and I will continue to stand up against efforts which erode that separation of powers."

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Anniston FEMA facility will be used to house young illegal immigrants, Rep. Mike Rogers says plan 'misguided'

Al.com

July 1, 2014

Leada Gore

The White House's plan to use a Federal Emergency Management facility in Anniston to house some of the minor children flooding across the U.S. border is being met with harsh criticism from Alabama lawmaker Rep. Mike Rogers.

Rogers, R-Saks, said he was informed in an email today of the plan to house children at FEMA's Center for Domestic Preparedness. He responded with a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell and Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson.

Rogers said the plan was "misguided and misinformed" and that the CDP, which provides emergency preparedness training for first responders, was not designed as a housing facility.

In recent weeks, the federal government has scrambled to care for waves of unaccompanied children and young people crossing into the U.S. Fort Sill, Oklahoma is being used to house as many as 1,200 such children and similar shelters are already open at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas and Naval Base Ventura County in Southern California.

It is not known how many children would be housed at the Anniston facility.

Rogers said CDP should not be used to house any number of children.

"The CDP is a world class first responder training facility; however, it was in no way built to house immigration detainees, much less children," Rogers said. "CDP is over 900 miles from the Rio Grande Valley where many of these border crossings occur, and transporting illegal immigrants so far away from the border and their home countries would seem to make this crisis worse.

The CDP is a world class first responder training facility; however, it was in no way built to house immigration detainees, much less children.

"It seems implausible that there is not a temporary facility within 900 miles of our southwestern border capable of housing these individuals without the disruption that I am concerned this transfer would cause to CDP operations."

In addition to the military bases, Health and Human Service is reportedly planning to turn a 55,000 square-foot warehouse in south Texas into a processing center. U.S. law requires children be transferred to the custody of the Health and Human Services Department within 72 hours of their arrest.

So far this year, more than 52,000 unaccompanied minors have been arrested for entering the U.S. illegally.

Rogers said he believes many of the minor children are coming to the U.S. under the false belief they will be granted legal status, something he said was fostered by the Obama administration.

Such an influx, he said "could put deep and challenging stresses on the local community's health system."

Last week, Rogers questioned Johnson during House Homeland Security Committee hearings.

"Right now, we have a crisis and I don't see the Administration doing anything about it – other than trying to house the children. I understand the humanitarian basis for that, but we need to send a signal to these other countries that it's not going to work. You can't send your children up here and let them stay," Rogers said during the hearing.

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Obama 'emasculating' United States in eyes of the world, U.S. Rep. Mo Brooks says

Al.com

July 1, 2014

Paul Gattis

HUNTSVILLE, Alabama – In a 17-minute rant Tuesday against President Obama, U.S. Rep. Mo Brooks said the president's policies were stripping the U.S. of its authority both domestically and across the world.

"The gentleman in the White House is emasculating the United States of America," Brooks said in a speech to the Republican Women of Huntsville at The Ledges. "He is undermining the credibility of the White House not only in the United States of America but also across the world."

Mark McCarter: It's the White House and the media -- and their partnership -- that are ruining America, Mo Brooks says

Brooks, R-Huntsville, focused the entirety of his speech on Obama's policies and practices – criticizing the president on a wide array of issues such as health care and the IRS investigation into citizens with apparent affiliation with the Tea Party.

He also touched on Obama's use of executive orders and promised the U.S. House of Representatives would take a lawsuit against the president "all the way to the United States Supreme Court" for what GOP leaders have described as overstepping his boundaries.

At one point, Brooks quoted the presidential oath of office and pulled out a copy of the U.S. Constitution and asked his audience if they believed Obama was following the law or enforcing the law. Then Brooks noted that no one raised their hand.

Primarily, though, Brooks hammered Obama on immigration and said Democrats are allowing unauthorized aliens into the country and pushing for their amnesty in an effort to "manipulate" elections.

The gentleman in the White House is emasculating the United States of America.

"Let's be clear: Barack Obama and his Democratic pals definition of border security problems is whether they have enough taxpayer money to pay for the welcome mats and Happy Meals they give illegal aliens to come to our nation," Brooks said in a speech frequently interrupted with applause.

"To the Democrats and Barack Obama, these illegal immigrants are nothing more than an insidious Democratic Party voter registration project that will help them manipulate future elections to the detriment of Americans who have been here and worked here. They want to dilute the voting power of Americans."

He also described the impact unauthorized aliens are having on the economy. Brooks cited a Pew Hispanic Studies report that found there were 8 million unauthorized aliens in the U.S. workforce in 2010.

Brooks said there are "serious economic consequences" with unauthorized aliens working in the U.S.

"That's 8 million lost job opportunities for American citizens," Brooks said.

He also referred to Center for Immigration Studies that found all employment gains in the U.S. since 2000 have been filled by immigrants.

"That's an astonishing number," Brooks said. "That's hard facts from the United States government. That's the danger of the open borders policy of this administration. It's not just how they are trying to skew elections by giving amnesty to people they think will be dependent on the American government to vote for them.

"It's also the destructive effect it's having on American families struggling to make ends meet. They can't find jobs and when they do find jobs, they discover their wages are suppressed and it's very, very difficult to make ends meet."

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Raytheon shows off Huntsville operations to Business Council of Alabama's manufacturing committee

Al.com

July 1, 2014

Leada Gore

HUNTSVILLE, Alabama -- The important role manufacturing plays in the Alabama economy was highlighted last week as a Business Council of Alabama committee visited one of Huntsville's major defense companies.

Raytheon hosted the gathering of BCA's manufacturing advocacy council, which includes representatives from throughout the state. The group heard economic updates from Fred McCallum, president of AT&T Alabama; Alabama Senate Pro Tem Del Marsh; Chad Moutray, chief economist with the National Association of Manufacturers; and Dr. Joe Morton, president of the Business Education Alliance of Alabama.

The group also toured Raytheon's missile integration facility on Redstone Arsenal and received an update from Randy Stevenson, Weapon Integration Center Director for Raytheon Missile Systems. In addition to engineering operations, Raytheon produces the Standard Missile-3 and SM-6 in North Alabama.

BCA's visit gave Raytheon a chance to showcase the work being done in Huntsville, Stevenson said.

Alabama is leading the way when it comes to business.

"We're here to perform a job and we're here to create jobs," Stevenson said. "It's always good to give the opportunity for others to see that."

In turn, it then falls on BCA to help promote efforts for Alabama's economic growth, according to William Canary, president and CEO of the BCA.

"Alabama is leading the way when it comes to business," said Canary, citing recent examples such as Remington's announcement it was relocating major operations to the state. "It's important to get the message out across the country."

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What grade did Alabama make in small business friendliness? See full statewide report card

Al.com

July 1, 2014

Lucy Berry

A study released today by California-based Thumbtack shows Alabama's small business friendliness dipped from an A+ in 2013 to a B- this year.

In partnership with the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation in Kansas City, Thumbtack surveyed more than 12,000 U.S. small business owners to determine the ranking.

"After a two-month survey of thousands of small business owners nationwide, we've been able to hear directly from Alabama's small business community about how they view the state," said Jon Lieber, chief economist of Thumbtack. "Creating a business climate that is welcoming to small,

dynamic businesses is more important than ever, and Alabama has some work to do to make this happen."

Alabama, which received an A- in small business friendliness in 2012, was one of the worst states in the U.S. for hiring new workers, according to the report. Small business owners also gave Alabama's training and networking programs an F.

The survey showed Alabama's employment, labor and hiring regulations received an A-, while the state was fifth in the nation in business owners being prepared for the controversial Affordable Care Act.

"Alabama small businesses were the most pessimistic in the nation about the state of the national economy," the report said.

Utah, Idaho, Texas, Virginia and Louisiana were the top-rated states for small business friendliness. Rhode Island, Illinois, California, Connecticut and New Jersey were the lowest-rated.

Here is Alabama's complete 2014 report card:

Overall friendliness = B+
Ease of starting a business = C-
Ease of hiring = D
Regulations = C+
Health and safety = C+
Employment, labor and hiring = A-
Tax code = C+
Licensing = C
Environmental = C-
Zoning = B+
Training and networking programs = F

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Sessions calls for cautious approach to environmental regulatory changes

Tuscaloosa News

July 1, 2014

Ed Enoch

U.S. Senator Jeff Sessions, left, is given a tour of Westervelt Lumber by Joe Patton, vice president of wood products. Sessions took a tour of the Westervelt Lumber company in Moundville Alabama on Tuesday morning July 1, 2014. staff photo | Robert Sutton

U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions on Tuesday called for a cautious approach to any environmental regulatory changes that might drive up the country's energy costs during brief comments at a stop at a Moundville timber mill.

“We’ve got to be careful we don’t harm the American economy,” Sessions said.

Sessions toured the Westervelt Co. facility in Moundville Tuesday morning as part of series of stops in the state to discuss jobs and the economy with local officials and meet constituents. Sessions was also scheduled to make stops in Butler and Crenshaw counties in the southern part of Alabama.

The senator praised timber as a renewable resource and said the industry has been positive for the environment and southwest Alabama.

“This timber industry is critical in Alabama,” he said.

Addressing staff in the facility’s training center, Sessions offered brief comments on the debate about coal-based power and efforts to cut carbon emissions.

The Mobile Republican said the country should avoid regulatory changes that would drive up energy costs unnecessarily as the country tries to compete in a global economy. Sessions also said that science has yet to bear out some of the extreme predictions about climate change.

“We are not going to be stampeded, at least I am not, on issues where the science is not there yet,” Sessions said.

Sessions called “dubious” the argument that carbon dioxide is a major pollutant.

“We are deniers, that’s what they call us,” Sessions said, drawing chuckles from the gathering of Westervelt staff.

“I don’t see we can justify all the regulations pushing down, just on CO₂,” he said.

Last month, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released its Clean Power Plan, a proposal to improve public health, move the U.S. toward a cleaner environment and fight climate change by cutting carbon pollution from existing power plants.

The proposal aims to cut carbon emissions from power plants by 30 percent nationwide, cut particle pollution by more than 25 percent, reduce premature deaths and illnesses, and reduce power bills by increasing energy efficiencies and reducing demand in the electricity system.

The proposal provides states with guidelines for developing individualized plans to meet state-specific goals to reduce carbon pollution.

“It’s not going to help us to alter our energy and close down the coal industry,” the senator said.

Sessions also offered comments on President Barack Obama’s Monday announcement he would take new executive steps on immigration reform following inaction by the Republican-controlled House on a bill passed last year.

“This is one of the worst presidential overreaches in history. He honestly said ‘I want you to pass my law,’ ” Sessions said.

Sessions, who voted against the immigration reform bill passed by the Senate last year, said he believes no change will come unless the country’s existing immigration laws are enforced.

The president also is seeking additional funding from Congress to deal with a surge of unaccompanied youth from Central America who are arriving at the country’s southwestern border.

Session called the spike over the last a predictable outcome of the administration’s policies that carry the message young people will not be deported from America.

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Artur Davis could face obstacles in run for mayor

Montgomery Advertiser

July 1, 2014

Mary Troyan

WASHINGTON – Although former Alabama congressman Artur Davis is eying a run for mayor of Montgomery and already is discussing a platform that could focus on attracting defense contractors to the River Region and creating a separate city school system, some political analysts see major obstacles.

Four years after leaving the U.S. House and losing a race for governor, Davis wants to return to public service, and he said a local, nonpartisan race in his hometown is an ideal possibility.

“I think Montgomery is at a really interesting point,” Davis said. “It is very, very close to making a breakthrough to become the biggest city in the state, and if it doesn’t have the right vision for the next decade, it is capable of falling back.”

Davis, a Democrat-turned-Republican, said he would have more to say about his plans next month.

Current Mayor Todd Strange, who won a special election in 2009 and who was re-elected in 2011, has not announced whether he plans to run in 2015.

Davis, 46, said he’s been talking for several months with people in the business and civic communities about running — well before the current controversy over leadership at the Montgomery Police Department.

“I like Mayor Strange,” Davis said. “I like him personally. He’s one of the most likable folks in politics, so if I run, it won’t be a campaign against Todd Strange. Having said that, if I run, I’ll be talking about my vision.”

Much like his first campaign for Congress 14 years ago, Davis said he would focus on education and economic development. He believes the city should explore breaking a school system away from the county.

He also wants to develop more real estate around the Hyundai plant. And he wants to grow the defense industry in the region, using Maxwell Air Force Base and Gunter Annex as a base.

“Montgomery could become the South’s next great city, but you’ve got to have the strategy to get there,” Davis said. “Getting the political, business and civic support for that strategy, that is the kind of challenge and opportunity that I have found myself drawn to over the last eight months.”

Davis would face political challenges if he decides to run for mayor in the population center of a county that is strongly Democratic.

He left Alabama in 2010 with harsh words for the state’s Democratic Party and the black political organizations that rejected him in his unsuccessful race for the Democratic nomination for governor. Davis, who was the only black member of Alabama’s congressional delegation, voted against the Affordable Care Act and angered black voters in the 7th Congressional District, where President Barack Obama and the health care law remain intensely popular.

Davis won his congressional seat in 2002 without backing from the state’s black political organizations, and he never asked for their support when he ran for governor. They endorsed his white opponent instead, and Davis went from a 30-point lead in the polls to a 24-point loss in the primary.

After campaigning for Obama in the 2008 presidential election, he switched parties and campaigned for Republican Mitt Romney in 2012, outraging his former Democratic allies. Obama beat Romney by 62 percent to 38 percent in Montgomery County in 2012.

Davis said he’s still Republican but would avoid political ideology in a bid for mayor. He said his party affiliation shouldn’t be a liability, noting that voters twice elected Strange, who was previously known as a Republican.

“The reason he was able to win two elections as mayor is he doesn’t run on a Todd Strange Republican vision for Montgomery — it’s a citywide vision for Montgomery,” Davis said. “To be a good mayor of Montgomery, you can’t be partisan. You have to represent both sides, all sides, and I would bring the same point of view.”

But two Montgomery political analysts said Davis’ chances are slim, especially if Strange runs again.

“It wouldn’t be about the fact that he’s a Republican,” D’Linell Finley, an adjunct political science professor at Alabama State University and an expert on black politics in the state, said of Davis. “I think there is a lot of distrust in the minority community. They saw him voting directly

against their interests in the past. They don't trust him and that will be a significant campaign issue."

Brad Moody, associate professor emeritus of political science at Auburn Montgomery, said Davis' treatment of the New South Coalition and the Alabama Democratic Conference in the governor's race will haunt him.

"I think he's dreaming," Moody said. "When he lost, it was sort of in the nature of a 5-year-old saying, 'I'm going to take my marbles and go home,' and he ran off to Virginia in a huff and left the Democratic Party. Montgomery is roughly evenly split between African-American voters and white voters, and I can't see any chance he gets any African-American votes."

Davis said voters who don't support him because he's a Republican are guilty of a "double standard" if they supported Strange.

Davis spent 31 of his 46 years in Montgomery, but he lived in Birmingham while he represented the 7th District from 2002 to 2010 and in Virginia for the last four years. His mother and other family members still live in Montgomery, he said.

Strange said Monday he'll decide in March or April whether he plans to run again.

"It'll depend on my family, my health, what the issues are, what's going on and how much we've accomplished," Strange said. "At some point in time, it's time to change mantels, and whether that's now or in four more years, I'll have to make that decision."

Strange said he's explored creation of a separate city school system but rejected it for financial reasons.

"You would have to raise additional revenue through taxation, and in today's environment, that just doesn't work," Strange said. "It's easy to talk about and it's great to have ideas, but as (state pension fund chief) David Bronner once told me, a good idea without money is just a good idea."

Since losing the Democratic nomination for governor to Ron Sparks in 2010, Davis finished his term in Congress and moved to northern Virginia. He worked for a law firm for about a year and then became a resident fellow at Harvard University's Institute for Politics in the spring of 2012.

He did political analysis on television, in newspapers and on his political website, which he said he took down because of costs. He also campaigned for Romney, including appearances with tea party groups and a speech at the Republican National Convention.

He joined the board of directors for Huntington Ingalls Industries in 2011, a major shipbuilder. Public records for the company show Davis was paid \$120,000 in 2013, plus almost \$100,000 in stock awards. His term is set to expire in 2016.

Davis said the northern Virginia job market for former members of Congress is mostly lobbying work, which he declines to do, and is the reason he left the law firm.

He said his decision on whether to run will depend on his wife and whether she's willing to relocate to Montgomery.

Last year, Davis decided against running for Congress in northern Virginia.

"I didn't expect to be involved in politics again at all," he said. "But where I think I can do the most good would be in public service, and the reason mayor of Montgomery came to my attention is it's my hometown, one I have an enormous identification with, and the challenges there are exactly the challenges that propelled me into politics in the first place."

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Alabama Cattlemen's Association hosting contest to name best steak in the state

Al.com

July 1, 2014

Amber Sutton

MONTGOMERY, Alabama -- The Alabama Cattlemen's Association is hosting a contest to determine who serves the most flavorful Ribeye steak in Alabama in the state. Starting today, consumers will be able to nominate the restaurant that serves their favorite Ribeye steak by visiting the contest's website. Nominations will be accepted through August 1.

Following the nomination process, the Sizzling 16 restaurants, based on online votes, will begin the bracket challenge to find the top four steak restaurants in Alabama. Once the "Fiery 4" restaurants have been determined, a team of anonymous judges will visit each restaurant to select the best Ribeye steak. Steaks will be judged based on overall taste, tenderness and juiciness.

Announcements and updates will be made during the competition and a winner will be announced at the beginning of October to kick off "Beef Month" in Alabama.

The Alabama Cattlemen's Association is a service based non-profit organization founded in 1944. Producer and member driven, the ACA's mission is to enhance the business climate of the state's beef cattle industry, promoting a positive image while educating consumers that beef is a safe, wholesome, nutritious and convenient food product.