



Speaker's Press Clips
Monday, July 22, 2014

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FULL TEXT

Alabama Workforce Council aims to match education programs with business needs

Al.com

July 21, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- State leaders in business, industry, education and government gathered today in the State Capitol for the first meeting of the Alabama Workforce Council.

The group, chaired by Zeke Smith, executive vice president of external affairs at Alabama Power, will try to improve collaboration between educators and employers so that more students can identify and take courses that fit the jobs available in business and industry.

Smith said there are shortages of people to work in skilled crafts. He said that gap will widen because more people are retiring than entering those skilled trades.

Smith said welding and pipefitting are examples of skills where there is more demand than supply. He also mentioned robotics.

Gov. Robert Bentley, who appointed the council members, said part of the challenge is to convince more students that skilled crafts lead to good career jobs that pay well.

Bentley said the council's work will benefit the state years from now.

Today's meeting was the latest part of a process Bentley started in January 2013 when he issued an executive order to create the College and Career Ready Task Force. One of the task force's recommendations was to create the Workforce Council.

The Legislature then passed a bill this year to set up the council, which has 31 members, most from the private sector.

Bentley said dual enrollment is an example of the kind of innovation that can help match students with courses that can lead to good jobs. It allows high school students to earn college credits.

The Legislature passed a bill this year to set up a \$10 million scholarship program to help more students take part in dual enrollment.

Members of the Workforce Council.

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House Speaker Mike Hubbard calls AEA's effort in GOP primary 'horrible failure'

Al.com

July 21, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- House Speaker Mike Hubbard calls the Alabama Education Association's foray into the Republican primary this year an expensive failure, although it did help take out a few GOP incumbents.

Campaign finance reports from AEA's political action committee, Alabama Voice of Teachers for Education, AVOTE, show that the PAC tried to unseat 13 Republican incumbents in legislative races in the primary and won three of those battles, all in the House of Representatives.

That third win came in the July 15 runoff, when Corey Harbison beat Rep. Mac Buttram of Cullman in House District 12.

Hubbard and former Gov. Bob Riley campaigned for Buttram, but he lost by 10 percentage points.

The other wins came in the June 3 primary, when Connie Rowe defeated Rep. Bill Roberts of Jasper in District 13, and Tim Wadsworth edged Rep. Richard Baughn of Lynn in a close race in District 14.

AVOTE's campaign finance reports show that it spent a total of about \$150,000 on behalf of Harbison, Rowe and Wadsworth.

AVOTE spent about \$170,000 on behalf of five other Republican candidates who challenged GOP incumbents in the House, according to the campaign finance reports. But those incumbents prevailed.

They were Reps. Dan Williams of Athens, Kerry Rich of Albertville, Ed Henry of Hartselle, Alan Harper of Northport and Mack Butler of Rainbow City.

Another AEA-backed candidate, Isaac Whorton of Valley, won the GOP primary in House District 38, an open seat because of the retirement of Rep. Duwayne Bridges. Whorton has no Democratic opposition.

AVOTE spent much more helping the opponents of Republican incumbents in the Senate but came up empty.

Reports show that the PAC spent a total of about \$730,000 for the opponents of Sens. Jimmy Holley of Elba, Del Marsh of Anniston, Tom Whatley of Auburn, Gerald Dial of Lineville and Paul Bussman of Cullman.

AVOTE also spent more than \$300,000 on two Republican candidates for open Senate seats -- Rep. Todd Greeson and Gayle Gear. Both lost.

Overall, Hubbard said the AEA got little for their money.

"From a 20,000-foot level, it was just a horrible failure for them," Hubbard said.

AEA Executive Secretary Henry Mabry was not available for comment.

Rep. Craig Ford, the House Minority Leader, a Democrat from Gadsden, said the AEA's efforts in the Republican primary were to protect public education, which he said the GOP-led Legislature has "abandoned."

"I think the AEA doesn't care if they're Democrats or Republicans, they just want people to support public education," Ford said.

Ford and other Democrats have sided with the AEA in numerous battles with the Republican majority, including over the Alabama Accountability Act in 2013, employee pay raises, and requirements that education employees pay more for their pensions.

Ford said he thought Buttram's loss, in spite of help from Hubbard and Riley, was an indicator that voters in local races don't care about endorsements from statewide party leaders.

Hubbard said the AEA has been a detriment to education by opposing reforms such as the Accountability Act and tenure reform.

"Every time you want to do anything progressive, they're the ones standing in the way," Hubbard said.

Hubbard said he's not concerned that several new members will join the House Republican Caucus thanks, in part, to campaign support from the AEA.

"Just because they supported them doesn't mean they're going to be AEA lackeys. I know for a fact that won't be the case," Hubbard said.

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Groundbreaking marks next phase in Ashford's economic growth

Dothan Eagle

July 18, 2014

Elaine Bracklin

With the turn of their shovels July 8, city, county and state officials marked another milestone for the city of Ashford. The dirt they tossed came from the construction site of the highly anticipated Walmart Express, now under construction by Bradford Building. The completion date for the project has not been set, but city officials anticipate the construction should be completed in five to six months – still in time to play a major role in the holiday shopping season.

“This development will generate money for the city,” State Rep. Paul Lee (District 86) said during the groundbreaking ceremony last Tuesday morning. “It will create commerce for the city. It will create jobs, around 30. You will see local people doing local work.

“I commend the council of Ashford and the mayor for what they have done. Ashford is no longer a sleepy little town. With this development and ACOM (Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine) nearby, you will see more good things coming to Ashford.”

With more than a year's worth of groundwork behind him, Mayor Jonathan Grecu was justifiably pleased with the work taking place on the northeast corner of the intersection of U.S. Hwy. 84 and County Road 55 North.

"This was my dream," Grecu said. "This is the significant growth we've dreamed of. I think this is the greatest step forward in looking to the future for Ashford. The east side of Houston County is where growth is necessary.

"If it had not been for the (Houston) County Commission, Gov. (Robert) Bentley and our state representative (Paul Lee), this would not be possible.

"Many have dreamed of it. Now, it's here today. It was a long, hard, strenuous effort on the part of everybody involved. I want to thank the general contractor (Bob Massey) for making this day possible. I would also like to thank CDG Engineers for their help. They have really bent over backwards to make this possible."

Growth in the eastern half of the county has been slow to develop. Grecu believes that is about to change, and he wants Ashford to be at the forefront of that economic growth.

"Ashford United Methodist Church did a study to check on a 10-mile area around Ashford," Grecu continued. "They found that more than 10,000 people reside in that 10-mile area. The Department of Transportation has documented that 11,000 vehicles run through Ashford (on U.S. Hwy. 84) on a daily basis. With this economic development coming to Ashford, we hope to capitalize on those numbers.

"If you have to go nine miles (to Dothan) to shop, this development should be exciting. This is constructive growth for Ashford."

The location of the new development, which is expected to expand beyond the Walmart Express, will allow the city to capitalize on what was once considered its death knell – the construction of the four-lane highway south of the downtown shopping area that allowed traffic to bypass that area.

"We've never been able to tap into the highway," Grecu continued. "People here always shopped downtown. This development is for the people who are outside of Ashford. This will make it convenient for them to shop close to home."

The world-wide brand recognition of the Wal-Mart Corporation, Grecu says, should enhance Ashford's ability to draw other national chains.

"We were looking for an anchor to bring to Ashford," Grecu added. "Walmart Express is that anchor. We don't have a hardware store in Ashford. Other than the Subway, we don't have a national restaurant chain located here. But, we're looking into possibilities. We're looking for anything that will bring more economic stimulus to Ashford. We're looking for companies to come here that will help the families of Ashford.

“I moved here, not to sleep, but to live here. You have to have that philosophy for this city to grow forward.”

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Alabama 8th-graders rank 50th in math; see how we compare with other states in reading, science

Al.com

July 21, 2014

Evan Belanger

The largest and longest running assessment of U.S. education performance shows Alabama lagging behind the rest of the nation in all subjects.

The latest available data from the National Assessment of Education Progress or NAEP shows Alabama fourth and eighth graders garnering average scores below the national average in all subjects.

Most notably, the state's eighth graders ranked 50th of 52 states and non-state school jurisdictions in math, and Alabama's fourth graders ranked 47th in math.

Just 25 percent of eighth graders and 30 percent of fourth graders garnered scores of proficient or better in mathematics.

Asked about the scores, officials with the Alabama State Department of Education said the state's previous standards were too low and could be to blame for the scores.

The new Alabama College and Career Ready Standards better engage students and offer more critical thinking, leading school officials to believe scores will improve with continued implementation of the higher standards, said spokeswoman Malissa Valdes-Hubert.

"The Alabama College and Career Ready Standards are aligned to the type of questions found on the NAEP test," she said. "Students will be more prepared to meet the challenge of assessments like NAEP. They'll be on an even playing field with the ACCRS."

Those standards include the controversial national standards for math and English known as the Common Core State Standards.

The NAEP, which randomly samples schools across all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense school jurisdiction, is scheduled to be administered again in 2015.

See a listing of the latest scores below:

Subject	Grade	Year	Alabama score	National score	National rank
Math	Fourth	2013	233	241	47

Math	Eighth 2013	269	284	50
Reading	Fourth 2013	219	221	30
Reading	Eighth 2013	257	266	45
Science	Fourth 2009	143	149*	38*
Science	Eighth 2011	140	151	46

*Five states or jurisdictions did not participate.

All data from the National Center for Education Statistics.

The NCES notes that 57.4 percent of Alabama's 744,621 students at the time were eligible for free or reduced lunch, meaning they live in a state of poverty.

Additionally, 60.8 percent of the state's 1,619 schools qualified as Title I schools, meaning at least 40 percent of the school's population qualified for free or reduced lunch.

While 10.7 percent of the students were enrolled in special education with individual education plans or IEPs, just 2.4 percent were enrolled in limited English proficiency programs.

The NCES listed per-pupil education expenditures statewide at \$8,803 and a total of 47,723 full-time-equivalent teachers.

Not represented are eighth-grade writing scores from 2007 and fourth grade writing scores from 2002, the latest scores available for those subjects and grades. In both cases, Alabama's average scores were below the national average.

With the NAEP to be re-administered in 2015, Alabama schools have chance to elevate their scores and demonstrate whether the new standards are effective.

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Alabama State U. picked for historic march exhibit

The Associated Press

July 21, 2014

Phillip Rawls

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — As the 50th anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery voting rights march approaches, the National Park Service has chosen Alabama State University as a location for exhibits honoring the historic 1965 march and its impact on American government.

The park service and university President Gwendolyn Boyd signed a memorandum of understanding Monday for the construction of an interpretive center on a grassy lawn next to the university's new football stadium.

On March 7, 1965, marchers set out from Selma to seek voting rights for disenfranchised blacks. The marchers were beaten by law enforcement on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in what became known as "Bloody Sunday." Later, with federal protection, about 25,000 marchers completed the

trek. The events led Congress to pass the 1965 Voting Rights Act, helping integrate governments in the South.

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Alabama State SGA leader asks 2 trustees to resign

The Associated Press

July 21, 2014

MONTGOMEY, Ala. (AP) — The president of the Alabama State University Student Government Association has sent a letter asking the chairman and vice chairman of the board of trustees to resign.

SGA President Darren Dubose said Monday the SGA Cabinet decided it was time to act when an accrediting agency sent the university a warning letter and noted that Chairman Elton Dean and Vice Chairman Marvin Wiggins had relatives with university contracts. Dubose also noted that Moody's Investor Services downgraded the university's bond rating during their tenure.

Dean said Monday the letter was a surprise and he needs time to digest it before commenting. Wiggins, a circuit judge, was in court and unavailable for comment.

University President Gwendolyn Boyd says she supports students' right to voice their opinions and be active on university issues.

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Barbers can now renew Alabama licenses online

Al.com

July 21, 2014

Stan Diel

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- Alabama barbers, who last year were subject to state regulation for the first time since hair was feathered and Jheri-curled, now can renew their licenses online. The Alabama Board of Cosmetology and Barbering today announced that barbers and barber instructors with existing licenses can renew them through the board's new website. Barber shops, which are separately licensed, can do the same. Until May of last year the state had not regulated barbers for at least three decades.

A state barber's license costs \$40 and can be renewed every two years for \$80. Barber shop licenses cost \$150 and can be renewed every two years for \$100. Barber shops must pass sanitation inspections under the new law.

The internet service was designed by NIC Inc., the Olathe, Kan.-based company that designed and manages Alabama.gov, the state government's official website.

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Auburn University, Intelligence and Security Academy help train public officials in data security

Opelika-Auburn News

July 21, 2014

AUBURN UNIVERSITY – Training offered by the Center for Governmental Services at Auburn University will provide public officials in Alabama and throughout the country with the resources needed to secure data and protect the interests of community governments and businesses.

Center director Don-Terry Veal said governments and businesses have operated under a heightened awareness of intelligence and security since the events of 9/11, and the need to secure data and information and protect resources is essential for the urban and rural communities within Alabama and across the United States.

Through the center, an agency of University Outreach, Auburn University recognized this need and collaborated with the Intelligence and Security Academy to provide current or upcoming managers, policy makers, law enforcement officers, military personnel and internet technology professionals with the proper tools to deal with security and intelligence issues and new threats.

“This type of information should not be used to protect only Washington, D.C., and the larger metropolitan areas, but it also has application to the more rural communities across the country,” said Veal.

Lt. Gen. Ron Burgess, senior counsel for national security programs, cyber programs and military affairs at Auburn, will serve as a consultant to the partnership. A 38-year U.S. Army veteran, Burgess spent much of his career in the upper levels of military intelligence and security.

“This joint effort will not only serve to equip communities and municipalities with the critical skill sets and situational awareness necessary to deal with myriad threats, but it will also provide opportunities for valuable training that will foster workforce development in our region’s growing knowledge-based economy,” he said. “This partnership is a good fit for both sides and aligns well with the education and outreach aspects of our mission here at Auburn University.

“I think anything we can do in this current threat environment to equip our leaders, law enforcement personnel and local citizenry with the requisite tools, knowledge and understanding is a good thing and is part of the reason we exist as an institution.”

Auburn University and the Intelligence and Security Academy jointly bring decades of senior executive experience in intelligence, national security and policy analysis that can apply to individual organizations and processes.

The first two courses, Introduction to U.S. Intelligence and Intelligence for Policy Makers, will be offered Oct. 22-23 at Auburn and taught by Mark Lowenthal, president of the Intelligence and

Security Academy. Lowenthal has served as assistant director of Central Intelligence for Analysis and Production; vice chairman for evaluation, National Intelligence Council; deputy assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence; and staff director, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

For those interested in a career in intelligence and security, a professional certification also is available. Specific information about the courses, costs and registration is available online at <http://www.auburn.edu/outreach/cgs/intelligence/index.php> or by calling Patrick Rose at (334) 844-1914. For more information about the Center for Governmental Services, go to <http://www.auburn.edu/outreach/cgs/>. For more information about the Intelligence and Security Academy, go to <http://www.theintelligenceacademy.net/>.

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On Birmingham's DNC bid, ALGOP Chair says 'bring their radical, leftist show here'

Al.com

July 21, 2014

Madison Underwood

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama – The chairman of the Alabama Republican Party, Bill Armistead, has thrown his support behind Birmingham's bid to bring the 2016 Democratic National Convention to the Magic City, but the tone of Armistead's endorsement is decidedly tongue-in-cheek.

"I can think of no better way for the citizens of our state to see the vast differences between the parties than to have the Democrats bring their radical leftist show here," Armistead wrote in a letter published Monday at ALGOP.org. "Their staunch support of homosexual rights, gay marriage and abortion are in stark contrast to the conservative beliefs that dominate in our great state."

The letter appears adjacent to a less-than-flattering photo of President Barack Obama.

Birmingham Mayor William Bell is hosting a delegation from the DNC this week to evaluate the city's fitness for the convention. In preparation, banners with the words "DNC Birmingham 2016" have been hung around the city, and even Vulcan has been lit up in blue for the occasion.

"There is a reason that Republicans have had the success we have had in the last few years," Armistead wrote. "The people of Alabama simply do not support the liberal platform of the Alabama Democrat [sic] Party or the National Democrat Party [sic] because they are one and the same. The visit by the DNC selection delegation will only serve to solidify this fact."

Armistead also took a shot at Alabama state Sen. Roger Bedford, D-Russellville, who, with Sen. Rodger Smitherman, D-Birmingham, he believes "will be part of the escort committee."

"Bedford's activism with the DNC goes back decades, and he was one of the few Democrats in Alabama to work hard to defeat President Reagan when he ran for President," Armistead said.

Armistead also says that the DNC visit to Birmingham is "sure to be a spectacle," and then says Obama has "condoned, no encouraged" illegal immigration.

"So, yes, I do hope the Democrats choose Birmingham for their National Convention and explain to Alabamians and Americans why the Democrat [sic] Party, under the leadership of Barack Obama, has felt it was necessary to radically transform America rather than restoring it to the greatness we once knew," he concludes.

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Democratic CEO: Birmingham visit great so far

The Associated Press

July 21, 2014

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — The chief executive of the Democratic National Committee says a visit to assess Birmingham's bid to host the 2016 national convention is going great so far.

Party CEO Amy Dacey briefly addressed the crowd at a public event in downtown Birmingham on Monday night. The two-day site visit concludes Tuesday.

Dacey says the city is being considered for the convention because of the passion and pride displayed by leaders during a meeting to discuss the bid.

But Birmingham is a long way from getting the convention.

The party will also visit potential convention sites in Columbus, Ohio; New York; Philadelphia and Phoenix, Arizona. Officials hope to announce a decision by late this year or early 2015.

Leaders hope the bid will raise Birmingham's profile even if it isn't selected.

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U.S. Coupling doubles work space, plans to add jobs

Dothan Eagle

July 21, 2014

Jennifer Calhoun

When Bob and Cathy Gourlay first started making coupling parts for fire hoses in northern Virginia in 2004, they had no idea their business would grow so fast -- and so far.

In 2006, the Gourlay's business, U.S. Coupling & Accessories, moved to Dothan to lease 18,000 square feet of space from one of its biggest customers, fire hose maker Key Fire Hose.

And after eight years of growth, the company has moved again.

In early July, the plant moved into the old W.J. Powell Produce building, a 40,000-square-foot facility on Range Street that gave the company more than twice the space it had before, Bob Gourlay said.

“We’re growing so fast,” said Gourlay, who was able to take advantage of a \$200,000 five-year, interest-free, capital loan from the Alabama Municipal Electric Authority to go toward purchase of a facility. “We’ve gone from one market into three.”

In addition to providing coupling attachments and other parts for fire hoses, the company also supplies equipment for agricultural and industrial hoses, he said. Agricultural hoses can be used to pump liquefied manure for fertilizing crops, while industrial hoses are often used in hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, to mine for gases.

“(Fracking) is booming everywhere, and we’re just absolutely swamped with work in that market,” he said.

But market forces aren’t the only things driving business, Bob Gourlay said.

“We’re a manufacturing company, and that is getting to be a rare thing in this country,” he said. “But surprisingly, particularly from where we came from, being a manufacturing company down here is a much more conducive environment.”

“Up (North), the regulations, taxes and all the requirements are just crushing to a business, whereas down here they keep it simple. They’re just as effective, but they don’t create a lot of nonsense.”

And now that the plant has room to expand, Gourlay said he plans to hire more people after they’re settled.

“We go all the way from low-skilled to high-skilled workers,” he said.

High-skilled workers in the plant are usually machinists, who can take an engineered drawing and use it to program and set up a machine that will process raw materials into finished products.

But those types of workers can be difficult to find these days, especially in the U.S. where machinist jobs and programs disappeared with the country’s manufacturing industry.

“We’ve been fortunate,” Bob Gourlay said. “Skilled machinists are hard to find all over the country, because that skill set has been on the decline for years with so much off-shore, out-sourcing of product. It’s become kind of a lost thing.”

But Gourlay said they’ve been able to train some workers on the job.

“Our newest set-up guy, his last job was working for a pool maintenance company,” he said. “But he showed the skills, the aptitude and the determination, so we trained him and he picked it right up.”

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Rep. Bradley Byrne to speak about I-10 bridge project; FHWA report not ready

Al.com

July 21, 2014

John Sharp

MOBILE, Alabama -- U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne, R-Fairhope, will talk about the I-10 bridge project during an afternoon news conference Monday.

The project's environmental impact study was supposed to be released last week by the Federal Highway Administration. As of Monday, it appears to be stalled.

Doug Hecox, spokesman with the FHWA, said more information will be available on Tuesday.

"We anticipate that the draft EIS for the proposed I-10 Mobile River bridge and Baway widening will be finalized and signed very soon," he said in an email to AL.com.

Hecox said last week that a comment period into the study was extended last week to Wednesday, and that federal officials were finalizing the report before releasing it.

The FHWA said on July 7 that the report would be released within one week. Nearly two weeks later, local officials are still waiting on the findings of a study viewed as being a key step forward in a long process toward the bridge project.

Byrne will speak to the media at 4:15 p.m. In May, he called the project a "national priority" and pushed for the FHWA to release the study.

Check back to al.com/mobile for updates later today.

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Raytheon's Alabama-made Standard-Missile 3 stands proud at Farnborough International Airshow

Al.com

July 21, 2014

Leada Gore

Alabama had a large presence at the Farnborough International Airshow. In the case of Raytheon, that presence was also tall, slender and packing a punch.

The Massachusetts -based company had several presentations and displays at the London show, including information on the Standard Missile-6 and SM-3. Both of the missiles are produced at Raytheon's 70,000 square-foot automation integration and testing facility on Redstone Arsenal.

The company's presentation included a life-size model of its SM-3 kill vehicle, a defensive weapon used by the U.S. Navy to destroy short-to-intermediate-range ballistic missile. The SM-3 doesn't use explosives; engineered instead to use sheer force equal to that of a 10 ton truck traveling at 600 mph to destroy its targets.

"It's like a bullet hitting a bullet," said Brent White, Raytheon Missile Systems' manager for meetings, events and trade shows. "Visitors (got) to see what it's like to launch all the way from ground to impact in space."

Company seeks booming market for Huntsville-made missiles

Raytheon's missile integration and testing facility opened in Huntsville 2012. In 2013, the company also opened a 42,000 square foot office building, home to more than 100 engineers, to support its missile projects. The facilities are in addition to the company's Huntsville headquarters in Research Park.

In March, Raytheon opened a new test cell at the Redstone Arsenal facility, enabling it to boost production and keep up with growing demand for the SM-6 and SM-3 interceptors.

Dr. Taylor Lawrence, an Alabama native who is president of Raytheon Missile Systems, said the Huntsville facility will play a key role as both missile systems continue to change and expand.

"We're looking at upgrading capabilities of the SM-6 in the future and ramping up the production in coming years," said Lawrence during a recent visit to Huntsville. "The SM-3 is enjoying an incredible run. It's done some amazing intercepts in challenging environments."

Lawrence said the SM-6's upgrades will allow it to serve the Navy in a role similar to that provided to the Army by Raytheon's Patriot missile. For the SM-3, Block IB is set for delivery in 2015, while flight testing for Block IIA are scheduled for the same time.

Lawrence was among those attending the Farnborough show, where he had a chance to meet with Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley and other state business leaders.

The company's presence at the show is invaluable, Lawrence said.

"It really gives you the opportunity to meet a lot of global customers in one place," Lawrence said.

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Alabama congressman declared 'driving force' behind rise of the Southern Republicans in Congress

Yellowhammer News

July 21, 2014

Cliff Sims

In the wake of House Majority Leader Eric Cantor's stunning defeat, the leadership team in the Republican-controlled U.S. House went through a shakeup.

Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-Cal.) rose from Majority Whip — the third-ranking member of the House — to become Majority Leader, which is second in command behind Speaker of the House John Boehner. Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.) succeeded McCarthy as Majority Whip.

Scalise's election to the number three spot gave southerners a real voice at the leadership table for the first time since Barack Obama became president in 2008.

That was important because many southern Republicans had grown frustrated with southern-state congressmen being overlooked for leadership roles, in spite of the South being the GOP's largest base of support on the national level.

Rep. Mike Rogers (R-AL03) was instrumental in propelling Scalise into House leadership. He organized numerous dinners with southern members in the months leading up to the House leadership elections to get them all on the same page. The week after Cantor's defeat, Rogers organized meetings between leadership candidates and southern members of the House, helping the region flex its muscle. It paid off.

RELATED: Why the new slate of GOP congressional leaders is good news for Alabama
This week, David Drucker of The Washington Examiner is out with a new piece titled "Battle cry of the South: Take over House GOP leadership," detailing southern Republicans' push to gain more power and influence inside the GOP caucus.
Here's how Drucker set the scene:

Once a month for the last six months, a group of House Republicans from the South has gathered for dinner at RT's Restaurant, an old-school Cajun joint across the river from Washington in Alexandria, Va.

There, in a dining room named for a former Republican congressman from Alabama, Herbert Leon "Sonny" Callahan, the "Southern Caucus," as the group calls itself, has plotted its rise.

And leading this new Southern Caucus is none other than Alabama's Mike Rogers.

"We'd like to see regional balance in chairmanships, something that used to be a factor in the Steering Committee and it hasn't been for years and we'd like to get back to that," said Rep. Mike Rogers, 56, the Alabama Republican who chairs the Southern Caucus.

It's fitting that Rogers is the driving force behind the Southern Caucus and the group retreats at RT's. The restaurant was a favorite haunt of Callahan when he served in Congress, and it was there that he hosted dinners for other Southern Republicans. Particularly after the 1994 midterm elections, when Rep. Newt Gingrich of Georgia led the GOP to its first House majority in 40 years and was elected speaker, Southern Republicans were a power center.

When Rogers took over host duties for the dinner last year, his goal was to reinvigorate influence the South has lost since. The group that coalesced into the Southern Caucus under his leadership was small, consisting mainly of members from Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle. In recent weeks, the caucus has become more popular.

The Caucus now meets multiple times throughout each week to discuss their strategy, and their ranks have grown to include members from Arkansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

The group is said to be targeting several prime committee slots in the next Congress, including some of the top posts on Energy and Commerce, Financial Services, Rules, Ways and Means and Appropriations.

Rogers said the group is still in its formative stage and is trying to gauge what is “possible” and realistic,” but his influence growing in D.C. can only mean good things for Alabama going forward.

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UAH-invented smart pill bottle that reminds you when to take meds wins second US patent *Al.com*

July 21, 2014

Lucy Berry

HUNTSVILLE, Alabama – A smart pill bottle invented by a University of Alabama in Huntsville professor is gaining traction in the U.S. medical community.

New York-based AdhereTech and UAH were recently awarded a second patent for the smart pill bottle, which measures when a patient has taken their medication and wirelessly reminds users if they have missed a dose through an automated phone call or text message, as well as on-bottle blinking lights and chimes.

The product, which is already in use by patients, was designed to help people with diseases such as HIV, diabetes, cancer and hepatitis C. The technology can detect when the bottle has been opened and how much medication is left inside.

The bottle can also solicit feedback from patients via text or phone call if a user is not taking his or her medication as directed. Emil Jovanov, inventor and associate professor in UAH's electrical and computer engineering department, said they learned about the patent a week ago.

"The second patent protects specific ideas in system implementation and alternative designs of the smart bottle," he said. "It is an important milestone in our commercialization efforts."

The pill bottle has garnered national attention and been featured in TIME Magazine, The Wall Street Journal, Fast Company, Bloomberg Businessweek, Wired and CNNMoney. A less expensive, smaller version of the device will be released by AdhereTech sometime next year.

The product is currently being tested in the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and Cornell Medical School, according to Kannan Grant, director of UAH's Office of Technology Commercialization.

"The results have been very good and that has led AdhereTech to secure a second round of financing," he said.

Joining Jovanov as inventors are Josh Stein, chief executive officer of AdhereTech, John Langhauser, AdhereTech's chief technology officer, and Michael Morena, chief operations officer for AdhereTech.

AdhereTech works with pharmaceutical companies, pill bottle manufacturers and pharmacies to distribute high-cost specialty medication in its bottles. The new patent will help AdhereTech develop new health solutions for patients.

"... It helps to define the company's scope and vision, as a growing connected medical device firm," said Stein. "In fact, we have more demand for our product than we can accommodate at the moment, so we are scaling up."

UAH can only take the smart pill bottle so far along the path of commercialization, which is why the university licensed its rights to the technology to AdhereTech.

Grant said UAH has been heavily involved in working with AdhereTech to improve the product, which gives the university more experience with technology commercialization.

"Now the faculty member can part that knowledge to the content he/she teaches to our young minds," he said. "Now there is a context to the content that is taught at UAH. Our students gain valuable knowledge when attending UAH. This is important."

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They beat the UA 'Machine,' now they're on the verge of being elected to statewide office

Yellowhammer Politics

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Cliff Sims

The Machine.

For over a century it has held almost total sway over Greek life and the Student Government Association at the University of Alabama.

The so called "secret society" has been the topic of a cover story in Esquire magazine. It's been featured in the New York Times. It's been accused of election-rigging, voter fraud and intimidation. It was even blamed by some for the SGA being shut down for several years in the wake of harassment and assault allegations.

But it's also been responsible for electing UA SGA Presidents who have gone on to become some of the most well-known and successful leaders in Alabama history.

Here's a partial list:

1915-16 Lister Hill, the first UA SGA President, became a United States Senator

1920-21 Joseph W. Sewell played for the New York Yankees with Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig

1923-24 John J. Sparkman became a United States Senator

1928-29 Albert Boutwell, Sr. became the Mayor of Birmingham

1935-36 Hugh Davis Merrill, Jr. became Speaker of the Alabama House of Representatives

1951-52 Robert Smith Vance became a Federal Judge

1952-53 William J. Edwards III became a U.S. Congressman

1955-56 Walter W. Flowers became a U.S. Congressman and was a key democrat on the Watergate Panel. When Nixon lost his vote on the panel, he knew he had to resign.

1967-68 Don E. Siegelman became Alabama Secretary of State, Attorney General, Lt. Governor and Governor

1974-75 William Bell Blount became the Chairman of the Alabama Democratic Party

There have also been dozens of Alabama students who rose through the SGA system with the backing of The Machine and went on to be pillars of their communities across the state as business and civic leaders.

1905: The founding members of the Theta Nu Epsilon fraternity at the University of Alabama (The Machine)

1905: The founding members of the Theta Nu Epsilon fraternity at the University of Alabama (The Machine)

But in the past 100 years, there have only been seven Alabama students who conquered The Machine to become SGA President without their blessing.

1936-37 Carl A. Elliot became a U.S. Congressman.

1963-64 Donald Wilbur Stewart became an Alabama State Senator and United States Senator

1970-71 James W. Zeigler served on the Alabama Public Service commission before earning the nickname "Mr. 49 percent" for always coming up just shy of getting elected

1976-77 Cleophus Thomas, Jr. became the first black SGA President, went on to Harvard Law and served on the UA Board of Trustees

1978-79 A. Jerry DeVaney, after whose election The Machine added sororities to their ranks to bolster the size of their voting bloc

1983-84 John N. Bolus

1986-87 John Merrill, who currently serves in the Alabama House of Representatives

Two of those seven, Jim Zeigler and John Merrill, now find themselves on the verge of being elected to statewide office in Alabama, decades after being introduced to the rough and tumble world of politics while taking on The Machine.

Zeigler won the Republican primary runoff for State Auditor last week and faces no Democratic opposition in the fall. Merrill squeaked out a close victory in the Republican primary runoff and should easily beat his Democratic opponent in November.

“When I enrolled at Alabama and started looking at the history of the SGA Presidents, those people were the ones who were in key positions in leaderships in our state — senators and congressmen, even a governor,” Merrill recalled. “Before I became SGA President, The Crimson White (student newspaper) asked me, ‘What is the Machine?’ And I told them, ‘The Machine is select coalition of fraternities and sororities that is specifically designed to influence and dominate campus politics.’ They still use that description to this day.”

Although the office he is currently seeking involves a much higher level of responsibility, Merrill says that his experience in student politics at Alabama undoubtedly prepared him for what he’s doing now.

“At least two times during my campaign people wrote on my Facebook wall, ‘well there’s another ‘Machine’ or ‘Greek’ candidate just going on to his next step.’ I told them that they better do their homework because I beat The Machine. And let me tell you, I didn’t run my campaign for Secretary of State any different than how I ran my campaign for SGA President. I went to see people where they were. I met with key leaders. I raised money. We had billboards, ads, brochures and t-shirts. We got statewide news coverage. So the opportunity to participate in the SGA thoroughly prepared me to know how to participate in the electoral process and how to be successful at it.

“It is a good training ground,” Merrill said in conclusion. “The main thing I learned very early on after getting elected SGA President was that it’s about getting things done, not getting credit for getting things done. I’ve carried that with me ever since.”

Jim Ziegler could not be reached for comment.