



Speaker's Press Clips
Tuesday, March 18, 2014

- AP: [Ala. House to debate education budget](#)
- Al.com: [Gov. Robert Bentley announces 'One-Shot Turkey Hunt to promote state](#)
- Times Daily: [Minimum wage increase effort likely dead in Alabama](#)
- Montgomery Advertiser: [Under the Dome: Judges' recusal criteria would change under bill](#)
- WHNT: [Ball, McInnish To Battle For Madison County GOP Committee Spot](#)
- Al.com: [School board challenger to Mary Scott Hunter quits GOP primary, says Common Core fight must go on](#)
- Yellowhammer News: [Pro-Common Core ads flood airwaves in Alabama, nationally](#)
- Al.com: [Airbus begins new engine option assembly as backlog mounts, and where Mobile fits](#)
- Al.com: [Congressman Byrne changes mind on Afghanistan, supports extension of U.S. troops](#)
- AP: [Propose rule change would benefit military spouses](#)
- AP: [States looking at \\$0 community college tuition](#)
- Al.com: [Faced with huge costs, rising prison population, U.S. Senate pushing for justice system overhaul](#)

FULL TEXT

Ala. House to debate education budget

The Associated Press

March 18, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — State representatives will give their input on education spending for the next fiscal year, including whether teachers and school employees will get a pay raise. The House of Representatives will debate the proposed Education Trust Fund budget Tuesday afternoon

The Alabama Senate approved a one-time 1 percent bonus for public education employees. However, the House budget committee last week stripped away the raise and instead put the money toward school employees' insurance costs.

Republican Gov. Robert Bentley is seeking a 2 percent raise plus the additional insurance funding. That has put him at odds with Republican legislators who say there is not enough room in the budget for both.

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Under the Dome: Judges' recusal criteria would change under bill

Montgomery Advertiser

March 16, 2014

Brian Lyman and Kala Kachmar

In the state of Alabama, justices or judges must recuse themselves if it appears they might not be impartial because of campaign contributions from a party involved with the lawsuit. A party can mean an attorney, a family member, a partner in business, an owner or coworkers.

Judges are required to report the names of all campaign contributors before they take office, and all attorneys have to disclose campaign contributions they made to the judge presiding over the case.

But a bill sponsored by Rep. Mike Ball, R-Madison, would repeal those laws and establish new criteria for recusal. The bill, which solicited debate on House floor Thursday, establishes two reasons why judges would have to recuse themselves because of a campaign contribution.

The first is if a "reasonable" person would perceive that the ability to make a fair decision is impaired because of the contribution.

The second is if the contribution is more than 10 percent of the judge's total contributions for a statewide appellate court race, 15 percent in a circuit court race or 25 percent in a district court race.

The bill also allows for an appeal on a motion for recusal that's denied.

Ball said that while working on a campaign finance task force, attorneys brought to his attention the need for a change in the recusal process.

"The first responsibility is on a judge him or herself to decide whether they have an appearance of a conflict," Ball said.

He said there needs to be a mechanism in place to automatically flag these situations, but couldn't come up with one.

“There are attorneys on either side that would have a responsibility if they suspected that could be an issue (with a judge),” Ball said. “It’s easy to punch all the judges’ names in and see where their contributions come from.”

But Rep. Chris England, D-Tuscaloosa, said the only way the problem will be solved is if judges are no longer elected. He said judges should be chosen based on quality and merit.

“We need to stop electing judges so we don’t have to worry about the appearance of impropriety,” England said. “If we have to walk into a courtroom and ask that question, we’ve already missed the point.”

“Justice shouldn’t have a price tag,” he said. “We need to appoint them and judge them on their performance alone.”

The bill passed the House, and will go to the Senate for committee assignment.

Nothing effectively would change

In an effort that will actually change nothing, the House of Representatives passed a bill that would ensure the citizens of Alabama the right to continue to hunt and fish in the future.

The state’s constitution currently says that all people have the right to hunt and fish in this state in accordance with laws and regulations.

But Rep. Mark Tuggle, R-Alexander City, who is sponsoring the legislation, says the constitutional amendment will ensure future generations will also have the right to hunt and fish. He said there are anti-hunting organizations in other states that pose a threat to hunters and fishers.

“This will not diminish or enhance the right,” Tuggle said on the House floor Thursday. “If it’s legal and traditional, it’ll be protected by the amendment.”

The amendment adds language that specifies the right to hunt, fish and harvest wildlife to “promote wildlife conservation and management, and to preserve the future of hunting and fishing.” It also says hunting and fishing by the public shall be the preferred means of managing wildlife.

“We want to recognize the idea that the American hunter should be part of the process,” Tuggle said.

Rep. Harry Shiver, R-Bay Minette, said if we don’t protect hunting and fish now with this amendment, “we’re going to be sorry.”

“We are losing, every day, our rights to hunt and fish and you know it,” he said.

After all, this is an election year.

More prisons?

Politicians often promise more in an election year: More jobs, more tax cuts, etc. Gov. Robert Bentley last week suggested his second term could feature more prisons.

In an interview on the Birmingham-based Matt Murphy show Tuesday, Bentley said addressing the state's chronic prison overcrowding could force the state to build more facilities to accommodate a system that is near 200 percent capacity.

"If I'm re-elected to this job, we're going to have to face that, and we're going to have deal with that, and we're going to have to build more prisons," he said. "And we're going to have to come up with the money to do it."

Horrific conditions at the Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women in Wetumpka, including sexual assault and intimidation of inmates, have led to a U.S. Justice Department investigation of possible civil rights violations. Amidst increasing talk about the possibility of the state's corrections system falling into federal receivership, lawmakers have said they are looking to appropriate money for security for Tutwiler.

Bringing the system under control will be costly. The state has not built a new prison since 1997, and lawmakers are hoping to get the state system under control without adding capacity. Sen. Cam Ward, R-Alabaster, who sponsored a resolution to create a panel to study the impact of overcrowding on the Department of Corrections, said building enough prisons to cut overcrowding to 150 percent will cost at least \$650 million.

"That's just construction," he said; staffing the prisons would be an additional cost. "I don't know how you do it."

Curricula in Hands of an Angry God

Tuesday's Senate Education Policy Committee on Common Core featured a raft of speakers for and against the educational standards, but only one who decided to turn the event into a sermon.

Terry Batton, a preacher from Georgia, used his total speaking time of 10 minutes to throw fire and brimstone at the math and English standards, claiming they cost young children "their innocence, starting in pre-school and kindergarten, saying homosexuality is OK."

"If you love God, and you call yourself a Christian, you owe it to yourself to look at these standards," Batton said. The preacher went on to accuse the standards of being against "faith, family and freedom."

While most speakers were limited to five minutes, one participant yielded his five minutes to Batton to continue the revival, though committee chairman Dick Brewbaker, R-Montgomery, eventually had to cut him off.

"Here endeth the lesson," Brewbaker said.

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Gov. Robert Bentley announces 'One-Shot Turkey Hunt to promote state

Al.com

March 17, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- About 75 business leaders, state officials and others are expected to take part in the Alabama Governor's One-Shot Turkey Hunt starting Tuesday.

Gov. Robert Bentley, Conservation and Natural Resources Commissioner Gunter Guy and Department of Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield announced the event today.

The two-day hunt will help promote Alabama, show off the state's natural beauty and raise money for a conservation scholarship program, officials said.

It will also help business leaders, those who have been in the state for years and newcomers like officials from Remington Outdoor Co., spend time together outside a corporate setting.

"It's mainly about building relationships," Guy said.

The program is organized by the Alabama Conservation and Natural Resources Foundation and funded by private sponsors, Guy said.

This will be the first Governor's One-Shot Turkey Hunt in six years. Guy said the event started in 2002 but put on hold after 2008 because of the economic downturn.

The hunt will take place at multiple locations across central Alabama.

The hunter who kills the highest-scoring turkey will be named the winner. Turkeys are scored for their weight, spurs and beard.

Guy said this year's event has raised about \$223,000 that will mostly go to fund scholarships at Auburn University and the University of Alabama for students to study in the fields of conservation and natural resources.

The foundation also supports other programs, including youth hunting, Hunters Helping the Hungry, archery in schools and women's participation in outdoor sports.

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Pro-Common Core ads flood airwaves in Alabama, nationally

Yellowhammer News

March 17, 2014

Cliff Sims

Pro-Common Core television ads funded by a coalition of business groups including the US Chamber of Commerce and Business Roundtable hit the airwaves nationally on Sunday, signaling Big Business's increasing determination to fight back against Tea Party groups who have made the repeal of Common Core their top priority in recent months.

POLITICO has the story:

The campaign — a major ad buy that could last months — aims to undercut dire tea party warnings that the standards amount to a federal power grab, akin to Obamacare. The TV spots and online ads will project a positive tone, featuring teachers praising the Common Core.

In a parallel effort unfolding mostly in deep red states, thousands of small-business owners and corporate executives have been bombarding state lawmakers with emails, calls and personal visits to press the point that better standards will mean a better workforce and ultimately, a better economy. They've been joined in some states by military officers who argue that not just the economy, but national security is at stake.

The strategy: Give conservatives reasons to support the Common Core — and make clear they will reap dividends if they do.

Billy Canary Business Council of Alabama
Billy Canary, President & CEO, Business Council of Alabama

That exact strategy has been played out in Alabama in recent weeks. The Business Council of Alabama (BCA), the official partner of the US Chamber of Commerce here in the state, has been the most vocal proponent of Common Core during the last two legislative sessions. BCA President & CEO Billy Canary and his lobbying team have fought tooth and nail to defeat several pieces of legislation that would either repeal or limit Common Core in Alabama.

“SB443 amounts to a significant usurpation of power by the Legislature,” Canary said of a recent anti-Common Core bill. “It is simply wrong. This is a political application at the expense of students and our future workforce. As we have said before, continued attempts by the Legislature to assume control of this issue, relegated by law to the State Board of Education, is the very definition of government overreach.”

RELATED: Common Core compromise is dead, so what went wrong?

POLITICO gives us a peak behind-the-scenes into the BCA's operation:

Billy Canary, president of the Business Council of Alabama, got four dozen influential executives on a conference call with the state senate leadership the other day to talk up the standards. He has also nudged hundreds of less prominent business leaders to reach out to their representatives in a campaign he calls “No lawmaker goes uncontacted.” If he senses a politician wavering on Common Core, he texts his pinstriped army. They spring at once into action.

Canary's talking points might not win over parents who think of their children as precious individuals rather than workforce widgets, but they're carefully calibrated to appeal to lawmakers concerned about economic development.

"The business community is by far the biggest consumer of the product created by our education system," Canary tells them — and that system needs to produce better product if businesses are to compete in the global economy. "That's why," he said, "we're all fighting in this direction."

8 retired generals on the The Tennessee Valley Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Committee also recently sent a letter to the Alabama Legislature urging them to keep Common Core.

"The Department of Defense Education Activity and the Military Child Education Coalition have both endorsed the Common Core State Standards because of the consistency and the rigor they provide to students who move from state to state," the letter said. "Tennessee Valley BRAC has repeatedly voiced its support for the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards, based on but independent of the Common Core State Standards."

And as POLITICO points out, in spite of the Tea Party's grassroots capabilities, they cannot compete with the financial resources of business groups and their members. But that doesn't mean they're backing down.

More from POLITICO:

Tea party activists are not intimidated.

On the contrary, they're convinced the business community's tactics will backfire by stoking populist outrage against the Common Core and its raft of powerful, establishment supporters. "Frankly, they can rant and rave as much as they want. They're not going to affect me, and I don't think they're going to affect any others," Arizona state Sen. Al Melvin said. "I'm a businessman. But sometimes, these chambers of commerce get it wrong."

With both sides of the Common Core debate calling the issue their "top priority," expect the battle to rage on well into Alabama's 2014 election cycle and beyond.

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Minimum wage increase effort likely dead in Alabama

Times Daily

March 17, 2014

Mary Sell

MONTGOMERY – A bill to increase the minimum wage in Alabama appears to be dead. The sponsor of the bill, Rep. Darrio Melton, D-Selma, knew going into this legislative session that his bill to raise the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$9.80 was a long shot. But he's talking

about the issue — one he says traps people in poverty — to anyone who will listen. And he says he wants to bring the legislation back next year.

“My (Republican) colleagues continue to think that capitalism is best worked out when you have low wages, I don’t think that’s capitalism at its best,” Melton said last week. “Capitalism is at its best is when your employees are paid decent and livable wages and yet you’re still able to profit.

“Minimum wage says, ‘I wish I could pay you less,’” Melton said.

The House Commerce and Small Business Committee last week held a public hearing on the legislation, but won’t vote on it this week, chairman Rep. Jack Williams, R-Birmingham, said Monday.

“The comments I got from committee members ... they’re not inclined to vote it out of committee,” Williams said. “I think the majority of the committee felt like that isn’t the direction the state wants to go in.”

Melton’s bill calls for a constitutional amendment, meaning the minimum wage wouldn’t be increased unless Alabama voters approved the change in November.

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Ball, McInnish To Battle For Madison County GOP Committee Spot

WHNT

March 14, 2014

Nick Banaszak

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (WHNT) -Recent turmoil in Madison County’s Republican Party is now the focus of a high-profile race for one of its Executive Committee seats.

State Rep. Mike Ball (R-Madison) will challenge long-time Republican Executive Committee Member Hugh McInnish in the GOP primary later this year, with both candidates taking very different stands on how the local party should operate.

McInnish has served on the Executive Committee for several years and said he makes no apologies for his outspoken views, which he describes as “staunchly conservative”.

“Some people say I’m a radical, and I don’t mind being called that,” said McInnish. “Radicals can be good or bad, I’m a good radical...He [Ball] already has a seat by virtue of his membership in the state legislature. He’s now running for my seat, and I don’t know how that works. In fact, I think it’s a legitimate question. Is he a legitimate candidate?”

McInnish is one of the stalwarts of the Madison County GOP, which recently censured State Board of Education Member Mary Scott Hunter. The committee also rebuked state legislators for “dereliction of duty” after they didn’t pass bills the local party wanted. Ball said that and an

effort to block candidates from competing in primaries show signs of a leadership structure that's out of touch.

"It's not even about political philosophy that I think our party needs to change so much, I think it's about tone," said Ball. "You can be strong and still be kind."

What role the Executive Committee should play is a clear dividing point between both candidates.

"The role of the party is not to make policy decisions for elected officials," said Ball. "Elected officials are responsible to, I believe, the electorate that elects them."

"Mike is vexed because we have some things to say about what he does, and we don't always like what good 'ol Mike does," said McInnish. "He's a good guitar picker and singer, but some of his melodies don't ring true to us."

The Republican primary is in June.

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School board challenger to Mary Scott Hunter quits GOP primary, says Common Core fight must go on

Al.com

March 17, 2014

Brian Lawson

HUNTSVILLE, Alabama -- Ginger Cochran, one of two state school board candidates vying to unseat incumbent Mary Scott Hunter, has withdrawn from the race, the Alabama Republican Party said today.

Cochran and Mike Parsons were both challenging Hunter in the state school board District 8 race that has focused on different views about Alabama's use of the Common Core standards that have been adopted by 45 states including Alabama. The district represents North Alabama.

A message on Cochran's campaign Facebook page announcing her withdrawal from the race contains criticism of Hunter and endorses Parsons. Cochran's posting says the most important issue in the race is stopping Common Core and defeating Hunter.

Hunter has supported the use of Common Core, arguing the standards are controlled by the state school board and are designed for Alabama students. She withstood an intraparty challenge last month aimed at removing her name from the ballot based on her support for Common Core. The Madison County Republican Party also censured her last year for failing to fight the Common Core, which has drawn support from military and business groups.

Some conservative Republicans, including Cochran, contend the Common Core standards are an unwelcome federal intrusion into state and local matters of education.

The statement argues that Hunter hasn't represented the issue honestly and claims the current state standards are "copyrighted" federal Common Core standards.

Cochran criticized Hunter for receiving support from the Business Council of Alabama and the Chamber of Commerce and said the U.S. Chamber has been getting money from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to push the Common Core. The statement also says the foundation is using the money in "pushing the propaganda to down to the state and local PTA groups."

Cochran's statement those who are opposing the "federal take over of our schools are NOT being paid to do so.

"We do not have sugar daddy's paying us to sell our souls for a bag of gold and silver. We fight for love of our children and for real learning," the statement concludes.

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Congressman Byrne changes mind on Afghanistan, supports extension of U.S. troops

Al.com

March 17, 2014

Brendan Kirby

GRAND BAY, Alabama – As a candidate, Rep. Bradley Byrne said he favored a quick American withdrawal from Afghanistan. New information – some of it classified – has changed his mind.

A resident at a town hall meeting at the Grand Bay-St. Elmo Senior & Community Center on Monday asked why the government was spending so much money on rebuilding the war-torn nation. Byrne, R-Fairhope, referenced Afghan President Hamid Karzai's refusal so far to sign an agreement extending the U.S. military presence in his country.

"I used to think that was a good thing. I no longer think that," he said. "I believe that if we leave, the Taliban would very quickly come back in."

Byrne said he was unaware before joining the House Armed Services Committee how effective the U.S. military has been in Afghanistan. Whereas there about 10 coalition troops for every Afghan soldier several years ago, he said, the ratio has flipped today.

"We've got to get their armed forces to the point where they can stand on their own two feet," he said.

It was Byrne's 16th town hall meeting since taking office in December after his victory in a special election in December. He touched on a range of issues, covering both domestic policy and defense. He also answered questions with people's specific problems with the federal bureaucracy.

Byrne said he is becoming “more and more concerned” about President Barack Obama’s proposed cuts to the Armed Forces. He suggested it emboldened Russian President Vladimir Putin’s aggressive moves in Ukraine, where soldiers entered the breakaway Crimean peninsula.

“Putin thinks we are weak,” he said. “He has judged us as weak.”

Byrne said Obama’s budget would spend 50 percent more on means-tested welfare programs than defense. “We’ve got our priorities out of whack,” he said.

Byrne heard many of the same questions he has field at past town hall meetings. For instance, he reiterated his opposition to proposals for a “path to citizenship” for immigrants who illegally entered the United States. Do so, he said, would be unfair to people who stood in line and immigrated legally.

“I’m against amnesty,” he said. “We’re a nation of laws. If we’re going to be a national of laws, we have to uphold them all.”

Other issues Byrne addressed included:

- Committing to carve out a “reasonable red snapper season” when renewing the Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Local fisherman have complained that flawed science has led to increasingly short snapper seasons in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Rejecting a proposal to raise the minimum wage. “Raising the minimum wage will not help jobs in this economy. It would hurt them,” he said.
- Reassuring one man that gun control legislation is not likely to reach the House floor. “If there is, I’ll vote against it,” he said.
- Renewing his vow to protect Austal USA’s contract to build littoral combat ships for the U.S Navy along Mobile River. Byrne has pressed civilian leaders at the Pentagon this month over the program, which the Obama administration has targeted for cuts.
- “I think we’re OK,” Byrne said. “I’m not going to say the fight is over, because it will never, ever be over,” he said.

Expressing his gratification for the U.S. Senate’s vote this month to adopt House legislation that will cushion the blow from sharp rate hikes set to take effect on policyholders in the National Flood Insurance Program.

In a question from a black resident in the audience, Byrne said he does his job without regard to superficial differences among his constituents.

“I think it’s the heart of conservatism to respect individuals for who they are. . . . We believe that we are all God-created people,” he said. “I don’t care what anybody’s race it. I don’t care what anybody’s national origin is. I don’t care what anybody’s religion is.”

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Propose rule change would benefit military spouses

The Associated Press

March 18, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — The Alabama State Bar is trying to speed up the process for a lawyer who is a military spouse to practice in Alabama.

The Board of Bar Commissioners has voted to allow them to practice law temporarily if they have passed the bar in another state and have completed a required course on Alabama law. The change must be approved by the Alabama Supreme Court before taking effect.

Bar spokesman Brad Carr says lawyers who are military spouses have had to take the Alabama Bar exam, and by the time that happens, their families are facing another transfer.

Alabama Bar President Anthony Joseph says the military spouses have the skills and experience to contribute to Alabama's legal community and this would ease the burden on them.

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Faced with huge costs, rising prison population, U.S. Senate pushing for justice system overhaul

Al.com

March 17, 2014

Brian Lawson

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The U.S. Senate is moving towards a criminal justice reform package to be voted on this year, with the push coming from unexpected partnerships between conservative and liberal-leaning senators, the New York Times reports.

The story and a related editorial note that mushrooming federal prison costs and a rising inmate population faced by the federal government have led to bills seeking to overhaul the current system, according The Times. The federal prison budget eats up nearly 25 percent of the entire Justice Department budget, the Times reports.

The Senate reform proposals include cutting federal mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug crimes, giving federal judges more power to reduce sentences below the guidelines and possibly reduced sentences for drug offenders sentenced under older laws. The measure's sponsors are U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill. and U.S. Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah.

[What's your experience with Alabama's prison system? [Click here to share your story](#)]

The senators have also seen states like Texas reduce its prison population and numerous states, like Alabama, reform their sentencing systems and provide alternatives to prison.

The debate comes as Alabama is grappling with the widespread implications of an expensive, overcrowded prison system and a recent report by the U.S. Department of Justice outlining staff-on-prisoner sexual abuse and harassment at the Julia Tutwiler prison.

Other proposals include allowing some prisoners credits toward early release through their participation in education, training and drug-treatment programs. The Recidivism Reduction and Public Safety Act is sponsored by U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas and U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I.

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States looking at \$0 community college tuition

The Associated Press

March 18, 2014

PORTLAND, Oregon (AP) -- Nothing sparks consumer demand like the word "free," and politicians in some states have proposed the idea of providing that incentive to get young people to attend community college.

Amid worries that U.S. youth are losing a global skills race, supporters of a no-tuition policy see expanding access to community college as way to boost educational attainment so the emerging workforces in their states look good to employers.

Of course, such plans aren't free for taxpayers, and legislators in Oregon and Tennessee are deciding whether free tuition regardless of family income is the best use of public money. A Mississippi bill passed the state House, but then failed in the Senate.

The debate comes in a midterm election year in which income inequality and the burdens of student debt are likely going to be significant issues.

"I think everybody agrees that with a high school education by itself, there is no path to the middle class," said State Sen. Mark Hass, who is leading the no-tuition effort in Oregon. "There is only one path, and it leads to poverty. And poverty is very expensive."

Hass said free community college and increasing the number of students who earn college credit while in high school are keys to addressing a "crisis" in education debt. Taxpayers will ultimately benefit, he said, because it's cheaper to send someone to community college than to have him or her in the social safety net.

Research from the Oregon University System shows Oregonians with only a high school degree make less money than those with a degree and thus contribute fewer tax dollars. They are also more likely to use food stamps and less likely to do volunteer work.

A Gallup poll released in late February found 94 percent of Americans believe it's somewhat or very important to have a degree beyond high school, yet only 23 percent of respondents said higher education is affordable to everyone who needs it.

As at four-year universities, the price of attending a community college has risen sharply because of reduced state support and higher costs for health care and other expenses. The average annual cost of tuition nationally is about \$3,300, and books and fees add to the bill.

It's cheaper than university, but expensive enough to dissuade someone who's unsure whether to pursue higher education.

In Tennessee, Republican Gov. Bill Haslam wants to use lottery money to create a free community college program for high school graduates. It's central to the Republican's goal of making the state more attractive to potential employers by increasing the percentage of Tennesseans with a college degree to 55 percent by 2025 from 32 percent now.

If approved by the Legislature, the "Tennessee Promise" would provide a full ride for any high school graduate, at a cost of \$34 million per year.

Meanwhile, Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber signed a bill March 11 ordering a state commission to examine whether free tuition is feasible. Among other things, the study will determine how much money the program will cost, whether the existing campus buildings can accommodate extra students and whether to limit free tuition to recent graduates.

The commission will also look at California, which offered no-cost community college until the mid-1980s, when a state fiscal crisis contributed to its demise.

The findings are due later this year and will help lawmakers decide whether to pursue the idea in 2015.

"What is exciting to us about the idea is that it signals that the state understands there needs to be significant reinvestment in community colleges in some way, shape or form," said Mary Spilde, the president of Lane Community College in Eugene, Ore., where in-state students pay \$93 per credit hour. Back in 1969-70, baby boomers paid \$6 per credit hour — about \$37 in today's money, adjusted for inflation.

Tennessee and Oregon are looking at the "last-dollar in" model, where the state picks up the tuition not covered by other forms of aid. Because students from poor families often get their tuition covered by Pell Grants and other programs, the state money would disproportionately help those from more comfortable backgrounds.

"If you're paying for two years for everybody, then you're paying for students whose families can afford to do it," said Kay McClenney, director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas. "And is that your best use of dollars within the public interest?"

There are other concerns. Molly Corbett Broad, president of the American Council on Education, generally praised the bills, but said students are more likely to be successful if they have "skin in the game" and pay something toward their education.

Patricia Schechter, a Portland State University professor active in the faculty union, worries that students will be induced into taking the community college route — "arguably against their interests" — and about the effect on public universities, whose students won't get a tuition break.

"We start competing for first-year students in a way that seems a little unfair if they can go somewhere for free," she said. "It doesn't address the creeping costs of higher ed. It just diverts them."

Hass, the Oregon state senator, countered that the university presidents he's spoken with, including Portland State's, support the idea.

"There's an old saying," he said of the criticism. "You can marshal an army to preserve the status quo."

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Airbus begins new engine option assembly as backlog mounts, and where Mobile fits

Al.com

March 18, 2014

Kelli Dugan

Welcome to the first installment of my new Business Before Breakfast column, which will be published three days a week (Tuesday, Thursday and Friday). I'll give you a little insight into the inner-workings of some of coastal Alabama's more interesting industries and, in turn, I hope you'll let me know what's happening everywhere from the boardroom to the back nine.

MOBILE, Alabama – The first Mobile-assembled commercial aircraft might not be delivered until 2016, but the Port City caught a glimpse of that future Monday while Airbus watched its own new baby take its first steps.

The A320neo, or new engine option, boasts a 15-percent reduction in fuel consumption, two tons of additional payload, substantially expanded range, lower operating costs and reductions in both noise and emissions. To date, Toulouse, France-based Airbus has logged more than 2,600 global orders for this single-aisle aircraft that has already captured 60 percent of the market, yet final assembly for the more fuel-efficient aircraft is only in its infancy.

Specifically, the join-up of the forward and aft fuselage sections – which arrived at Airbus' final assembly line in Toulouse from St. Nazaire, France, and Hamburg, Germany, respectively – began Monday. The next step will be the join-up of the wing to the fuselage. Its first flight is expected before the close of 2014, and its delivery is slated for the fourth quarter of 2015.

According to a statement issued by Airbus, it takes about one month to complete final assembly of an A320 family aircraft, with one leaving one of three current final assembly lines – in Toulouse, Hamburg or Tianjin, China – every seven hours.

Mobile, meanwhile, recently celebrated the topping-out ceremony for its own \$600 million final assembly line to be dedicated solely to production of A320 family aircraft, and Airbus Group Inc. Chairman Allan McArtor told the Wall Street Journal recently the facility will most likely be

a prime candidate to handle assembly of the company's next-generation A321 jets, Airbus' largest single-aisle jet being positioned to replace older Boeing 757s within aging U.S. fleets.

Coffee and cost-cutting?

The state of the city's finances will have a captive audience first thing this morning as Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson is expected to share details of his amended budget proposal – unveiled this past Thursday – with area business leaders.

Stimpson will address the Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce's monthly, members-only Executive Roundtable around 8 a.m., before the Mobile City Council's finance committee takes up the matter for formal discussion.

Startup-savvy

Mobile ranked highest among the only four Alabama cities tapped recently by WalletHub as among the best in the nation to start a business.

That's right. Mobile ranked 22nd on the Washington, D.C.-based personal finance website's top cities for entrepreneurs in 2014. Montgomery followed right behind at 23, with Huntsville ringing in at 25 and Birmingham at 31.

Specifically, WalletHub used 14 metrics to evaluate startup resources in the nation's 150 most populous cities, including access to capital, cost of office space, tax structure, labor pool availability, cost of living, average annual salary, education levels and length of the average workday, among others.

For the complete WalletHub report and methodology, [click here](#).

Mark your calendars

The Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance's 14th Annual Job Fair will be April 1 at the Daphne Civic Center from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The event, hosted in concert with the county's five chambers of commerce, is open to the public and will offer free seminars throughout the day to assist job seekers.

Businesses interested in exhibiting at the fair or becoming a sponsor are asked to contact Karen Glover at the alliance by calling 251-970-4081 or emailing her at kglover@baldwineda.com. You can also visit the alliance's website to download the registration form.

In addition to free seminars and face-time between job seekers and business owners, the Alabama Career Center will also be on hand to provide advice and counseling and Hero2Hired will assist military service members, veterans and military spouses in preparing for employment.

Help yourselves

And now that the stuffy details are out of the way, take a minute to check out this delightful video compiled by the folks at Business Insider that clues you in to the “8 Things You Should Never Say in a Job Interview”.

Seriously. Watch the video. But beware of the oddly loud Snow White-infused soundtrack.