



Speaker's Press Clips  
Thursday, July 24, 2014

- *AP*: [Bentley backsteps on call for special session](#)
- *Al.com*: [Governor calls for special session to use education funds to pay for industrial recruitment](#)
- *Montgomery Advertiser*: [Bentley mulls special legislative session](#)
- *Al.com*: [Governor Robert Bentley says call for special session 'misinterpreted'](#)
- *Al.com*: [Only 9 Alabama Accountability Act scholarships awarded in 2013; number to rise sharply this year](#)
- *Times Daily*: [New state law expands interlock device use in DUI convictions](#)
- *Al.com*: [Flood of young immigrants could end up taxing state's education, public service systems, Gov. Robert Bentley says](#)
- *Al.com*: [Bentley says national leaders should look to Alabama as model for running government](#)
- *Al.com*: [State pays \\$75,000 for rights to 'Sweet Home Alabama'](#)
- *WSFA*: [Gov. Bentley says Black Belt moving ahead; not prepared for Medicaid expansion](#)
- *Decatur Daily*: [Decatur schools get \\$100K grant for tech](#)
- *Montgomery Advertiser*: [ASU chairman signed for \\$100K transfer days before meeting](#)
- *Al.com*: [Users of free government cellphones to start paying state 911 tax](#)
- *Al.com*: [10,000 Alabamians to get insurance refunds due to Obamacare](#)
- *Al.com*: [Governor excited about I-10 bridge, says funding questions will be answered another day](#)
- *Al.com*: [Feds offer funds to help poor Alabama communities 'reimagine' workforce development](#)
- *Al.com*: [Congressman Byrne to host Facebook town hall meeting this afternoon](#)
- *AP*: [Army: Patient IDs wrongly trashed at Ala base](#)
- *Al.com*: [Out of this world: Tuskegee University joining with firm hoping to build next NASA spacecraft](#)
- *Roll Call*: [Sessions: 'Colossal Error' to Pass Immigration Spending Without Blocking 'Administrative Amnesty'](#)
- *Washington Post*: [House Republicans unveil plan to deal with border crisis](#)
- *Politico*: [Unions put teachers on streets — for votes](#)

FULL TEXT

### **Bentley backsteps on call for special session**

*The Associated Press*

July 23, 2014

CHATOM — Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley said Wednesday that he plans to call a special session of the Legislature to use money from the state's education budget to pay for economic incentives to lure new companies.

Bentley made the remarks Wednesday at a workforce development summit in Washington County, AL.com reported. He said the special session would come after the election in November.

Later Wednesday evening, he issued a statement saying he would not call a special session without consulting legislative leaders and that he has no plans to hurt the Education Trust Fund.

Lawmakers haven't been enthusiastic about the idea of a special session. Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, said he opposes it.

"I think we've got so many challenges with the budget that I'm going to be very resistant to offer any kind of economic incentive packages," he said. "I'm not on board."

But others were more positive about it.

Sen. Arthur Orr of Decatur, who chairs the Senate's General Fund budget committee, said the state relies too much on borrowing money by selling bonds to fund economic incentives and needs to look at other options.

"The idea of issuing debt to fund economic development certainly in my opinion is not the best way to support economic development," Orr said.

"There are better ways to achieve that goal."

Orr said he's talked with Alabama Secretary of Commerce Greg Canfield about alternatives but wasn't aware of specific proposals.

House Speaker Mike Hubbard of Auburn said in a statement that private-sector job creation and a pro-business environment are priorities for the Republican majority. But he said he hasn't seen a proposal and said it wouldn't be wise to call a special session without involving legislative leaders.

House Minority Leader Craig Ford, D-Gadsden, was more firm in his opposition to the idea.

“This is how it begins: Raiding the education budget for tax incentives for out-of-state corporations,” he said in an email. “The next step will be combining the budgets so they can pay for prisons with our children’s education funds.”

In a statement issued Wednesday evening, Bentley said that “any economic incentive package I propose will guarantee millions of dollars more for education.”

“I will work closely with the legislature to make sure we have the most competitive economic incentive package in the country,” Bentley said. “I have fought hard for education during my entire career in public service. My goal is to grow the ETF so that we can provide a quality education for our children and to make sure our teachers and support personnel have competitive salaries and benefits.”

Bentley is looking at many options for economic development incentives, press secretary Yasamie August said.

“Calling a special session on economic development is one of many options that may be necessary to help Alabama continue to compete with other states to bring jobs to the state,” she said in an email. “The Governor will work with the Legislative Leadership before calling a special session.”

The state should have about \$150 million a year to pursue large projects, Bentley told attendees at the Delta Regional Authority conference. The money should come from a budget stabilization fund, not the Education Trust Fund itself, he said.

The governor said his office is still working on the specifics of a proposal and declined to discuss details.

“We don’t have any final proposal on that,” he said, later adding, “We will not do anything to hurt the Education Trust Fund.”

+++

### **Governor calls for special session to use education funds to pay for industrial recruitment**

*Al.com*

July 23, 2014

Brendan Kirby

CHATOM, Alabama – Gov. Robert Bentley said Wednesday that he plans to call a special session of the Legislature after the November election to shift from the state’s General Fund to education funding to pay for economic incentives to lure new businesses.

Speaking at a workforce development summit in Washington County, Bentley noted that the state is running short on money to lure manufacturers and other larger employers. That money traditionally has come from the General Fund, which pays for Medicaid, prisons and other non-education functions of government.

But Bentley said the additional tax benefits that new businesses bring to Alabama mostly flow to the Education Trust Fund.

"Who pays for the incentives? It's not education, but they benefit from it totally. ... You ought to eat what you kill," he said.

Senior lawmakers have been lukewarm toward a special session, and Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, said Wednesday that he opposes it.

"Who pays for the incentives? It's not education, but they benefit from it totally. ... You ought to eat what you kill." -- Gov. Robert Bentley

"I think we've got so many challenges with the budget that I'm going to be very resistant to offer any kind of economic incentive packages," he said. "I'm not on board."

The Democratic leader in the state House of Representatives, Craig Ford of Gadsden, said the governor should be focusing efforts on growing small businesses that are the backbone of the economy instead of chasing multinational corporations with expensive tax abatements. And, he added, a state lottery or an increase in the cigarette tax should fund the programs – not education funds.

"This is just par for the course with the governor," he said.

The Alabama Department of Commerce announced earlier this year that it was studying ways to revamp the state's economic incentives structure.

Other lawmakers expressed more support Wednesday.

Sen. Arthur Orr of Decatur, who chairs the Senate's General Fund budget committee, said the state needs to revamp its economic incentive program because it depends too much on borrowing money by selling bonds.

"The idea of issuing debt to fund economic development certainly in my opinion is not the best way to support economic development," Orr said. "There are better ways to achieve that goal."

Orr said he had discussions earlier this year with Alabama Secretary of Commerce Greg Canfield about alternatives. He said he has not seen any proposals for what might be introduced in a special session, but said there's still plenty of time for the governor to share those with legislative leadership to build support before a special session.

Orr said Alabama needs to make changes to be more competitive.

"Right now it would appear the case can be made that Alabama is at a marginal competitive disadvantage because of our current structure for economic development incentives," he said. "It would appear that other states have more arrows in their quiver than we do when it comes to incentives."

House Speaker Mike Hubbard of Auburn issued a statement saying that private sector job creation and a pro-business environment are priorities for the Republican majority in the House.

"That being said, I have seen no proposal details from the governor or anyone in his office and I think it would be unwise to call a special session without involving the legislative leadership," Hubbard said.

Rep. Steve Clouse of Ozark, who chairs the General Fund committee in the House, said, "My only thoughts are we need to make sure we stay competitive, particularly with the bordering states, on economic development incentives. But then the question always is where is the money coming from?"

Sen. Trip Pittman, chairman of the Senate's education budget committee, said legislators should evaluate the results the state has gotten from incentive spending as part of considering any possible changes.

"When you start talking about changing you need to look at what you've been doing and how well that has worked," Pittman said.

The chairman of the House education budget committee, Rep. Bill Poole of Tuscaloosa, said he could not comment because he had not discussed or seen any proposals.

Bentley told people at the Delta Regional Authority conference that the state should have about \$150 million a year to go after large economic development projects. He said the money should come from a budget stabilization fund and not the Education Trust Fund, itself. Having the money is crucial to compete with other states, he said.

"We have to be in the ballgame," he said.

Questioned by reporters after his address, Bentley declined to discuss details of his proposal. He said his administration is still working on the specifics.

"We don't have any final proposal on that," he said, later adding, "We will not do anything to hurt the Education Trust Fund."

+++

### **Bentley mulls special legislative session**

*Montgomery Advertiser*

July 23, 2014

Brian Lyman

Gov. Robert Bentley is considering an economic development incentives package that could lead him to call a special session, a spokeswoman said Wednesday.

Lawmakers and a member of Bentley's cabinet Wednesday broadly described the package as an effort to increase the state's competitiveness with other states, and reduce Alabama's dependence on indebtedness in crafting its incentive packages. However, specifics were few and far between.

"Governor Bentley is looking at many different options for an economic development incentives package," spokeswoman Jennifer Ardis said in an email Wednesday afternoon. "Calling a Special Session on economic development is one of many options that may be necessary to help Alabama continue to compete with other states to bring jobs to the state."

At least one legislative leader has expressed caution about new economic incentives. Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, said last week that "we need to look at what we're giving industries" in light of a potential \$200 million deficit in the state's General Fund next year.

Marsh reiterated those concerns Wednesday, saying that the problems the state faces -- from the General Fund to the poor state of the prison system -- meant that he would oppose a one-issue special session.

"The General Fund is terrible, and the Education Trust Fund has its challenges as well," he said. "It's hard to talk about taking money out of it at this point for any of those situations."

House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, was neutral about the proposal in a statement released Wednesday.

"I have seen no proposal details from the Governor or anyone in his office, and I think it would be unwise to call a special session without involving the legislative leadership," the statement said.

Ardis said in the statement that the governor would work with legislative leadership to determine the best course of action.

The state offers a wide variety of economic incentives and pays for them out of different pots. Sales and income tax incentives come out of the Education Trust Fund; bonds issued from the state's Capital Improvement Trust Fund are paid for through oil and gas revenues, and the General Fund helps pay some debts on bonds issues by the state.

Alabama Secretary of Commerce Greg Canfield, a member of Bentley's cabinet, declined Wednesday to discuss specifics about the package being contemplated, but said there was a broad goal of trying to reduce the amount of borrowing in state packages. Approving new bonds or raising debt ceilings for economic incentives frequently requires constitutional amendments, which must first be approved by the Legislature and then by state voters, a process that can take months or years.

"I want to reduce our dependency on borrowing funds for 100 percent of discretionary incentives," Canfield said. "If we reduce borrowing to a sustainable amount, we can sustain economic growth and job creation and capital development in the state. (If) that leads to true growth in GDP, that's the course we ought to take."

How the state would replace borrowing, however, is unclear. The General Fund's resources are stretched to the limit and the Education Trust Fund operates under a Rolling Reserve cap that limits growth in the fund.

Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, the chairman of the Senate's Finance and Taxation General Fund committee, said the goal of the incentives would be improving the state's competitiveness with neighboring states.

"Other states have various incentives that we do not have here in Alabama. They have more arrows in the quiver than they can use for projects that the state seeks to pursue."

The news caught a number of lawmakers by surprise. Reps. Steve Clouse, R-Ozark and Bill Poole, R-Tuscaloosa, the chairmen of the House's General Fund and Education Trust Fund committee, said Wednesday they had not spoken with the governor about any proposals. Clouse said he saw a need to stay "competitive" with other states in attracting jobs, but was equally aware of the trouble in the General Fund.

"In the past, we've paid off debt service with oil and gas revenues, but those prices are going down, so we're taking money out of the General Fund to pay debt service," he said. "That's a concern for me."

House Minority Leader Craig Ford, D-Gadsden, was sharply critical of the proposal, saying it amounted to "raiding the education budget for tax incentives for out-of-state corporations."

"The next step will be combining the budgets so they can pay for prisons with our children's education funds," Ford said in a statement.

Bentley has centered his term -- and his re-election campaign -- around jobs and job creation, but the news has been mixed. The state's unemployment rate fell from 8.9 percent in January, 2011 -- when Bentley took office -- to 6.1 percent last January. However, on a year-to-year basis the unemployment rate has crept higher over the last four months.

Surveys of Alabama's workforce have presented contrasting messages. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' payroll survey found the number of employed workers in Alabama increased from 1.866 million in June 2011 to 1.909 million this past June -- an increase of about 43,000, but below the state's pre-recession peak of 2.015 million in December, 2007. The generally high-paying manufacturing sector added about 16,000 jobs during that timeframe, though other sectors, most notably construction, have either remained flat or shed positions.

The BLS' household survey showed a slight decrease of 3,600 employed people from June 2011 to June 2014, with a reduction of the workforce of about 52,000 workers. The shrinkage could reflect everything from individuals dropping out of the workforce to retirements; Alabama's median age is above the national average.

+++

## **Governor Robert Bentley says call for special session 'misinterpreted'**

*Al.com*

July 23, 2014

William Thornton

OXFORD, Alabama -- Gov. Robert Bentley, appearing this evening at an event in Oxford, said a trial balloon he floated earlier in the day about calling a special session of the Legislature was misinterpreted.

Earlier Wednesday, Bentley was quoted as calling for a special session after the November election to shift money from the state's General Fund to education funding to pay for economic incentives to lure new businesses.

At a workforce development summit in Washington County, Bentley noted that the state is running short on money to lure manufacturers and other larger employers. That money traditionally has come from the General Fund, which pays for Medicaid, prisons and other non-education functions of government.

But by the evening, he appeared to back off some of those comments, saying he would "never" call for using money from the Education Trust Fund, unless that money could be immediately pumped back in.

"We will never take money from it," he said. "Never. We're going to support education."

Instead, he said a special session was up for discussion.

"As to a special session, we've made no final decision on that," Bentley said. "We'll work closely with the our education leadership, with Sen. (Del) Marsh and Speaker (Mike) Hubbard. We'd be in a consensus before we called a special session."

Marsh, who was at the same event, said he did not know what industry Bentley may be trying to attract, but he could not support a special session at the moment without more information.

Bentley also didn't comment on what kind of industry the state is seeking, but that incentives are needed because Alabama is competing with other states in the region offering packages of their own.

"If we're going to compete, we have to have incentives," he said. "Of course, we get that money back through taxes in four or five years."

+++

**Only 9 Alabama Accountability Act scholarships awarded in 2013; number to rise sharply this year**

*Al.com*



July 23, 2014  
Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Scholarship organizations created under the Alabama Accountability Act raised almost \$25 million in 2013 and awarded only nine scholarships before Dec. 31.

But the low number is not indicative of the participation in the program, said a spokeswoman for the largest scholarship fund.

Sonya DiCarlo of the Alabama Opportunity Scholarship Fund said most of the organizations were not in a position to give scholarships until January because of the limited time frame. AOSF has awarded more than 1,300 this year, she said.

The Alabama Department of Revenue released the 2013 numbers today taken from annual reports submitted by seven scholarship granting organizations.

The Chambers County Education Foundation awarded five scholarships totaling \$15,017.

Beacons of Hope, in Birmingham, awarded four scholarships totaling \$9,723.

All nine of the scholarships awarded went to children who qualified for free or reduced lunch.

The other five scholarship granting organizations did not report any scholarships awarded last year.

DiCarlo said the AOSF awarded 768 scholarships for the spring semester and has awarded 555 for the school year that begins in August. She said the organization has received more than 11,000 applications.

In a news release, the AOSF says the average household income for applicants is \$30,144 for a family of four and more than 67 percent are minorities.

Other numbers from the Department of Revenue summary released today:

- The AOSF raised \$17.8 million from 25 contributions.
- Scholarships for Kids, in Birmingham, raised \$6.3 million from 753 contributions.
- Beacons of Hope raised \$364,262 from 79 contributions.
- AAA Scholarship Foundation in Prattville raised \$85,380 from 10 contributions.
- Chambers County Education Fund raised \$80,000 from 10 contributions.

-- Global Community Development Ministries in Lafayette raised \$37,000 from one contribution.

-- Circle of Love Outreach in Selma raised \$49,500 from four contributions. (Circle of Love failed to submit the required annual report, according to the Department of Revenue.)

-- Inspire & Achieve in Huntsville reported no contributions.

The Accountability Act authorized creation of organizations to accept donations and give scholarships for private school tuition to students in families who make no more than 150 percent of the median household income in Alabama. The median is about \$41,000.

Before Sept. 15 each year, the scholarships must go to children zoned for failing public schools. After that, scholarship money left over can go to other students.

Donors to the scholarship organizations receive a credit on their state income tax. The total amount of credits allowed under the law is \$25 million.

That money would otherwise go to the Education Trust Fund. Critics of the Accountability Act say it is wrongly shifting money from public schools to private schools.

The law has been challenged in court several times. A Montgomery judge ruled in May that it violated the state Constitution. Lawyers for the state are appealing to the Alabama Supreme Court.

Lesley Searcy, executive director of the AOSF, said in a news release today that public schools work well for most children, but not all.

"Thousands of parents with little means, from 59 Alabama counties this year, are hoping to find a better fit for their children," she said. "This program gives them the chance to do that for the first time."

Larry Lee, a longtime advocate for public education and frequent critic of the Accountability Act, said when he looked at today's numbers he was struck by the fundraising prowess of the AOSF, which is chaired by former Gov. Bob Riley.

The AOSF raised \$17.8 million from 25 contributions, an average of about \$716,000.

Corporate donors to the scholarship organizations receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for up to one-half of their state income tax liability. Individual and married couple donors receive a dollar-for-dollar credit up to one-half of their tax liability, with a \$7,500 cap.

+++

**New state law expands interlock device use in DUI convictions**

*Times Daily*

July 23, 2014  
Mary Sell

MONTGOMERY — Officials in Alabama are hoping that the expanded use of interlock devices in the vehicles of convicted drunken drivers will decrease DUI-related fatalities. It also means that drivers can get their licenses back sooner — for a fee.

State law has allowed for the devices for a few years, but legislation passed this year expands their required usage.

Now, first-time offenders with less than a .15 blood alcohol level have the option of getting the device, rather than losing their license for 90 days. All other offenders have the option of losing their license for a shortened period of time and getting the device earlier. Interlock devices are required for a set time for repeat offenses.

For example, on a second DUI offense, previous state law required license revocation for one year and an interlock device for two. Under the new law, the defendants can get their license back after 45 days, if they get the device installed early.

According to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, 50 to 75 percent of convicted drunken drivers continue to drive on suspended licenses and ignition interlocks reduce DUI recidivism by 67 percent compared to offenders with a license suspension only.

The legislation was sponsored in the Senate by Bill Holtzclaw, R-Madison.

Rep. Micky Hammon, R-Decatur, co-sponsored the bill in the House.

“Mothers Against Drunk Driving has been pushing this because it works,” Hammon said. “I think you’ll see an immediate impact (on drunken driving fatalities).”

The law went into effect this month and is retroactive, meaning that people with suspended licenses from previous convictions can apply to have the devices installed and legally get on the road again.

Device installation is \$95 and there’s a monthly \$75 calibration fee, said Donna Tate, director of public relations for Smart Start of Alabama, which provides the equipment and downloads monthly reports on each one for local court systems. Smart Start also looks for evidence of device tampering each month. The devices require drivers to blow into a mouthpiece and their blood alcohol content is measured before their vehicle will start.

There are 12 Smart State locations in the state, including one in Decatur. It also operates in all 50 states.

“In states like Arizona, Washington and Louisiana, they’ve seen anywhere from a 40 percent to 70 percent drop in DUI fatalities,” Tate said.

Tate called Alabama's new interlock law one of the nation's more aggressive.

In situations where a family shares a vehicle, all drivers will have to be trained to use the interlock device, Tate said.

In addition to having to pay the device costs, defendants pay \$300 to the state. The money is divided between the Alabama Interlock Indigent Fund, the state judicial Administration Fund, the Highway Traffic Safety Fund and the District Attorney's Solicitor Fund.

+++

### **Flood of young immigrants could end up taxing state's education, public service systems, Gov. Robert Bentley says**

*Al.com*

July 24, 2014

Leada Gore

Saying they are concerned states could end up bearing the burden of caring for the stream of unaccompanied minors crossing into the U.S., Gov. Robert Bentley and five other Republican state leaders are calling on President Barack Obama to develop a plan to deal with the growing immigration crisis.

In a one-page letter dated July 22, Bentley, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback, North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory, Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett and Utah Gov. Gary Herbert, said the influx of as many as 50,000 immigrants – most of them minors – since October could end up stressing state resources.

During the National Governors Association meeting in Nashville, the governors met with Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell. During that visit, they said, the group learned the federal government is not requiring the relatives who are taking in the undocumented immigrants be citizens themselves.

"This raises real questions as to whether these children will maintain appropriate contacts with our legal system and will follow necessary procedures designed to protect both them and the American public," the governors wrote.

Nearly half the immigrant children sent to live with relatives fail to show up for immigration proceedings, the governors said.

"We are concerned that there will be significant numbers who will end up using public schools, social services and health systems largely funded by the states," they added.

Housing sought for 5,000 more children

Tens of thousands of minors – most from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras – have crossed into the country through the southwestern border since October, creating a humanitarian and

political crisis for the Obama administration. The minors are currently being housed at three military bases and on Wednesday, the Pentagon said it has agreed to provide housing for an additional 5,000 children.

An agreement signed last week by the Department of Defense extends the current housing agreement through Jan. 31, 2015. The original plan called for up to 3,600 children to be housed for up to 120 days, with Fort Sill, Okla., Naval Base Ventura County, Calif., and Lackland Air Force Base, Texas providing shelter.

The Defense Department has not selected the bases where the additional 5,000 might be placed, only saying it is considering an "extensive list of possible locations." The children will be housed at the bases until returned to their home countries, a process that, unless changed, could take years.

Lack of immigration control encourages more to come

In their letter, the governors said the failure to return to unaccompanied children in a timely manner "will send a message that will encourage a much larger movement towards our southern border," something that will "put a significant number of children at risk of abuse and neglect.

"More than 57,000 children have crossed the border since October last year," they wrote. "Reports are that 90,000 children could make the journey by this fall. With no end in sight, we need to have a plan to deal with this crisis in a humanitarian and practical way."

+++

### **Bentley says national leaders should look to Alabama as model for running government**

*Al.com*

July 23, 2014

Brendan Kirby

CHATOM, Alabama – National leaders would do well to look at the Heart of Dixie as a model for how to run a government, Gov. Robert Bentley said Wednesday.

Bentley, who answered questions from audience members and later the media after his keynote address at the Delta Regional Authority's workforce development summit in Washington County, said the next president should come from the ranks of the nation's governors. He did not offer up himself but said the federal government has a lot to learn from Montgomery.

"The federal government does not create jobs. They can impede jobs. But they don't create jobs," he said. "The federal government needs to look at Alabama. I'll tell them how to run the government."

In addition to dispensing some unsolicited advice to the federal government, Bentley pontificated on subjects ranging from Tuesday's federal court rulings on the Affordable Care Act to

Alabama's prekindergarten program. He also defended the state's huge delegation to an international air show in London.

Bentley said he was proud that Alabama's contingent at this month's Farnborough Air Show, at nearly 100 public officials and business leaders, dwarfed that of competitor states. He said he was the only governor who was "working the show."

Bentley noted that both of Alabama's U.S. senators, U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne, R-Fairhope, and deans from the Auburn University, the University of Alabama and the University of Alabama at Huntsville were among those who attempted to build on the success of luring an Airbus plant to Mobile.

"We're the only state that does that – and it shows," he said.

Experts long have regarded Alabama's prekindergarten program as one of the county's best but have lamented that it serves so few children. Bentley said the state has put an additional \$10 million into the initiative each year of his governorship. He said he supports continued expansion and said it would be targeted at the students who need it most. He said all students in impoverished Wilcox County, for instance, have access to prekindergarten.

"If you don't have a foundation, it's like building your house on sand," he said.

Asked about Tuesday's competing federal appeals court rulings – one declaring health insurance subsidies illegal in states that did not set up their own exchanges under the Affordable Care Act and one ruling them legal – Bentley said he expects the U.S. Supreme Court to resolve the split.

Echoing comments Tuesday by Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange, the governor said he hopes the high court strikes down the subsidies and that the whole law implodes as a result.

"It's a way we, as states, can fight Obamacare, and that's what we did," he said.

+++

### **Decatur schools get \$100K grant for tech**

*Decatur Daily*

July 23, 2014

Deangelo McDaniel

Decatur City Schools' spending on technology will get another boost Friday when the district receives a \$100,000 state grant.

The Appalachian Regional Commission funds will help the district purchase as many as 300 computers for the school system's "bring your own device" program for secondary students, DCS technology supervisor Kathy Rains said.

“We’re going to provide a variety of computers and devices for high school students to check out who can’t afford to buy their own,” she said.

Superintendent Ed Nichols said the devices will be a mix of Windows and Apple products.

“We figure by the time students reach high school, they have found the devices they want, and all are not Windows-based,” he said.

The state grant comes less than a year after the school board voted to spend \$1.7 million for computers, new servers and workstation upgrades.

Decatur’s technology budget is \$1 million more than the district spent a decade ago.

State leaders said one of the things that made Decatur’s application appealing is the district is piloting project-based learning, a teaching method that focuses on problem-solving skills, teamwork and communication.

“We’re going to provide students with real-world issues and problems for them to work on as a team,” Rains said.

During a training session in April, state Superintendent Tommy Bice said what Decatur teachers will be doing this year at Austin High, Brookhaven Middle, West Decatur Elementary, Leon Sheffield Elementary and Chestnut Grove Elementary could be the future of education throughout the state.

“The days of memorizing and passing a test is no longer good enough for students,” he said.

Rains said technology is critical to this teaching method because it gives students and teachers access to more information.

Last year, the district outfitted every middle school student with a laptop computer.

Rains said the school system plans to have at least 500 computers at both Austin and Decatur high schools.

“This is part of our one-to-one initiative,” she said.

+++

### **State pays \$75,000 for rights to 'Sweet Home Alabama'**

*Al.com*

July 23, 2014

Leada Gore

Drivers in Alabama will soon be greeted with the slogan "Welcome to Sweet Home Alabama."

The state is paying Universal Records, which owns the trademark for the phrase from the Lynyrd Skynyrd rock anthem, \$75,000 for five-year rights. The phrase will be featured on new green and white signs at the state line. Smaller versions of the signs will be placed at welcome centers.

Currently, the signs say "Alabama the Beautiful."

The new signs will be erected during the next few months, State Transportation Director John Cooper announced last week and will cost \$61,000.

The state's agreement with Universal will allow it to use the phrase in other types of tourism promotions and Alabama has the option of renewing the agreement after the first five-year term.

The phrase is a natural fit and an important part of marketing the state to visitors, Lee Sentell, Alabama Department of Tourism and Travel Director, told AP.

"'Sweet Home Alabama' works for our state because it is a very popular song, and it is a very popular phrase," he said.

"Sweet Home Alabama," a Southern rock classic, was released 40 years ago this year. The song, recorded in Doraville, Ga., was the band's cheeky response to artist Neil Young's "Southern Man." In 2009, the state began using the phrase on car license plates and it remained there until the design was changed this year.

The song appears in numerous movies, including "Forrest Gump," 2003's "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre," "Crimson Tide," "Con Air," "Joe Dirt," "Sweet Home Alabama" and "Despicable Me," and is a fixture at University of Alabama football games.

You can read more about "Sweet Home Alabama," [here](#).

+++

### **Gov. Bentley says Black Belt moving ahead; not prepared for Medicaid expansion**

*WSFA*

July 23, 2014

Max Reiss

THOMASVILLE, AL (WSFA) -

During a meeting of the Black Belt Commission in Thomasville Wednesday, Alabama's governor says he likes what he sees and hears from people working to move the region out of the economic doldrums.

"These things I'm hearing, they're great" Gov. Robert Bentley told the crowd of about 100 at the Thomasville Civic Center.



The governor said in order to increase business involvement and development in the depressed region, the leaders there need to keep doing what they're doing and the state has to continue lending its support.

"Once you have skilled workforce training and once you have and once you have a skilled workforce available they'll look at it and they'll look at this area just like they'll look at any other part of the state" Bentley said.

The region saw some of the most significant development in years less than two months ago when the Golden Dragon Copper Tubing Company opened its first American facility in rural Wilcox County, a few minutes from Thomasville in Sunny South, AL. The plant employs 300 people and the company has already announced plans for two expansions on the site.

"That project alone can change this region" Gov. Bentley says.

One participant, John Zippert who publishes the Greene County Democrat newspaper, challenged the governor on a way to improve the quality of life in the counties that make up the Black Belt.

"I would like for you to reconsider your position on Medicaid expansion" Zippert said to the governor in front of the audience. "There are people here with health needs that could be helped if they had Medicaid coverage."

Governor Bentley later told the audience that he wants to see a day when Alabama no longer needs Medicaid at all with everyone having a good paying job with private health insurance. What the governor describes would require the creation of potentially hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Bentley later said, "Medicaid is no good unless you have providers and we must have providers and we must provide a way to have someone see these patients."

"We need nurse practitioners, we need physicians' assistants. They have very few of them so you need to work on that part more than you do the Medicaid expansion."

+++

### **Users of free government cellphones to start paying state 911 tax**

*Al.com*

July 23, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- An estimated 200,000 low-income Alabamians who receive free cellphone service through a federal program will have to pay a state tax that supports 911 services starting Aug. 1.

Groups opposing the change wrote a letter to Gov. Robert Bentley this week. The company that provides the free cellphone service under the federal Lifeline program has filed a lawsuit to block it.

The monthly tax, which applies to cellphones and landlines, will increase from \$1.60 to \$1.75 a month starting Aug. 1, in addition to being expanded to include Lifeline users.

The tax, expected to generate about \$105 million this fiscal year, pays for personnel, infrastructure, equipment and other costs for 88 city and county 911 districts, said Jason Jackson, executive director of the Alabama 911 Board. Jackson said the tax provides the only state dollars for the 911 offices.

Jackson said the board had to increase the monthly tax and add Lifeline users to those paying the tax to meet its obligations to the local 911 offices. That's because of the steady decline in the number of landlines, he said.

"The only way we could continue to do what we're legislatively required to do was to go up on the rate," Jackson said.

A letter from seven organizations to the governor that was distributed as part of a press release this week called the tax on Lifeline users "punitive."

"Alabama's E-911 Board has gone where no other state has seen fit to go before: It has for no valid public policy reason imposed a punitive phone tax targeting the poorest of its poor residents who receive wireless Lifeline telephone service at no cost," the letter says.

The letter says some Lifeline users depend on the free phone service to get a job or keep a job.

The letter is signed by the Alliance for Generational Equity, the Consumer Action Partnership of Alabama, the Community Action Partnership, Consumer Action, National Consumers League, the National Grange and the North Alabama Patriots Tea Party.

Some of those groups have connections to TracFone Wireless Inc., which provides the Lifeline service in Alabama. They participated in the Keep America Connected to Opportunity Campaign, which has been supported by TracFone, said Will Harwood of The Hastings Group, who distributed the letter and news release.

"These groups all have real concerns about Lifeline Wireless state taxes and a number of them have spoken out separately in other states," Harwood said in an email.

TracFone, a Delaware corporation, filed a lawsuit in Montgomery County Circuit Court in January, seeking to block the 911 tax from applying to Lifeline users.

TracFone, which provides the Lifeline service through the brand name of SafeLink, uses a federal subsidy of \$9.25 a month to provide 250 minutes of free cell service a month to Lifeline customers, who also receive a free phone, according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit says there are about 200,000 SafeLink customers in Alabama. It says that many of those customers would have to drop the service if they had to pay the tax.

The Federal Communications Commission started the Lifeline program in 1985 to help low-income families have access to telephone service. In 2005, the Lifeline discounts became available for wireless services.

There's an income cap, about \$15,750 for an individual and \$32,000 a year for a family of four, which is 135 percent of the federal poverty limit. Recipients of some other programs, including Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (food stamps) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, are eligible.

The letter to Bentley says that the \$1.75 monthly 911 tax will be one of the highest in the country. It characterizes the tax as a 19 percent tax increase for Lifeline users (based on the \$9.25 monthly benefit).

The 911 Board's Jackson said the comparisons with other states are "apples to oranges" because other states have local 911 fees, while Alabama does not.

Before 2012, Jackson said Alabama's 911 districts imposed local 911 taxes on landlines that varied from \$1.10 to \$5.50 a month, and there was a separate statewide tax on wireless phones of 70 cents a month.

Legislation passed that year eliminated the district taxes and made the statewide tax apply to both cellphones and landlines. That tax is now \$1.60 a month and increases to \$1.75 Aug. 1.

Legislation passed this year, Jackson said, authorized the board to apply the 911 tax to users of wireless Lifeline services. Jackson said Lifeline customers with landlines have paid the 911 tax for years.

The 911 Board initially proposed at \$1.80 tax, but a legislative panel recommended the \$1.75 instead.

+++

### **ASU chairman signed for \$100K transfer days before meeting**

*Montgomery Advertiser*

July 23, 2014

Josh Moon

Alabama State University board chairman Elton Dean authorized a \$100,000 transfer into an account controlled by trustees on June 30, documents obtained by the Montgomery Advertiser reveal.

The transfer documents show the money was placed in the board's account more than week before trustee Marvin Wiggins officially requested it at an executive committee meeting on July 9. Trustees sent that request to the full board for approval.

According to a notation in the margin of the paperwork, the transfer was requested by outgoing executive vice president John Knight and approved by outgoing vice president of finance Freddie Gallot on the pair's final day on the job – June 30. Knight first said he made the request after speaking with Dean, but later said he was mistaken, that Dean had made the request and that he had simply checked on it for him.

"That's why the notation is in the margin like that," Knight said. "I didn't make the request. (Dean) did. I checked on it and made sure everything was set. That's what that's about."

Despite a "completed" box on the transfer form being checked off, Knight also said it was his understanding that the \$100,000 had not yet been transferred into the board's account.

"Nothing has been transferred, because the trustees were uncomfortable approving a large amount like that without full board approval," Knight said. "My understanding is that the money was needed because the trustees were concerned about the questions from (the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) and Moody's and felt like they needed to hire some consultants to help with those questions."

The \$100,000 transfer was one of 10 transfers into the board's account since December 13, totaling \$211,000. Knight or former board of trustees liaison Bernadette Chapple authorized all but the final transfer.

"Making transfers like that is not uncommon in a budget that large," Knight said. "I would have to check with Dr. Gallot on where the money came from for those transfers, but our standing policy was to not hurt the bottom line. So, he would pull from an area in which we had some remaining funds that we could use."

The beginning balance in the board's account is unclear, but ASU financial records show trustees spent more than \$27,000 between Oct. 31 and when the first transfer of additional funds went into the account on Dec. 13. The majority of that money went to pay for trustees' travel and food, including charges for football game catering.

Wiggins, the board vice-chairman, requested a \$100,000 transfer of funds into the board's account to pay for "travel" near the end of a five-hour committee meeting two weeks ago. Other trustees were dismissive of the idea, with Herbert Young, the chair of the school's finance committee, saying the "funds aren't there for that."

Asked Wednesday if he was aware that the transfer had already been approved prior to that conversation, Young said, "I was not aware of that – no." He declined to comment further.

According to ASU officials, the \$100,000 has not been spent. Following a board resolution passed at its last meeting, any transfer of funds from one account at the university to another now has to have board approval.

New ASU vice president of finance Wanda Smith put a hold on the funds until that approval was made. Smith could not immediately be reached for comment.

+++

### **10,000 Alabamians to get insurance refunds due to Obamacare**

*Al.com*

July 24, 2014

Mike Oliver

Money cash, american hundred dollar bills isolated on a white background  
Nearly \$1 million in insurance refunds will be split among 10,000 Alabamians. (FILE)

More than 10,000 people in Alabama will get refunds averaging \$111 per family from certain health insurance companies, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will announce today.

The refunds come from a provision in the Affordable Care Act, called the medical loss ratio rule or the 80/20 rule, which requires insurers to spend at least 80 percent (85 percent in large group market) of premium dollars on patient care and quality improvement activities -- or refund money to consumers.

In Alabama 10,342 of the insured will split \$990,323. Nationally, \$330 million in refunds will go to 6.8 million people – an average of about \$80 per family.

Alabama's refunds come in the individual market. Golden Rule Insurance Company, owned by UnitedHealthcare, owes the lion's share of the refunds at \$937,229. The MEGA Life and Health Insurance Company owes \$44,863; and American General Life Insurance Company owes \$8,231.

UnitedHealthcare representatives didn't immediately respond to a request for comment by deadline. UnitedHealthcare earlier said has it filed to compete with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama and Humana on Alabama's federal exchanges when the next enrollment begins in November. The company elected not to sell on the exchanges this past year, the first time around.

Humana and BCBS owe no refunds. BCBS is far and away the market leader in health insurance in Alabama with a nearly 90 percent share.

"We have exceeded for years the medical loss ratio requirements that were established by the ACA," said BCBS spokeswoman Koko Mackin. "We return approximately 92 cents in customer

health benefits for every premium dollar received from our customers, which is well above the ACA's minimum requirements.'

Alabamians in the individual market who qualify for a refund may get it via check in the mail; a lump sum reimbursement to the credit or debit card account; or a reduction in future premiums, according to HHS.

"The 80/20 rule is bringing transparency and competition to the insurance market, ensuring that consumers are continuing to receive value for their premium dollars," HHS Secretary Sylvia Burwell said in a statement. "Standards like these created under the health care law are providing Alabamians with immediate savings and are helping to keep costs down over the long-term."

Nationwide, consumers have saved a total of \$9 billion on their health insurance premiums since the 80/20 rule took effect in 2012, according to HHS. Consumers saved \$3.8 billion last year in reduced premiums, HHS said in the report..

While refunds serve as a "stopgap measure" to make sure insurance customers are getting the right value, there is also an upfront savings because companies are charging lower premiums in face of the 80/20 rule, HHS says in the report.

"If insurance companies had maintained their 2011 ratios of premiums relative to the cost of medical care, consumers would likely have paid an estimated \$3.8 billion in additional premiums in 2013."

+++

### **Governor excited about I-10 bridge, says funding questions will be answered another day**

*Al.com*

July 23, 2014

Brendan Kirby

CHATOM, Alabama – Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley on Wednesday expressed elation that a long-planned bridge over the Mobile River appears to be moving forward and said there is plenty of time to figure out funding.

Speaking to reporters after a workforce development summit in Washington County, the governor said he was pleased that the Federal Highway Administration had released a draft of an environmental impact statement – a years-long process that had kept construction plans in a holding pattern.

"I am very excited about that," Bentley said. "This is a project that needs to be done."

The release of the environmental draft in some ways is the beginning, not the end, of the process. The government still must schedule public hearings, receive feedback and issue a final report.

A local consensus appears to have formed around the so-called "B prime" route, which would connect Interstate 10 at Virginia Street in Mobile with the Bayway. It would cross the Mobile River just south of the Mobile cruise terminal and move across Pinto Island. As part of the projected, the Bayway would be widened to eight lanes.

Then there is finding a way to pay for the project, which some officials have estimated at \$850 million or more. That is more than the federal government spent on all transportation projects in Alabama last year.

The state's 20 percent match would come to at least \$170 million. That, too, is an enormous sum for a state that has struggled to pay for routine transportation projects in recent years.

"We have to decide on how to fund it," Bentley acknowledged.

He said tolls could be an answer. He also said county and local governments likely would have to chip in a share. But he added that those decisions are a ways away.

"We haven't gotten to that point yet," the governor said.

Bentley said that if he is re-elected to a second term, he hopes to see progress by the time he leaves office. He said the first step is clearing the environmental issues.

"I think we've gotten past those hurdles," he said.

+++

### **Feds offer funds to help poor Alabama communities 'reimagine' workforce development**

*Al.com*

July 23, 2014

Brendan Kirby

CHATOM, Alabama – The Delta Regional Authority announced Wednesday that it is spending \$1.7 million to help "reimagine" workforce development in the Mississippi Delta region, including 20 counties in Alabama.

The federal-state agency, which represents 252 counties and parishes in an eight-state region, made the announcement in Washington County at the first of a series of summits planned throughout the larger region this summer.

"Just like the flow of the Mississippi River, the Delta economy is constantly changing – and our workforce training needs to change with it," Delta Regional Authority Federal Co-chairman Christopher Masingill said in a prepared statement. "Working with our state partners, we are committed to enhancing the system of how we train our workers and connect our people to the jobs of the future."

The money will pay for technical assistance for communities to strengthen the connection between education and job skills. Communities can apply for grants of up to \$50,000 for technical assistance. The region covers high-poverty counties and parishes along the Mississippi River, from southern Illinois to Louisiana. Some Alabama counties are included, even though the state does not touch the Mississippi River, because the profile of those counties is similar.

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley boasted during his keynote address at the conference that the state already has the best workforce training program in the country. He said the state has spent \$15 million on scholarships for dual enrollment programs that allow high school students to earn two-college degrees at the same time they obtain high school diplomas.

He said Alabama also has spent \$51 million on new programs and equipment at high schools and colleges.

Bentley created a workforce council made up of 31 members from business and industry.

"That's how business and industry and education work together, and that's the way it should be," he said.

Within the next two months, Bentley said, his administration will roll out a small business initiative that will pull all of the state's resources for small businesses under a single umbrella.

"By far, the most important thing we can do is organize, and also create training and education for people of our state, and that's what companies really look at," he said.

Chatham Mayor Howard Crouch praised the state's dual enrollment program and said 15 Washington County students had gotten two-year college degrees by the time they graduated from high school. He said one girl who showed up for a welding program with makeup and pretty clothes, and he recalled cautioning her that she might not find the program to her liking.

"She said to me, 'I and my family have been poor all our lives. If you don't give me the opportunity, we're going to stay poor all our lives,'" he said. "She turned out to be the best welder we had."

+++

### **Congressman Byrne to host Facebook town hall meeting this afternoon**

*Al.com*

July 24, 2014

Brendan Kirby

U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne, R-Fairhope, has held more than two-dozen town hall meetings across southwest Alabama since taking office in January.

Today, he will host one in cyberspace.



Byrne announced that he will answer questions from constituents on Facebook beginning at 1 p.m.

Congressman Bradley Byrne (AL-1) will answer constituent questions during a Facebook town hall meeting on Thursday afternoon. People can post questions here.

"It has been my priority from day one to stay in contact and accessible to the people I represent," he said in a prepared statement. "I am committed to using all resources available to stay in contact with the people back home in Alabama, including social media."

Byrne added that he is new to social media but realizes its value to communicate with people who cannot attend town hall meetings in person.

"Whether you have a question or just want to voice a concern, I hope people will take advantage of (the) Facebook town hall meeting," he said.

+++

### **Army: Patient IDs wrongly trashed at Ala base**

*The Associated Press*

July 23, 2014

OZARK, Ala. (AP) — The military says as many as 2,300 patients are affected by a breach of personal information at the Lyster Army Health Clinic at Fort Rucker.

Paper records with the names and Social Security numbers of patients were tossed into a recycling bin at the southeast Alabama base on July 2.

The Army says no medical information was released. But it's now sending letters to about 2,300 patients whose identifying information may have been compromised.

A spokeswoman says officials believe the papers were shredded before anyone could see them. The letters are going out to tell patients they can get free fraud monitoring for the next year because of the mistake.

+++

### **Out of this world: Tuskegee University joining with firm hoping to build next NASA spacecraft**

*Al.com*

July 23, 2014

Joseph D. Bryant

Students at Tuskegee University soon could play a hand at designing a new NASA spacecraft through partnership with a Nevada-based aerospace company.

Officials from Tuskegee and Sierra Nevada Corporation Thursday are set to announce plans to pursue a new cooperative educational and research program at the university.

Among the projects, students will have an opportunity to help design the Dream Chaser spacecraft, part of a competition to design the next generation NASA vehicle.

Dream Chaser is designed as a reusable spacecraft to provide transportation support for astronauts and cargo to and from orbit.

Sierra Nevada Corporation's Space Systems business division designs and manufactures advanced spacecraft, space vehicles, rocket motors and spacecraft subsystems and components for the U.S. Government, commercial customers as well as for the international market.

+++

### **Sessions: 'Colossal Error' to Pass Immigration Spending Without Blocking 'Administrative Amnesty'**

*Roll Call*

July 23, 2014

Sen. Jeff Sessions says it would be “institutional surrender” for the House to advance an immigration spending bill without preventing President Barack Obama from expanding “administrative amnesty” for millions of additional unauthorized immigrants.

The Alabama Republican made that case in a lengthy statement circulated Wednesday afternoon, and he expanded on those views in a brief conversation with CQ Roll Call.

“I think it would be a colossal error to pass any kind of legislation that does not prohibit the president from granting legal status to five or six million people, as he’s indicated he intends to do,” Sessions said. “I’m baffled that the House talking points didn’t deal with that ... The House principles didn’t address President Obama’s failure to execute the laws and expressed no concern about that danger.”

Sessions issued his statement in response to a report of recommendations to address the border crisis and the flood of unaccompanied migrant children from a House GOP “working group” led by Rep. Kay Granger of Texas. Appropriators on both sides of the Rotunda are working to put together supplemental legislation, but the two plans are vastly different.

Sessions’ written statement appears below:

“The border crisis is the direct and predictable result of the President’s sustained policies undermining America’s immigration laws. The President’s continued determination to carry out this nullification remains the singular obstacle in the way of restoring lawfulness. It is therefore odd that the House working group did not mention President Obama even once in their released

findings. Indeed, they made no mention of the President's threat of sweeping new executive actions. Multiple reports indicate that these imminent actions are likely to take the form of administrative amnesty and work permits for 5-6 million illegal immigrants. Any attempt at improving the border situation would be rendered utterly void if the President follows through on his dramatic nullification acts. How can Congress ignore this brewing constitutional crisis? In fact, granting the President new funds without tackling these orders would be an institutional surrender to the planned illegality.

The document also appears to cement the idea that anyone who shows up unlawfully at our border is presumptively entitled to an asylum hearing in the United States. This cannot be so. We cannot allow unjustified claims of asylum to overwhelm our system. Also, because the working group does not explicitly demand a narrowing of the conditions for asylum, the end result of their plan may paradoxically be that more illegal immigrants are eventually granted asylum—enticing even greater numbers to arrive on the promise of speedy grants of lawful status.

The border security measures also raise concerns. The document calls for President Obama's Department of Homeland Security to develop a 'strategy' and 'plan' to secure the border, which is less than what is actually required to do under current law. Meanwhile, it omits any discussion of restoring collapsed interior enforcement. If portions of this plan are as similar to the Gang of Eight bill as they appear to be, it could open the door to substantial legislative mischief in the Senate. With only days before Congress' planned adjournment, a better strategy would be to focus on blocking the President's threat of new executive actions—and insist that he enforce current laws—while these complex proposals are studied and revisited.

Finally, it is curious that the proposal makes no mention of the needs of Americans. Yes, this is a humanitarian crisis. But it is also a legal crisis. And so too is it a crisis for the American people who have begged and pleaded for a lawful system of immigration that serves their interests, protects their jobs, and increases their wages. Republicans should not be timid or apologetic, but present a bold defense of the American people. The House GOP has so far been the last bulwark protecting working Americans; it would be tragic for that defense to buckle in the closing days of this Congress.

+++

### **House Republicans unveil plan to deal with border crisis**

*Washington Post*

July 23, 2014

A House Republican plan to address the influx of illegal immigrants at the U.S.-Mexico border would cost considerably less than President Obama has requested but could get upended by the political forces that long have divided GOP lawmakers.

The \$1.5 billion proposal unveiled Wednesday proposes to spend far less than Obama's \$3.7 billion request to provide more resources along the southern border and to care for the record number of migrants who have arrived in recent months. It would mandate the deployment

National Guard troops, boost funding for Border Patrol, and require the administration to more quickly process and deport young children and families who have illegally entered the country.

But it was unclear how quickly the House could advance the proposal and whether House Republicans will be able to reach agreement with Senate Democrats on a final deal before Congress adjourns Aug. 1 for a five-week recess.

“I’d like to act. We’ve got a humanitarian crisis on the border that has to be dealt with,” House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) told reporters Wednesday. But Boehner also faulted Obama for failing to work with Congress to swiftly seek a solution.

“The administration ought to get their act together,” he said. Later, Boehner’s office sent a letter to the White House asking for clarification on whether it supports changing a 2008 anti-trafficking law to make it easier to deport minors from Central America.

1 of 17

Gov. Rick Perry (R) has ordered 1,000 National Guard troops to assist U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents with the large influx of children illegally crossing into the United States. Tens of thousands of Central Americans, fleeing violence in their native countries, have tried to cross the 1,200-mile border in recent months.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents take undocumented immigrants into custody near Falfurrias, Tex. Thousands of immigrants, many of them minors from Central America, have crossed illegally into the United States this year, causing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis on the U.S.-Mexico border. John Moore/Getty Images

That issue remains central to the impasse.

The Obama administration informed Congress in a letter this month that it was seeking greater authority for the Homeland Security secretary to deport the Central American minors quickly. But faced with strenuous opposition from leading Democrats and immigrant-rights groups, the White House did not suggest legislative language to make the change in its emergency funding request. Administration officials continue to say they would support efforts to amend the law but have not suggested specific changes.

In the Senate, Democrats plan to move forward on a spending bill to provide \$2.7 billion in emergency funds to deal with the influx of minors — about \$1 billion less than Obama’s request. The Democratic plan will not include amendments to the 2008 law.

In the House, Rep. Kay Granger (R-Tex.), who led the House GOP’s working group tasked with tackling the issue, shared her team’s recommendations during the weekly closed-door meeting of House Republicans. On her way into that meeting, Granger said a vote on her proposals “should happen right now.

“Every day that we delay, thousands more come across the border,” she said.

Granger said her proposals would tweak the 2008 law, but not repeal it.

The changes, she said, would “change a portion that will let us send the children back in a very speedy way.”

#### GRAPHIC: Dangerous journeys taken by unaccompanied children

An hour before Granger addressed her colleagues, Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas), a favorite of tea party activists, met with more than a dozen House Republicans over a breakfast of Chik-Fil-A items and coffee. He urged them to not buckle to Democratic demands for compromise on the scope and cost of legislation.

Cruz spoke at a meeting of the Conservative Opportunity Society at the invitation of the group’s chairman, Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), a prominent critic of bipartisan efforts to pass comprehensive immigration reform.

“He’s a perfect catalyst and he has a real rapport with conservatives in the House,” King said in an interview. “He really wanted to hear from people in the room. He also let us know that anything we send to the Senate, if it comes back, it’s going to be terrible, so we should make sure we’re ready to respond to that.”

King said that he and many others there are likely to oppose the initial GOP House plan.

“I’m leaning no. The Granger report is constructive, but no one has come up with a plan for how to deal with the Senate,” King said. “We’re putting our head in the noose and associating ourselves with the president’s problem.”

Cruz said that Granger’s plan includes “a number of good and positive elements.” But he added that other Obama policies are to blame for the uptick in illegal immigrants.

Other Republicans said Wednesday that they want to act quickly.

“People want to be able to go home and say, ‘we’ve done something.’ And what we’re doing is eminently defensible,” said Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), a Boehner ally. “We’re putting an offer on the table and waiting to see what the Senate does. If we didn’t act, it would play right into the president’s hands.”

In order to pay for the changes, Rep. Harold Rogers (R-Ky.), who chairs the House Appropriations Committee, said that about half of the \$1.5 billion would pay for National Guard deployments and to bolster the Border Patrol. About one-third of the money would be provided to the Department of Health and Human Services for the ongoing housing and care of migrants, far below the \$1.8 billion requested by Obama.

With Congress still mulling what to do, the presidents of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras are scheduled to visit Capitol Hill on Thursday to appeal directly to lawmakers for assistance. They will meet with Obama at the White House on Friday.

+++

## **Unions put teachers on streets — for votes**

*Politico*

July 24, 2014

Stephanie Smith

This story is part of an ongoing POLITICO series on how national policy issues are affecting the 2014 midterm elections.

Teachers unions are struggling to protect their political clout, but as the midterm elections approach, they're fighting back with their most popular asset: the teachers themselves.

Backed by tens of millions in cash and new data mining tools that let them personalize pitches to voters, the unions are sending armies of educators to run a huge get-out-the-vote effort aimed at reversing the red tide that swept Republicans into power across the country in 2010.

The unions have plenty of money: They spent \$69 million on state races in 2010 and are likely to top that this year. But as they gear up for the most intense and focused mobilization efforts they have ever attempted, they believe it's their members who will give them an edge. Americans may be frustrated with public schools and wary of unions, but polls still show respect and admiration for teachers.

(POLITICO's All Politics is Local Education series)

“If someone knocks on your door and says, ‘I’m Mark, I’m from the state Democratic Party,’ you take the literature and shut the door,” said Karen White, political director for the National Education Association. “If you say, ‘Hi, I’m Karen, I’m a third-grade teacher at Hillsmere Elementary and I’m here to tell you what’s at stake for public education,’ that gets a very different reaction from the voter.”

Or at least, so union leaders hope.

While other interest groups focus on the frenzied fight for control of the Senate, teachers unions are pouring their resources into state politics. They're pushing to flip legislative chambers in several states to Democratic control and put allies in key offices such as attorney general and secretary of state in Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico.

Above all, they're out to oust incumbent Republican governors, especially Wisconsin's Scott Walker, Florida's Rick Scott and Michigan's Rick Snyder.

Education rarely shows up as a top concern for voters in national polls. But it's been a galvanizing force in recent mayoral elections in New York and Newark, and unions believe it will stir voters on the state level in a year roiling with debates about the Common Core, standardized testing and the soaring cost of college.

(POLITICO's full coverage of the 2014 elections)

All the GOP governors in the union cross hairs are considered vulnerable, their races listed as tossups by The Cook Political Report. All have moved to curb union influence, cut education funding or promote alternatives to traditional public schools — or all of the above.

Walker stripped public-sector workers of most collective-bargaining rights (and then beat back a ferocious effort by organized labor to recall him). Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback cut job protections for teachers. Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett has been locked in a years-long battle with unions over school funding.

And in Maine, Gov. Paul LePage famously advised his constituents: “If you want a good education, go to private schools.”

The enmity many teachers feel toward these governors goes far beyond partisan politics: It’s personal. There was even a booth at the NEA convention in Denver this month that gave teachers a chance to throw darts at the Republican governor of their choice.

“We’ve got to play real hardball in these midterm elections,” said Antonio White, a business teacher in Miami-Dade County, Florida.

(Sign up for POLITICO’s Morning Education tip sheet)

He bounced on his toes, fairly crackling with energy in his eagerness to take on Gov. Scott. “Without a doubt, we’ve got to be Scott-free,” White said. “We’ve got to gain back power.”

To that end, the NEA has held training sessions across the country to teach members how to shape their message for every possible audience — including their own spouses. The vast majority of NEA members are white suburban or rural women, and their spouses are mostly middle-age white men, a voting bloc that Democratic candidates have traditionally struggled to reach. Union strategists see huge potential in training their members to start their voter outreach in their own living rooms.

The NEA has also developed more sophisticated data-mining tools to target specific voters outside union households.

The union’s database might indicate, for instance, that the adults at a given address are struggling financially and don’t have school-age kids. So rather than send a teacher to talk with those voters about reducing class sizes, the NEA might dispatch a school bus driver to talk about a favored candidate’s commitment to raising the minimum wage.

(Also on POLITICO: Full education policy coverage)

Other common talking points include college affordability, student loans and concerns about too much standardized testing in K-12 schools.

The American Federation of Teachers, meanwhile, has joined other major unions in funding a huge expansion of the Grassroots Victory Program, run by the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee and focused on state legislatures. The initiative already has deployed 236 field organizers across 27 states — up from 60 organizers in 10 states in 2012.

And the NEA is partnering with Rock the Vote to bring more young people to the polls and with the NAACP to help voters intimidated by new ID requirements in some states.

“When you stand up, others follow, because you are the trusted messengers in your communities,” AFT President Randi Weingarten told 3,500 of her members at the union’s recent convention in Los Angeles. “We need you to be those trusted messengers like never before.”

GOP financially armed

Republicans aren’t exactly quaking. The Republican Governors Association and Republican State Leadership Committee have collected far more cash than their Democratic counterparts this year — and are far ahead of their pace in the 2010 midterms.

The RGA, for instance, raised \$50 million in the first half of the year, compared with \$27 million for the Democratic Governors Association. The RGA also reported a record \$70 million cash on hand as of the end of June, up from \$40 million at the midyear point in 2010. And Republican strategists are confident they can take at least a few governor’s mansions from Democrats, including in Illinois and Connecticut, where teachers unions will be forced to expend resources playing defense.

Republicans have new allies, too, including a super PAC focused on electing conservatives to state Legislatures from West Virginia to Nevada.

Plus, GOP partisans predict union endorsements will backfire among voters who don’t trust Big Labor to put the public good first.

“Unions want to keep electing liberal Democrats who continue to drive up unsustainable spending to their special interest causes,” said Jill Bader, a spokeswoman for the RSLC. “Hard-working families who are having trouble making ends meet have recognized that this doesn’t work.”

Incumbents take heart, too, from two high-profile stumbles for organized labor in recent years. In Wisconsin, unions went all out — including a tremendous voter mobilization effort — to recall Walker in June 2012. He won that vote easily. And in November 2012, Michigan voters resoundingly rejected a union-backed ballot initiative that would have enshrined collective-bargaining rights in the state Constitution.



“All the millions spent attacking the governor didn’t work in the recall and spending millions more won’t work this fall,” said Alleigh Marre, a spokeswoman for Gov. Walker.

To be on the safe side, though, the union’s top targets have been busy buffing their images on education.

In Florida, the state Republican Party this week came out with a Spanish-language TV ad featuring four teachers praising Scott for improving public education. In Pennsylvania, Corbett is holding near-daily events aimed at persuading voters to blame the Legislature, not him, for pinching school budgets. And in Michigan, Snyder used the high-profile platform of his State of the State address to rebut union claims that he’s decimated school funding.

“Michiganders see the progress the state is making, and I don’t think any amount of union attack ads will change that perception,” said his spokeswoman, Emily Benavides.

David vs. Goliath?

Union leaders like to frame the political battleground as a David-vs.-Goliath affair. They speak with pride about their working-class members, armed only with clipboards and comfy sneakers, going up against corporate titans of immense wealth and power.

It’s a point of pride with the NEA that nearly 12,000 members volunteered to register or contact voters in the 2012 presidential campaign and more than 900,000 have indicated some interest in political activism.

“We’re in every legislative district, every county, every precinct. No other organization has that kind of reach,” said White, the union’s national political director.

“The money conversation distracts from the point. What we’re putting in is the mobilization,” said Michael Podhorzer, political director of the AFL-CIO, which also plans a heavy focus on state races.

The money, however, is hardly incidental.

Organized labor spent \$252 million on state-level campaigns in 2010. Public-sector unions alone spent \$140 million, according to campaign finance records assembled by the National Institute on Money in State Politics.

Teachers unions, which represent a combined 3.8 million workers, spent \$69 million on state races in 2010 and \$92 million in 2012, according to the Institute. The NEA and AFT are also perennially among the top outside spenders on federal campaigns.

In this cycle, the teachers unions plan to play in some federal races, including the Senate campaigns in Arkansas, North Carolina and Louisiana. The NEA’s political action committee recently made a \$500,000 ad buy attacking Rep. Tom Cotton, the Republican candidate for Senate in Arkansas.

But union strategists say they're deploying the bulk of their resources on state races, in part because the scrum around the Senate races is already so noisy, it's hard for additional voices to break through.

It's a savvy strategy, analysts say. "Governor's races don't have as many warplanes up in the air as the Senate races," said Brock McCleary, president of the Republican polling firm Harper Polling.

Pennsylvania, where Gov. Corbett is lagging in the polls, is a top target. Teachers unions have already donated more than \$1 million to Tom Wolf, the Democratic nominee for governor, campaign finance records show. They're also helping to fund a PAC that just bought \$2 million in airtime to slam Corbett for education cuts.

Labor strategists even have ambitions to flip the Pennsylvania Senate to Democratic control. They're also targeting state Senate chambers in New Hampshire, Arizona and Wisconsin and have their eyes on the Arkansas House as well.

"We plan to play big and aggressively in this election cycle," the AFT's Weingarten said. "Our members are determined to reverse some of the devastation they have felt since the 2010 elections."