



Speaker's Press Clips
Wednesday, July 23, 2014

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FULL TEXT

Gov. Robert Bentley says he's 'proud of progress' Alabama making in employment

Al.com

July 22, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Gov. Robert Bentley said Monday that Alabama's economy is moving in the right direction even though the most recent unemployment statistics don't show that, as pointed out by his Democratic opponent, Parker Griffith.

June's unemployment rate of 6.8 percent exceeded the rate of the previous June, making Alabama the only state to see an increase during that time period.

"You can look at statistics any way you wish but we have 50,000 more people working today than when I took office," Bentley said Monday when asked about the unemployment rate during a break at the first meeting of the Alabama Workforce Council.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in June 2014 Alabama employers had about 1.92 million employees, up from about 1.88 million in June 2011, the year Bentley took office. That would be an increase of about 40,000 jobs. The number includes part-time jobs. Agricultural jobs and self-employed workers are not included.

"I'm very proud of the progress we're making," Bentley said. "Now, are we where we want to be? Absolutely not. But that's why we are creating this task force today. That's why we are continuing to train students. And what we're putting in place today will reap benefits for this state years to come."

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State superintendent explains low test scores, says more rigorous standards will help

Al.com

July 22, 2014

Evan Belanger

MONTGOMERY, Alabama -- AL.com reported Monday that the largest and longest running assessment of U.S. education performance shows Alabama lagging behind the rest of the nation in all subjects.

The 2013 scores from the National Assessment of Education Progress or NAEP included a ranking of 50th in the nation for eighth grade math in Alabama public schools.

Now, State Superintendent Tommy Bice is speaking out on the issue, blaming the low test scores on the state's old standards, which were aligned with substandard assessments.

"Our previous assessments -- the ARMT and Alabama High School Graduation Exam -- were totally unaligned with the level of rigor and text complexity and critical thinking required on NAEP," Bice said.

ARMT refers to the Alabama Reading and Math Test, which has been discontinued in favor of a new ACT Inc. suite of assessments.

Bice predicted significant progress under the state's new College and Career Ready Standards, which include the controversial Common Core State Standards for English and math.

"Our new standards and assessments are far more aligned with the rigor, text complexity and critical thinking required to be successful -- not just on an assessment but in the real world.," he said. "We expect to see significant progress as we shift from AYP to College and Career Readiness."

AYP refers to Adequate Yearly Progress, the key measure under No Child Left Behind, which Alabama quit last year.

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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Bentley wants ASU board members Dean, Wiggins to resign

Montgomery Advertiser
July 22, 2014
Josh Moon

Gov. Robert Bentley has requested that Elton Dean and Marvin Wiggins resign from their positions on the Alabama State University board of trustees, a spokesperson for the governor's office confirmed.

Bentley made the request in letters sent to Dean and Wiggins on Tuesday morning, asking that each resign by the close of business on Thursday.

Bentley's letter is the latest call for the pair's resignations. Dean, who serves as the board chairman, and Wiggins, who is vice-chairman, also have received letters from the ASU student government president and from the president of the national alumni association requesting their resignations.

The requests come on the heels of a letter from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools that identified conflicts of interest by Dean and Wiggins as one of the reasons for the accrediting agency placing ASU on warning status.

ASU alumni were also angered by recent in-fighting between the board, specifically Wiggins, and ASU president Gwendolyn Boyd, who is very popular among students, faculty and alumni.

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Alabama State University president responds Gov. Bentley's request that two trustees step down

Al.com

July 22, 2014

Evan Belanger

MONTGOMERY, Alabama -- Alabama State University President Gwendolyn Boyd has issued a statement in response to Gov. Robert Bentley's request today that two top board members step down.

"I have read all of the material from all of the concerned parties, which includes the Alabama State University Student Government Association president, our alumni, friends, supporters of the University and Governor Robert Bentley; and we will respectfully continue to move forward as these issues are being resolved," she said in a statement that gave no other information.

In letters issued today, Bentley, who serves as president of the ASU board by virtue of his elected office, asked board members Elton Dean and Marvin Wiggins to step down due to conflicts of interest.

[Download copies of the letters [here](#).]

In both documents, he said he was "disappointed" to learn that proposed amendments to ASU's bylaws had been circulated to members of ASU's board "excluding me as president and a member of the board."

According to Bentley's letter, the amendments would have done the following in an apparent attempt to grab power from Boyd:

- Establish an attorney-client privileges between the university's general counsel and the board, replacing that between the university and its president,
 - Provide for the hire of the general counsel by the board of trustees,
 - Allow removal of trustees only for criminal acts by a majority of the members of the board of trustees rather than a majority present at the time of the vote,
 - Install a board liaison with the same powers as those designated to the university president,
 - Prohibit trustees from disclosing confidential information, and
 - Allow a committee chair to direct the actions of the president.
- The requests comes as ASU remains under a six-month warning from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools for conflicts of interest and other leadership problems that predated Boyd's selection as president of ASU.

According to The Associated Press, ASU's student government association called upon the same two trustees to step down.

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Bentley taps Butler as Ala state budget officer

The Associated Press

July 22, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) - Longtime state fiscal expert Kelly Butler is Alabama's new state budget officer.

Gov. Robert Bentley announced Butler's appointment on Tuesday.

The state budget officer leads the Executive Budget Office and advises the administration on the state's General Fund and education budgets.

Butler has been assistant state budget officer for two years. He previously worked for 19 years with the Legislative Fiscal Office, most recently serving as the state Senate's fiscal officer.

Bentley says Butler brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the job.

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Wallace puts mobile welding lab on display

Dothan Eagle

July 23, 2014
Jim Cook

Wallace Community College got a chance to show off its new mobile welding lab Tuesday, demonstrating how the tractor trailer equipped with several virtual welding simulators could benefit area businesses.

Vincent Vincent, coordinator of non-credit training, said the labs will allow Wallace to better partner with local businesses. The lab will be used to provide training for businesses in the Wiregrass that need help improving workers' welding skills. Local legislators and other community leaders got the chance Tuesday to tour the lab, which houses simulators in a tractor trailer.

The mobile welding lab uses simulators to teach students how to weld. The simulators can provide different scenarios for students to weld in, and can also simulate the different settings on welding torches students will need to learn. After each welding task, students are given a grade on how well they performed the welding task by the simulator.

The devices are useful because they do not consume metal or other resources associated with welding in training and provide an accurate evaluation of students' welding skills.

The mobile lab was made possible by a \$10 million grant awarded to Wallace and other local colleges which received welding simulator equipment.

Greg Clemmons, of Southeastern Sheet Metal, has requested that the lab come provide training for his employees. Clemmons said finding welders trained to deal with the thin metal his business uses for sound attenuators and air conditioner duct work is difficult. Clemmons said the simulator should help his staff better adjust to working with thin metals.

"It's going to help us on cost and speed," he said.

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"To cripple Obamacare" -- Alabama Attorney General proud of his role after court ruling today

Al.com

July 22, 2014

Mike Oliver

In the wake of a federal appeals court ruling today that insurance subsidies under the Affordable Care Act are illegal in 36 states, Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange issued a release saying he was proud of Alabama's participation through a "friends of the court" brief in the case.

"This lawsuit has the potential to cripple Obamacare and free millions of Americans from the individual mandate," Strange said in a release. "The court's decision was also a stinging rebuke

to the Obama Administration for making up the law as it goes along, instead of following the law as it was passed by Congress."

The D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the tax credits to be received by millions of Americans, including Alabamians, cannot get subsidies, as promised, to pay for their insurance on the federal exchange. The D.C. court said subsidies could be delivered through the state-run exchanges.

"I am proud to have joined my fellow Republican Attorneys General in filing a brief in support of this result," Strange said.

In a contradictory ruling two hours later, the Richmond-based 4th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled law's language was ambiguous so that the Obama administration was free to allow the subsidies in all states.

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Jeremiah Denton, American war hero and Alabama senator, laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery

Al.com

July 22, 2014

Paul Gattis

ARLINGTON, Virginia – Jeremiah Denton, an American hero from the Vietnam war and former Alabama senator, was laid to rest today in Arlington National Cemetery.

Denton, a Mobile native, died on March 28 at the age of 89.

According to a statement from the office of U.S. Rep. Mo Brooks, R-Huntsville, Denton was laid to rest with full military honors. Brooks joined Alabama Sens. Jeff Sessions and Richard Shelby at the ceremony.

"I first met Admiral Jeremiah Denton while he served in the U.S. Senate and I served in the Alabama legislature," Brooks said in a statement released following the ceremony. "Admiral Denton was one of the finest patriots I have had the pleasure to meet. Admiral Denton's life exemplified the best of America. His patriotism and determination during his 7 years and 7 months in North Vietnamese captivity inspired fellow POWs and helped mend a war-torn nation.

"He was a remarkable man and I was fortunate to count him as a friend. It is truly fitting that Admiral Denton was today laid to rest in America's most hallowed ground, Arlington Cemetery, where he rests in peace with his comrades in arms. All Alabamians and Americans would do well to remember this selfless patriot and strive to carry on the values he cherished that have served our great nation so well for so long."

As a POW during the Vietnam War, Denton in a television interview blinked his eyes in Morse code repeatedly to spell T-O-R-T-U-R-E. Denton learned after the war that his message was the first indication to U.S. intelligence that prisoners were being tortured.

Denton served as U.S. senator from Alabama from 1981-87.

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Carly's Law: Bentley, supporters gather in Pelham to praise bill's passage

Al.com

July 22, 2014

Martin J. Reed

PELHAM, Alabama -- Almost a year ago, Dustin Chandler was talking at work about an idea to legalize medicinal marijuana in Alabama to treat seizures in his child and others.

"We just kind of laughed about 'what an uphill battle you're going to face,'" Chandler recalled about the conversation with a fellow Pelham police officer.

During a special gathering today at Pelham City Hall attended by Gov. Robert Bentley and various state lawmakers concerning the legislation involving a marijuana-derived medicine for treating seizures, Chandler has seen his idea come full circle.

"It's a symbolic thing for me," Chandler said. "That's kind of where it was hatched."

Holding his 3-year-old daughter who was the motivation behind the Carly's Law legislation that authorizes a UAB study of cannabidiol oil, also known as CBD, Chandler gathered with Bentley, lawmakers and about a half-dozen families with children who may benefit from the medication.

"These kids that you see, Governor, are why we fought so hard for Carly's Law," he said. "What they did in the state House was nothing short of a miracle. ... Carly can't speak and a lot of these kids can't, but we gave them a voice."

The potential opportunity to use CBD oil -- a medicine that does not contain the intoxicating properties associated with marijuana -- has provided a sense of relief for families across Alabama with children who are using prescription medications that leave the kids sedated and sometimes worse.

"Her medicine that we have right now, it's not the best," said Thomas Woods, whose 2-and-a-half-year-old sister, Leni Young, has been diagnosed with epilepsy and cerebral palsy. "It has a lot of side effects."

Woods, a University of Montevallo student, remembered his mother, Amy Young of Wetumpka, talking last year about CBD oil used in Colorado with positive results. "I'm really hopeful this can be replicated here," he said. "Every time she has a seizure, she takes two steps back" in terms of progress.

Carrie Akins of Foley had her 8-year-old daughter, Avery, back in Pelham for today's gathering after attending a pro-Carly's Law rally at the Pelham Civic Complex and Ice Arena on March 1.

"Empowered," Akins said about how she felt with the passage of Carly's Law. "She's part of history, not only for the state of Alabama, but for other kids across other states."

Avery has suffered from Rett Syndrome since she was born and has six to 10 seizures a day. Akins said her daughter is on the waiting list to participate in the UAB study.

The mother has the goal of removing her daughter from the heavy prescription medications she's using. "As of now they're not asking anybody to come off anything prior to the study. Ultimately, yes, I would like her to be pharmaceutical-free except for CBD oil," she said.

Robin Pass came from Prattville with her family including Gabriel, who sometimes suffers 30 to 40 severe seizures daily. "It's something you don't want to have to be involved in, but you're glad to be a part of it," she said about supporting Carly's Law.

She was thankful for the opportunity to meet the legislators behind Carly's Law. "It's a big opportunity to say thank you to those who had a part in this," Pass said.

Bentley addressed the few dozen people gathered inside the Pelham City Council chambers. "Y'all were the best lobbyists -- and I'm not a lobbyist fan," the governor said. "You came and you touched the hearts of all of us."

With state Reps. Mike Ball of Madison and Allen Farley of McCalla and state Sen. Paul Sanford of Huntsville in attendance, Bentley thanked them and the Legislature for approving Carly's Law.

"Now that we have things in place, hopefully the study will show this will be a benefit to these sweet children," Bentley said.

Sanford, an early supporter of the effort, said when he first heard about CBD oil, he asked himself what he would do if the situation involved his own child. "This has been one thing I consider the best effort of anything I've done in Montgomery since 2009" when he was elected, he said.

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Free meeting next month in Decatur on state's crowdfunding bill for small businesses

Al.com

July 23, 2014

Lucy Berry

DECATUR, Alabama – Four months after Gov. Robert Bentley signed a new crowdfunding bill into law to help spur new businesses, officials will hold a town hall meeting in Decatur to educate local entrepreneurs and startups about the legislation.

The Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce and Decatur-Morgan County Entrepreneurial Center will host a free event from 4-5:30 p.m. Aug. 11 on Alabama's new crowdfunding law, which allows someone looking to start a small business to raise up to \$1 million toward their initiative.

A news advisory said the forum, which will be open to the public, will explain the law and how to apply, provide information on raising capital and allow attendees to ask questions. Alabama Securities Commission Deputy Director Ed Reed will be the keynote presenter.

Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, who sponsored the bill, and Republican Rep. Terri Collins, also of Decatur, will attend the meeting.

The event will take place at the Alabama Center for the Arts on 122 Second Ave., room 118 in downtown Decatur. To attend, contact the Chamber by Aug. 7.

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Alabama lawmaker heads up increasingly influential Southern Caucus: Today in state politics

Al.com

July 23, 2014

Leada Gore

Six months ago, a group of Southern Republican lawmakers met in a Washington, D.C. restaurant to chart a path to take over a number of key House positions. At the group's helm is Alabama's Rep. Mike Rogers, *The Washington Examiner* reports.

Rogers, R-Saks, is the leader of what's become known as the "Southern Caucus." Originally comprised of Congressional members from Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle, they were soon joined by lawmakers from Arkansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. Then, lawmakers from non-deep South states Oklahoma and Virginia asked to be part of the group, too.

The group's purpose is to put lawmakers from Southern states – generally members of the GOP's most conservative wing – into key leadership roles when the 114th Congress convenes in January. Among the posts it would like to see held by Southerners include more representation on Energy and Commerce, Financial Services, Rules, Ways and Means and Appropriations.

"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," Rogers told the *Examiner*.

The Southern Caucus meets on Capitol Hill throughout the week and is formulating its strategies and goals.

"This is more in the early stages of us trying to see what's realistic, what's practical" Rogers said.

Here's what else is going on in Alabama politics today:

Gov. Robert Bentley says he's 'proud of progress' Alabama making in employment

DNC 2016: Columbus mayor says bring Democratic convention to Ohio or face losing the state to GOP

Democrats Birmingham visit ending: Will Magic City 'passion and pride' bring 2016 convention?

Immigrants are only taking jobs Americans don't want? Not so, says U.S. Rep. Mo Brooks

236,000 runoff voters last week, and 2 million clicks on AJ and Katherine Webb's wedding. Time for the apocalypse, or online voting?

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Herbert, GOP governors scold Obama over border crisis

Salt Lake Tribune

July 22, 2014

Herbert joined Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley, Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback, North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory, Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett and Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker in the letter outlining problems they see in handling the crisis that they say could hurt their states.

They said Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell told them at a recent meeting of the National Governors Association (NGA) that the federal government "is not inquiring whether these undocumented children are being placed with sponsors or relatives who are undocumented themselves."

The GOP governors said that "raises real questions as to whether these children will maintain contacts with our legal system" or instead disappear into the shadows. The governors wrote that they were told that "nearly half fail to show up for their assigned immigration proceeding," which can create problems for states.

"We are concerned that there will be significant numbers who will end up using the public schools, social services and health systems largely funded by the states. More importantly, we are concerned that the failure to return the unaccompanied children will send a message that will encourage a much larger movement towards our southern border."

Not only does it create problems for states, they said, but "We fear that this will put a significant number of children at risk of abuse and neglect on their journey to the United States."

While just the six GOP governors signed the letter, they said at recent NGA meetings "Governors on both sides of the aisle expressed concern with your administration's handling of the situation."

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Federal appeals courts issue contradictory rulings on health-law subsidies

Washington Post

July 22, 2014

Two federal appellate courts handed down contradictory rulings Tuesday on the legality of a central part of the Affordable Care Act that provides insurance subsidies to millions of Americans in three dozen states.

The D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the subsidies available under the 2010 health-care law may be provided only to residents of states that set up their own health insurance marketplaces. Less than two hours later, the Richmond-based 4th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the subsidies, ruling in a separate case that the law's language was ambiguous, giving the Obama administration the authority to allow the subsidies nationwide.

The divergent rulings increase the likelihood that the question will be decided by the Supreme Court. If the subsidies ultimately are struck down for states that did not set up their own marketplaces, it would be a crippling blow to the federal program, dramatically reducing the ability of low- and middle-income Americans to pay for health insurance, which is now mandatory for most people.

The government immediately announced it would ask the entire appeals court to review the decision in the D.C. case. The ruling does not have an immediate impact, because the judges gave the government time to appeal the decision.

"We feel very strong about the sound legal reasoning of the argument that the administration is making," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said. "There's a clear, commonsense case to be made here, which is that intent of Congress was to be sure that every eligible American who applied for tax credits to make their health insurance more affordable would have access to those tax credits whether or not the marketplace was operated by federal officials or state officials."

California and Florida lead the way for state and federal healthcare sign-up markets. If the decision going against the government is upheld, it would be more damaging to the law than last month's Supreme Court decision on contraceptives because it strikes more directly at the law's heart. In his dissent, Judge Harry T. Edwards called the D.C. case a "not-so-veiled attempt to gut the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act."

Conservatives have spent years laying the groundwork for the challenge, which they viewed as their last, best chance at hollowing out the federal program. Activists lobbied state legislatures, urging them not to set up their own marketplaces in part to magnify the effect if the courts ruled their way. Four separate cases have been working their way through the courts relying on a similar rationale, among them the D.C. and Richmond cases.

The suits argued that Congress intended for the subsidies — in the form of tax credits — to go only to people in states that set up their own insurance exchanges, also referred to as marketplaces. They said it was meant as a “carrot,” to entice states to embrace this part of the law. They cited a section of the law that said the subsidies would be available to those “enrolled through an Exchange established by the State.”

Lower courts have sided with the government, which contended that Congress meant for the subsidies to be available in all states, including those that left the job of setting up a marketplace to the federal government. It said the intent was obvious from the law’s context, which is why the Internal Revenue Service wrote rules clarifying that the subsidies would be available everywhere.

In the 2-1 opinion Tuesday in the D.C. case, *Halbig v. Burwell*, Circuit Judge Thomas B. Griffith wrote that this interpretation is wrong. While the federal government may establish an exchange on behalf of a state, he wrote, “it does not in fact stand in the state’s shoes when doing so.”

But in the Richmond case, *King v. Burwell*, which was decided unanimously by that three-judge panel, Fourth Circuit Judge Roger L. Gregory wrote that it is not specified as to whether the subsidies should be available in states that declined to set up marketplaces.

Because of this ambiguity, the court concluded that the IRS acted appropriately, and that it is “clear that widely available tax credits are essential to fulfilling the Act’s primary goals and that Congress was aware of their importance when drafting the bill,” Gregory wrote.

Read the court decisions

Obamacare

D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in *Halbig v. Burwell*

4th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in *King v. Burwell*

The D.C. Circuit panel was made up of two Republican and one Democratic appointee. The Fourth Circuit panel was comprised of two Democratic appointees and one judge — Gregory — who was nominated by a Bill Clinton and then renominated by George W. Bush.

Supporters of the health-care law predicted that these challenges will ultimately be unsuccessful. “Today’s decision represents the high-water mark for Affordable Care Act opponents, but the water will recede very quickly,” said Ron Pollack, executive director of the consumer health organization Families USA, in a statement.

Republicans, however, immediately cited the decision as yet more evidence that the law is flawed.

“Today’s decision rightly holds the Obama administration accountable to the law. The plain text of Obamacare authorizes subsidies only through state exchanges, not the federal exchange,” said Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee. “The court considered the Administration’s justifications and came to an unmistakable conclusion: President Obama overreached.”

If the D.C. decision is upheld, it would have wide-ranging consequences for states that declined to set up their own marketplaces.

The ruling would affect 27 states, most with Republican leaders who oppose the law, and another nine states that partially opted out of setting up their own marketplaces. Those states are instead being served by the federal marketplace, HealthCare.gov.

Companies in those states would no longer have to offer health insurance to their workers under the so-called employer mandate, which kicks in next year. This is because under the law, employers are only hit with penalties for non-compliance if one or more of their workers ends up buying health coverage with the help of a subsidy.

And it would put insurance financially out of reach for the millions of Americans relying on subsidies this year to pay their insurance premiums.

About 5.4 million people signed up for health insurance on the federal marketplace through the spring, the government says. Of them, about 87 percent received subsidies, according to federal data.

More than nine in 10 people in states relying on the federal marketplace bought health plans with the help of the subsidies. The average tax credit for a person this year is \$276, lowering the person’s premium from an average price of \$345 per month to an average of \$69, federal figures show.

The subsidies are in many cases sizeable. In Wyoming, for example, the average mid-grade plan on the federal marketplace costs \$99 — but only with the help of a \$444 per month subsidy.

Starting this year, most Americans must carry health insurance or pay a fine. However, it is likely that the vast majority of the people affected by this ruling would not be subject to a fine if they drop their health insurance, economists say. The reason is that the penalty does not apply to people whose health insurance costs would exceed 8 percent of their income.

Without the subsidies, insurance would no longer be considered affordable by this standard for 99 percent of people who receive them, earning them exemptions from the penalty, according to an analysis by the Constitutional Accountability Center, a think tank and law firm.

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U.S. airlines prohibited from flying to or from Tel Aviv

Washington Post

July 22, 2014

U.S. airlines were banned from flying into Tel Aviv after a rocket landed within a mile of the airport serving Israel's second largest city Tuesday morning, the Federal Aviation Administration said.

The FAA imposed the 24-hour ban on U.S. flagged carriers, although the Israeli airline, El Al, continued flights from the airport Tuesday evening.

"The FAA immediately notified U.S. carriers when the agency learned of the rocket strike and informed them that the agency was finalizing [an official Notice to Airmen]," the FAA said. "The FAA will continue to monitor and evaluate the situation."

Airlines began canceling service to and from Israel on Tuesday after Delta Airlines diverted a flight bound for Tel Aviv and suspended service to Israel's second-largest city following reports of a rocket near the airport.

Ben Gurion International Airport in Tel Aviv remained in operation, with several flights approaching the airport late Tuesday, including one by El Al, followed by a Royal Jordanian Airlines flight. It was not clear whether the Jordanian flight planned to land in Tel Aviv or Amman, Jordan.

Seven more Israeli soldiers were killed in fighting and the Palestinian death toll rose to more than 500 on Monday as Israel announced that it had prevented two more attempts by Hamas militants to infiltrate the nation via tunnels from the Gaza Strip.

July 21, 2014 An Israeli soldier stands on a tank outside the northern Gaza Strip. Seven more Israeli soldiers were killed in fighting within 24 hours, bringing the military's death toll to 25 since the Israeli ground offensive in Gaza began Thursday, Israel's military said Monday evening. Baz Ratner/Reuters

The FAA action underscored heightened concerns about the safety of commercial jetliners after a Malaysia Airlines flight was shot down last week by an apparent missile over eastern Ukraine.

Delta was the first U.S. airline to cancel, suspending its service between New York and Tel Aviv after one of its flights between the two cities was diverted. The airline said it diverted flight 468, a Boeing 747 bound from New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport with 273 passengers and 17 crew on board to Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris.

In a statement, Delta said it made the decision after hearing "reports of a rocket or associated debris" near the Tel Aviv airport. The airline said it was working with passengers to help them reach their final destination.

US Airways said Tuesday it had two flights between Tel Aviv and Philadelphia in response to these security concerns.

United Airlines suspended all operations to and from Tel Aviv “until further notice,” the airline said in a statement to The Washington Post.

Tel Aviv is about 53 miles north of the Gaza Strip, where Israeli troops have moved in to root out Hamas militants who have fired hundreds of rockets into Israel in recent weeks.

The State Department issued a warning on Monday advising U.S. citizens to delay “non-essential travel to Israel and the West Bank,” owing to the current conflict between Israel and Hamas. This travel warning, replacing one issued earlier in the year, noted that long-range rockets from Gaza have reached Tel Aviv.

The cancellations and FAA action come days after a Malaysian passenger jet was shot down last Thursday in eastern Ukraine, killing 298 people. Authorities believe the flight was shot down by a missile battery located in an area held by pro-Russian separatists, and recorded conversations indicate that rebel leaders believed they were shooting down a military transport jet rather than a commercial airliner.

Though there was no immediate description of the rocket that landed near the Tel Aviv airport, the hundreds of rockets that Hamas militants have fired into Israel in recent weeks in no way resemble the missile which took down Malaysia Air flight 17. The Hamas weapons are surface to surface rockets that lack sophisticated guidance systems and often fall harmlessly in remote, scarcely populated sections of Israel.

The Malaysian airliner was believed to have been struck by a Russian-make Buk SA-11 surface to air missile. The plane was flying at an altitude of 33,000 feet when the missile struck.

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Rev. Al Sharpton will be in Birmingham next week for grand opening of his group's headquarters

Al.com

July 23, 2014

Barnett Wright

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- The Rev. Al Sharpton, president of the New York-based National Action Network, will be in Birmingham next week for the grand opening of his local chapter's headquarters.

Sharpton will be joined by Sheila Tyson, president of the NAN's Birmingham chapter. The grand opening is scheduled for Wed. July 30.

"It's an honor to have him here," said Tyson, a Birmingham City Councilor. "This city has been a mecca for all social justice issues whether voters' rights, the fight against police abuse or civil rights. "

Tyson said the First Avenue North headquarters are being spruced up now and will be ready for Sharpton's visit.

She said the grand opening is tied to Sharpton's push to commemorate the 1964 Freedom Summer activities where civil rights leaders, activists, local citizens and others gathered in Mississippi for an extensive voter registration project.

Sharpton wrote in his blog that 50 years after Freedom Summer renewed voter registration efforts are needed after the U.S. Supreme Court last year "gutted" the Voting Rights Act when it declared Section 5 of the Act unconstitutional.

Sharpton is activist, preacher and former presidential candidate. He is nationally known for his battles against racial injustice.

Sharpton has supporters who say he has been instrumental in important causes to the African-American community such as the fight against police abuse. He also has critics who say he is an opportunist who will use a cause to further his own agenda.

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Poll: Alabamians, other Southerners more likely to own guns, be conservative, be proud of America

Yellowhammer News

July 23, 2014

Cliff Sims

According to an extensive study conducted by the Pew Research Center, Alabamians and other Southerners are more likely to own guns, hold conservative political views and "feel proud to be American" than individuals who live in other parts of the United States, especially the Northeast.

The Pew Research Center conducted their annual "American Trends Panel" survey of 3,243 adults between April 29 and May 27.

Here are 5 takeaways Yellowhammer gleaned from the poll, some of them followed by a comment from Pew's senior editor Rich Morin.

Most of them probably aren't surprising, but do any jump out at you as unexpected? Let us know in the comment section below.

1. Roughly one-third of Americans with children under 18 have a gun in the home

...including 34% of families with children younger than 12. That's nearly identical to the share of childless adults or those with older children who have a firearm at home.

2. Nationally, whites are about twice as likely to own a gun than blacks and hispanics

While blacks are significantly more likely than whites to be gun homicide victims, blacks are only about half as likely as whites to have a firearm in their home (41% vs. 19%). Hispanics are less likely than blacks to be gun homicide victims and half as likely as whites to have a gun at home (20%).

3. The racial divide between gun owners and non-gun owners is even greater in the South

White southerners are significantly more likely to have a gun at home (47%) than whites in other regions. But because blacks disproportionately live in the South and are only half as likely to have a gun at home as whites, the overall rate for the southern region falls to 38%.

4. 49% of Republicans, 22% percent of Democrats and 37% of Independents own a gun

5. Americans who have a gun at home see themselves differently than do other adults

Adults in gun-owning households are more likely to think of themselves as an "outdoor person" (68% vs. 51%) or "a typical American" (72% vs. 62%), and to say "honor and duty are my core values" (59% vs. 48%).

6. Gun owners are really proud to be Americans

About six-in-ten gun household members (64%) say they "often feel proud to be American." In contrast, about half (51%) of other adults say this.

7. Gun owners are more likely to be sportsmen

Not surprisingly, members of gun-owning households are more than twice as likely to identify themselves as a "hunter, fisher or sportsman" (37% vs. 16%).

Here are a five other interesting stats from the survey that don't have anything to do with guns:

1. Support for gay marriage has exactly doubled since 1996, from 27% to 54%.

2. Support for marijuana legalization has more than doubled since 1995, from 25% to 54%

3. More individuals favor Common Core (46%) than oppose (39%) based on what they've heard so far. However, 40% say they know "nothing at all" about Common Core. Also the "strong opposition" (15%) is more widespread than the "strong support" (9%).

4. More Americans still oppose ObamaCare (53%) than approve (43%), but those who oppose are torn about what they want their elected officials to do now that it is being implemented. 30%

want to their elected officials to “do what they can to make it work,” while 19% want them to “do what they can to make it fail.”

5. 51% of Americans think abortion should be legal “in all or most cases,” while 43% think it should be illegal.

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Tuscaloosa City Council changes ordinance on ticket scalping

Tuscaloosa News

July 23, 2014

The City Council on Tuesday approved an amendment to the municipal ordinance that now requires all members of a ticket reselling business to be licensed by City Hall.

Capt. Rodney Gilliam, head of the Tuscaloosa Police Department’s Code Enforcement Division, told the City Council’s Public Safety Committee last week that runners purchase tickets from other individuals before sporting events — primarily University of Alabama football games — and return them to the licensed reseller.

With the City Council’s vote, runners as well as the re-sellers must purchase a \$100 business license in order to legally operate.

The licenses must be on display while the resellers are in operation, and Gilliam said the licenses could be purchased from the city’s Revenue Department or from code enforcement officers at the games.

City Hall has been licensing ticket resellers, or scalpers, since the 1970s, officials said.