



Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh  
Press Clips  
Monday, April 19, 2010

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**[Gov. Robert Bentley declares state of emergency, postpones special elections \(al.com\)](#)**

MONTGOMERY, Alabama – Gov. Robert Bentley called for Alabamians to hunker down for a couple of days of potentially treacherous weather, declaring a state of emergency effective at 6 a.m. Tuesday.

Bentley postponed for one week three special legislative elections that had been scheduled for Tuesday. The elections are in House District 31 in Elmore and Coosa counties, House District 104 in Mobile County and House District 53 in Jefferson County.

He said state offices would open Tuesday morning but might close later in the day or for Wednesday.

National Weather Service Meteorologist Jim Stefkovich said south Alabama could see one-tenth inch to one-quarter inch of ice on Tuesday.

"That's going to be the real nightmare," Stefkovich said.

The precipitation is expected to begin Tuesday morning and end by about midnight. But cold temperatures on Wednesday mean that the treacherous road conditions will persist.

Stefkovich said the heaviest snow, as much as about three inches, is expected over a band of central Alabama from just north of Montgomery to about Troy. But he said snow was expected as far north as the Interstate 20 corridor.

Asked whether Alabamians should expect a storm similar to one that blanketed the state in snow in 1993, Stefkovich said it would be more like the January 2011 storm that coated roadways with ice.

"It's going all the way to the coast ... all those exposed bridges," Stefkovich said. "It could be really hairy."

Alabama Department of Transportation Director John Cooper said trucks and equipment to place salt and salt brine on icy roads was being moved to south Alabama. He said he expected most of the major roadways to be treated with salt, salt brine or sand.

Bentley urged Alabamians to keep travel to a minimum, check the DOT website for road conditions and to check on their neighbors, especially the elderly.

Bentley activated the Alabama National Guard to be on stand-by in support of winter weather operations. The Alabama Emergency Management Agency is activating its State Emergency Operations Center to monitor the storm and assist county EMAs.

EMA Divisions in Mobile, Troy and Montgomery will activate at 7:00 a.m. Tuesday.

The governor said concerns about the availability of propane persist. He declared a state of emergency because of the threat of a propane shortage last week. The problem is especially serious for chicken farmers. Bentley said the main problem is there are not enough trucks to transport propane.

"We would like to ask everyone across the state to please conserve as much as possible their propane because we just don't know when that problem is going to be solved," Bentley said.

## **Alabama Legislature's plans uncertain due to snow (AP)**

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Legislative leaders are taking a wait-and-see approach to the meeting schedules for the House and Senate this week due to the weather.

Spokesmen say the House will meet at 1 p.m. Tuesday as planned and the Senate at 2 p.m. Tuesday. Then officials will assess the weather and decide what to do.

The House and Senate had set Tuesday's meeting times before the forecast for snow and ice. Their original plan was to have committee meetings Wednesday and sessions of the House and Senate on Thursday. But legislative spokesmen say that will be re-evaluated on Tuesday afternoon.

## **Democratic Party says Alabama Republican 'may be the worst person in the world' (Yellowhammer News)**

When Ala. State Senator Bryan Taylor, R-Prattville, introduced a bill requiring welfare recipients to perform community service to receive their benefits, he didn't realize he was propelling himself into the pantheon of the world's worst people.

But according to the Lauderdale County Democratic Party, that's exactly what he did.

Tweet

The tweet by the Lauderdale Democrats linked to an article by Montgomery Advertiser liberal editorial writer Josh Moon. In the article, Moon bemoans "ultra conservatives" in the Alabama Republican Party who perpetuate "every misperception, every caricature, every false narrative" of the poor in our state.

Moon specifically takes exception to Taylor's bill, which was one of several welfare reform bills that began working their way through the Alabama legislature last week. The other bills allow drug testing of welfare recipients with a prior drug conviction; make it a crime to defraud public assistance

programs; prohibit welfare recipients from spending benefits on alcohol, tobacco, strippers and gambling; and require welfare applicants to prove they're trying to get a job.

Moon shreds the GOP for those policies, which he says aren't based in reality, but rather fit into a false Republican narrative "that most welfare recipients are deadbeats." He did, however, stop short of calling Alabama Republicans the worst people in the world.

That's where the Lauderdale Democratic Party came in.

While we're thinking about it, let's take a quick look at a randomly ordered, off-the-cuff list of some of the worst people in the world.

- North Korea's Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un imprisons tens of thousands of his political enemies in labor camps and recently sentenced his uncle to be eaten by a pack of 120 dogs. In his spare time, Kim threatens the world with "all out nuclear war."
- Joseph Kony is the leader of a guerrilla army that has abducted tens of thousands of children to become sex slaves and child soldiers. When there aren't people around to kill, Kony's army slaughters elephants so he can add more ivory tusks to his collection.
- Khalid Sheikh Mohammed is the radical islamist who was the principal architect of the 9/11 attacks that killed roughly 3,000 Americans. He is currently being detained at Guantanamo Bay.
- Omar al-Bashir, the President of Sudan, has led "a campaign of murder, rape and mass deportation" in Darfur. According to The Guardian, Bashir, "masterminded and implemented a plan to destroy in substantial part" three tribal groups in Darfur because of their ethnicity. In case I'm not getting the point across, we're talking genocide here.

...And now, the Lauderdale County Democrats would like to add Sen. Bryan Taylor and his fellow Republicans in the Alabama legislature to this list.

Taylor took a short break from his evil deeds to give us his thoughts on being one of the worst people on Earth.

"I guess that shows just how far left some Alabama Democrats have swung," Taylor told Yellowhammer. "I'm just proposing to reinstate the bipartisan program a Republican Congress passed and Bill Clinton signed into law in 1996 as part of welfare reform. It was in effect until 2008, when Obama suspended it. Since then, the number of food stamp recipients has skyrocketed by 56 percent. If it makes me 'evil' to support reinstating a bipartisan program to require that unemployed able-

bodied adults without dependents engage in productive activity, such as job-hunting, job training, or community service in order to keep their benefits, well, then, I guess I'm evil."

A call to Lauderdale Democratic Party Chairman John C. Harris, Jr. was not immediately returned.

## **[What's the Huntsville senate delegation up to? Bills tackling crime, schools, welfare and more \(al.com\)](#)**

Here's a look at some of the bills sponsored during the legislative session this month by the state senators who represent Madison County.

Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur: The seniormost member of the local Senate delegation is also the busiest. He's sponsored 23 bills so far this session, and has tackled a wide variety of topics from open meetings to jury sizes to gifted classes.

But the bills receiving the most attention so far are probably the pair related to welfare. Orr has one bill that would require recipients apply for at least three jobs, and those who quit a job cannot qualify for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Another seeks to prevent any welfare dollars from going toward beer, tobacco or the lottery. The bills also says public benefits can't be used for tattoos, psychic readings, gambling, strip club visits or body piercings.

Orr has a proposal to provide start-up grants to boost gifted education programs in public schools, if the state has the money. He'd tweak the open meetings law to allow members to call in or video chat at public meetings. Another bill would drop Alabama juries from 12 members to just 6 for misdemeanor criminal trials and civil cases involving less than \$50,000.

Perhaps his most unusual bill would require that people diagnosed with "autism spectrum disorder" have the letters ASD stamped on their Alabama drivers licenses.

Sen. Bill Holtzclaw, R-Madison: He's been a little less active this session than last, when his flexibility bill morphed into the show-stealing Alabama Accountability Act. So far he's sponsored two bills, but none involve schools.

He instead seeks to increase charges for certain sorts of murder, making defendants eligible for the death penalty. The bill would make murder at a daycare or murder of a criminal prosecutor a capital

offense. The bill would also make it a capital offense to murder a juror, a policeman or a victim in order "to avenge, intimidate or retaliate." That would also apply to their family members.

Holtzclaw also sponsored the much discussed Fair Justice Act to speed up the Rule 32 appeals process for criminals sentenced to be executed.

Sen. Paul Sanford, R-Huntsville: Sanford, who represents the largest portion of Huntsville city, has -- like Orr -- taken on a broad variety of topics. He seeks to exempt health savings accounts from state income tax; to no longer require voter lists be published in local newspapers; to prohibit courts from ordering payment of college tuition for children over 18, unless they are "mentally or physically disabled."

Sanford also has a couple more narrow bills. For example, in Alabama those who purchase wine at dinner, and do not finish the bottle, may recork the bottle and take it home. Sanford would change the open container exemption to require that recorked wine be stowed in a trunk, in the bed of a pickup, in a locked glovebox or put in a locked case behind the rearmost seat in a hatchback.

Sanford also sponsored a new "defense of necessity" against prosecution for possession of cannabidiol, a marijuana-derived anti-seizure medication.

Sanford's broadest bill is also his most concise. It simply asserts a new state right. "A parent has a fundamental right to direct the education, upbringing and care of his or her child."

Sen. Clay Scofield, R-Guntersville: Scofield once again sponsored a bill that he has said is of personal significance, called Kelley's Law. The bill would make it a capital offense to murder a person who had already taken out a protection order against the defendant.

Scofield also sponsored a bill that would redact "identifying information" in older online statements of economic interest filed by public officials with the Alabama Ethics Commission. Scofield seeks to extend certain immunities to probate judges; require schools count as transfers - instead of dropouts - students who leave for online schools; and change the way state employees choose representatives for the State Employees Insurance Board.

Sen. Shadrack McGill, R-Scottsboro: McGill has announced that he is unlikely to seek re-election. He has sponsored just one bill this session, exempting belongings that cost less than \$250 from state property tax.

## **Birmingham set to spend \$130,000 on state lobbyists, Water Works bill opposition high on priority list (al.com)**

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- A former state senator, a law firm with ties to a former governor and a former longtime Birmingham Water Works chairman are among the slate of lobbyists set to represent the city of Birmingham at the State House.

The City Council this morning will vote on \$130,000 in contracts for four lobbyists for the current legislative session.

Proposed contracts are: \$50,000 for Jay Murrill a lawyer with Riley & Jackson; \$40,000 for Anthony Barnes, a Birmingham businessman and former longtime Water Works Board chairman; \$25,000 to Daryl O. Perkins of Master Solutions and \$15,000 to Kurt Lee, a former Republican state senator from Walker County.

Riley & Jackson, a Homewood firm, was founded by Rob Riley Jr. and Keith Jackson. Riley is the son of former Alabama Governor Bob Riley.

The complete list was passed out Monday during the Budget and Finance Committee meeting.

A major issue for the city is opposition to proposed legislation to change the composition and operation of the Birmingham Water Works Board.

"We think it's important for us to have a team of people to go down as a unified front for the city of Birmingham to advocate for bills and fight against others," Council President Johnathan Austin told AL.com.

Lawmakers began the 2014 legislative session Jan. 14.

Birmingham's new lobbyists would join representatives already hired by the Water Works Board to meet with legislators, in part, to quash proposals from State Sen. Jabo Waggoner, R-Vestavia Hills, and Rep. Paul Demarco, R-Homewood.

The bills would put a \$500 monthly cap on board member pay, mandate a two-term limit for board service, and require public hearings before water rate increases.

The most controversial parts of the proposal involve expanding the five-member board to include representatives from other counties and limiting board pay. Currently, the entire board is appointed by the Birmingham City Council.

Councilman Steven Hoyt complained there was not enough discussion about the list of proposed lobbyists before a completed slate was passed out Monday afternoon.

"You said we were ten lanes moving in the same direction and I'm trying to figure out what street we're on," Hoyt said during the committee meeting before the committee endorsed the list. Hoyt is not a member of the committee.

Rather than traveling a smooth highway, Hoyt said it appeared that city leaders were more likely riding down an alley. Hoyt said his concern over the process would be evident with his vote during this morning's council meeting.

Bell defended the selection process, saying the current team was the result of collaboration between both the mayor and council offices.

"Lobbyists for the city have always been the purview of the mayor," Bell said. "This is the first time it has been invaded by the council."

Bell said the lobbyist lineup was the result of cooperation and a voluntary ceding of his authority.

"But I need your cooperation to make that happen," he said. "I'm trying to accommodate the council. I'm trying to be cooperative."

While Bell insisted that he was within his rights to select lobbyists, Councilwoman Kim Rafferty reminded that mayor that it was within the council's authority to either approve or deny the spending requests.

The four lobbyists will exceed the original \$100,000 the council set aside for lobbyists earlier this month.

Councilwoman Valerie Abbott, chairwoman of the Budget and Finance Committee, has pressed for more details on the lobbyists.

She continued to object to Bell's recommendation of Barnes, whose long tenure on the Water Works Board is frequently cited by critics of the utility.



Bell said Barnes will not work on opposing the water works legislation. Instead, he would work on other items, such as expansion of the historic tax credits.

Still, Abbott said his presence in Montgomery on behalf of the city sends the wrong message to legislators with their sights set on the water works.

The committee endorsed all four lobbyists with Abbott being the lone no vote against Barnes.

"The mayor knows how I feel about appointing Anthony Barnes, since he's been part of the problem at the water works," Abbott said. "He's an absolutely lovely man, but that has nothing to do with hiring him."

## **Sen. Sessions: Immigration spikes income inequality (USA Today)**

By: Jeff Sessions

In Tuesday's State of the Union address, President Obama is expected to discuss the plight of American workers. At the same time, he is pushing Republicans to pass an immigration plan making the problem worse by increasing the flow of immigrant workers to compete against unemployed Americans and those struggling to get by in low-wage jobs. Yet, alarmingly, the move is regarded as a part of Obama's agenda that has a chance of becoming law.

COLUMN: How Americans can kill Obamacare, legalize pot

House Republicans should reply to the president's immigration effort with a simple message: Our first duty is to help struggling Americans find good work and rising wages.

The president's own economic adviser, Gene Sperling, recently noted that there are three unemployed people for every job available. Wages today have been flat since 2000. Last year, a record one in five American households received food stamps.

This is a national emergency.

So what is the president's proposal? With three job seekers for every open job, he proposes doubling the number of guest workers entering every year, granting immediate work permits to millions of

illegal immigrants, and tripling the number of new immigrants granted permanent residency over the next decade.

Today, the U.S. admits 1 million immigrants a year. The plan supported by the president and Senate Democrats would increase that to 3 million a year, or 30 million largely lower-skill immigrants over the next 10.

Did anyone ask the American people whether they wanted to triple immigration?

Polling shows that the public opposes these increases. The opposition is particularly strong among lower- and middle-income Americans. Those earning under \$30,000 prefer a reduction to an increase by 3-1.

This is not hard to understand. From 2000 to 2013, a period of record immigration, the number of U.S.-born Americans with jobs declined by 1.3 million while the number of immigrants with jobs increased 5.3 million. On net, all employment gains went to immigrant workers.

Harvard professor George Borjas determined that high levels of immigration from 1980 through 2000 resulted in a 7.4% wage reduction for workers without a high school diploma. Similarly, he found current immigration policy resulted in a net wage loss of \$402 billion for workers competing directly with immigrant labor.

Republicans have the opportunity to give voice to the working and middle-class Americans whose wages and job prospects have eroded drastically in recent years. House GOP leaders are reportedly planning to release their "immigration principles" this week. Unfortunately, leaks reveal the leaders' plan mirrors central elements of the president's plan, combining work permits for millions of illegal immigrants with large permanent increases in the flow of new workers from abroad. This would be an extraordinary act of self-sabotage.

Would it not be in the national interest to help move Americans off of welfare and into good paying jobs that can support a family? Is there not an argument to be made that we should slow down and allow wages to rise, assimilation to occur, and both immigrants and citizens to rise together into the middle class?

Republicans have a chance to recapture the trust of millions of disaffected voters who have turned away. But it will mean resisting the influence of corporate interests acting on the president's behalf. And it will mean recognizing the practical real-world concerns of everyday Americans.

The choice is clear. Either the GOP can help the White House deliver a crushing hammer blow to the middle class — or it can stand alone as the one party defending the legitimate interests of American workers.

Sen. Jeff Sessions is an Alabama Republican.

## **Alabama's GOP lawmakers want fewer government-focused solutions from Obama (Montgomery Advertiser)**

WASHINGTON — Alabama's Republican members of Congress are bracing for a State of the Union speech on Tuesday that further alienates conservatives by calling for a larger government role to combat poverty, according to members of the state's congressional delegation.

President Barack Obama will address a joint session of Congress at 8 p.m. The annual event seems less likely this year to produce avenues for bipartisan compromise, the Republicans said.

Rep. Martha Roby, R-Montgomery, is expecting partisan rhetoric about the growing gap between the rich and the poor in the U.S. and the persistent crisis of poverty.

"What I hope to hear from the president — but all indications are it won't be this — but I'm hopeful I'll hear him laying out opportunities for job growth based on the employee and what's good for the American worker and taxpayer by reducing the size of government rather than expanding government programs," Roby said Monday.

She said Obama's expected call to increase the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour would invite unintended consequences. Democrats tend to favor an increase to better keep up with inflation. Republicans say an increase would hurt hiring.

"What good does it do a mom who missed out on a job because a company's payroll was too high?" Roby said.

Another piece of Obama's anti-poverty theme is expected to be education and increasing access to — and the quality of — pre-school programs for 4-year-olds. Roby said such proposals amount to federal intrusion into local decisions on schools.

"It's not the responsibility of the president of the United States at the State of the Union to stand up and tell states how to educate our children," Roby said Monday.

Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., said Obama's call to give legal status to some of the 11 million immigrants in the country illegally would exacerbate the problems of the middle class by increasing the competition for jobs. Sessions opposed a Senate-passed plan to overhaul immigration laws and provide some of the 11 million a path to citizenship.

"What we have seen from the president — a plan to increase the minimum wage and extend unemployment compensation for people who are long-term unemployed — are plans that treat symptoms of the disease rather than the problem," Sessions said Monday in an interview.

White House officials say the president will lay out plans for creating an economy that provides opportunity and rewards hard work.

"After all, it is a theme the president put front and center since he first ran for president in 2007, when he talked about his view that too many middle-class families are working harder and harder yet falling farther and farther behind," said Josh Earnest, deputy press secretary at the White House. "He'll talk about expanding economic opportunities for the middle class so every American — all Americans — have a good shot."

Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Saks, said Obama's focus on income inequality is a distraction from concerns in his district about the implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

"It makes me think his eye is not on the ball," Rogers said.

He said employers and workers are worried about how the law will affect their employer-provided health insurance plans.

"Rather than the president trying to stir another pot for an election year, he needs to focus on the circumstances right now," Rogers said.

The lone Democrat in Alabama's congressional delegation, Rep. Terri Sewell of Birmingham, said increasing the minimum wage should be included in any agenda to improve the economy.

"No one wants anything to be given to them," Sewell said. "They're not looking for hand-outs, they're looking for hand-ups."

Sewell said she'll be listening to the president's speech for details on equipping American workers with valuable skills, making college loans more affordable and improving pay for women.

"I want to hear words of empowerment for those who hope to join the middle class," she said. "I look forward to hearing practical solutions to long-term problems that have plagued my district and the nation."

On the foreign policy front, Roby, who has large military installations in her district, worries Obama will reveal too much about the strategy for withdrawing troops from Afghanistan. In last year's address, Obama said that another 34,000 troops would come home and that the war would end by the end of 2014.

"I think the worst thing we can do is open our playbook and tell our enemies how long they have to wait," Roby said.

Sessions, a former federal prosecutor, said he would like Obama to retreat from recent comments downplaying the dangers of smoking marijuana. Obama told the New Yorker the drug is not any more dangerous than alcohol, but he told his daughters to avoid it because it is an unhealthy habit.

"I think it's one of the greatest errors he's made in the entire time of his presidency," Sessions said. "For 10 years I worked intensely with community groups in Alabama and particularly in Mobile where we successfully saw a reduction in the use of drugs by young people and adults as a result of a clear message that drug use is unacceptable."

## **[Congressman Byrne joins steel caucus, subcommittee responsible for Navy contracts \(al.com\)](#)**

U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne, R-Fairhope, on Monday joined congressional subcommittees that he says put him in the best position to safeguard Austal USA's naval contracts.

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Buck McKeon, R-Calif., notified Byrne that he would serve on the Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee and the Tactical Air and Land Forces Subcommittee. Earlier this month, the newly installed representative got an appointment to the Armed Services Committee.

The Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee has direct jurisdiction over policy for the U.S. Navy, which includes Austal's contracts to build ships in Mobile.

"These subcommittee assignments are a victory for our south Alabama workers at Austal and across the state line at Huntington Ingalls," Byrne said in a prepared statement. "From these subcommittees, I will work to protect the job-generating contracts for the cutting-edge Littoral Combat Ship and Joint High Speed Vessel built right here at home in the Port of Mobile. I look forward to working with Chairman McKeon and Subcommittee Chairman Forbes from these important posts."

Rep. Randy Forbes, R-Va., welcomed Byrne to the subcommittee. "Given Alabama's past and present contributions to American shipbuilding and his many years of distinguished public service, it is only fitting that Congressman Byrne play a leading role in ensuring the strength of American Seapower," Forbes said in a statement.

Byrne also announced that he has joined the House Shipbuilding Caucus and the House Steel Caucus.

Austal, which employs roughly 4,000 workers at the Port of Mobile, is the city's largest industrial employer. Huntington Ingalls Industries, a shipbuilding company that provides ships for the Coast Guard and the Navy, employs roughly 1,700 Alabamians at its Pascagoula facility.

"Shipbuilding is a major industry in Alabama's 1st Congressional District, representing thousands of jobs and the livelihood of thousands of south Alabama families," Byrne stated. "This is an excellent place for me to craft policies with Members of Congress who share my commitment to jobs and building a naval fighting force for the next century."

Byrne also indicated that his position in the steel caucus would be important to a region that includes a facility operated jointly by ArcelorMittal and Nippon Steel and Sumitomo Metal Corp., ThyssenKrupp, Outokumpu Oyj, Berg Pipe and SSAB.

"Our steel facilities are jobs providers for our region and state," he stated. "I am excited to join the House Steel Caucus to work with Members whose districts encompass steel-producing interests across the country to forge agreements and foster better cooperation with this industry."

**[NLRB hearing set on charges that Mercedes interfered with union campaign \(al.com\)](#)**

A National Labor Relations Board hearing has been set on charges that Mercedes-Benz interfered with the United Auto Workers' effort to organize a union at the automaker's Tuscaloosa County factory.

Three separate unfair labor practice charges were filed last summer and fall. One, filed Aug. 21, was dismissed, and the other two have been consolidated into one case that is proceeding to the April 7 hearing, said Claude T. "Chip" Harrell Jr., regional director for the NLRB office in Atlanta.

"Charges were filed, we investigated and determined there was reasonable cause to believe the (National Labor Relations) Act has been violated, with respect to certain aspects," he said this morning in an interview.

The complaint issued by the NLRB says Mercedes has been interfering with, restraining and coercing employees from exercising rights guaranteed under the National Labor Relations Act.

It alleges that plant supervisors prohibited employees from talking about the union during work time, but they allowed discussion of other non-work subjects. It also says supervisors threatened employees with discipline including termination if they solicited for the union anywhere inside the plant, but they allowed solicitations and distributions for things that didn't involve the union.

In a statement today, Mercedes' Alabama operations, officially called Mercedes-Benz U.S. International, said it was pleased with the dismissal of the charge and allegations filed in August.

"As for the remaining matters, we disagree with the UAW's version of events and look forward to the NLRB hearing where witnesses and the evidence will establish that team members' rights were not violated. The NLRB process still has many more stages of litigation and review, and it is important to make clear that there has not yet been any finding that MBUSI has done anything wrong," the company statement reads.

"We at MBUSI believe that our actions have been entirely appropriate, lawful and consistent with our position of neutrality on the union issue. MBUSI will continue to respect the rights of our team members and we believe that our positive team culture of open communication and direct access to management is the best path to a successful future."

The hearing will be held before an administrative law judge, and the parties will have a chance to make their case, Harrell said. The judge will then make recommendations to the NLRB in Washington, which will issue a decision.

The UAW plans a news conference this afternoon at its Tuscaloosa County office, where Mercedes employees will talk about the development. State Sen. Bobby Singleton also is expected to attend.

The union campaign at the Mercedes plant is part of a broader push by the UAW throughout the Southeast and includes efforts at the Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga and Nissan in Canton, Miss.

In the rearview: In other news about Alabama's auto industry last week, Trussville's Southern Comfort Automotive unveiled a new off-road performance truck, the Chevrolet Reaper. SCA gets vehicles from manufacturers and outfits them with after-market touches and accessories. The company is adding about 25 jobs tied to the Reaper model. Read the story.

Number of the week: 9.98 million. That's how many vehicles Toyota sold around the world during 2013, a performance that allowed it to retain the crown of the top-selling global automaker. Read more.

## **[Bill to Offer an Option to Give Vouchers \(New York Times\)](#)**

Senator Lamar Alexander, who served as secretary of education under President George Bush in the early 1990s, plans to introduce a bill on Tuesday that would give 11 million children from low-income families federal money to spend on any kind of schooling their parents choose, as long as it is in an accredited institution.

Although the bill is likely to face strong opposition from the Democratic majority in the Senate, it is another sign that Republicans are staking out school choice as a significant rallying point in an election year and promoting it on the day President Obama delivers his State of the Union address. Representative Eric Cantor of Virginia, the majority leader, has spoken out repeatedly about his support for vouchers and an expansion of charter schools.

"We have a problem with federal funds today that are supposed to be going to low-income families," Mr. Alexander, Republican of Tennessee, said in a telephone interview. "The simplest way for them to get there is just to pin them to the blouse or shirt of a child and let it follow the child to the school they attend."

Mr. Alexander's bill would take about \$24 billion — or about 41 percent — of current federal spending on elementary and secondary public schools, and allow states to decide whether to give the lowest-income families the money as individual scholarships to pay for private school tuition, or to attend a public school outside the child's traditional neighborhood zone, or a charter school.



For each eligible child, based on family income, an average of about \$2,100 in federal money would be allocated.

About a third of states have already taken steps to redefine public education with a network of vouchers and scholarships that allow families to use state taxpayer funds to educate their children however they want, whether it be in public, charter, private or religious schools, online or at home.

Under Mr. Alexander's bill, states would be allowed to opt in to the voucher program. States could also continue to distribute federal funds to public schools rather than individual students.

Republicans have long favored voucherlike proposals. During the 2012 presidential campaign, the Republican nominee, Mitt Romney, proposed a program similar to Senator Alexander's.

Last week, Senator Tim Scott, Republican of South Carolina, introduced legislation to allow families of students with disabilities to gain access to about \$11 billion in federal funds for vouchers to attend private schools.

Supporters of vouchers in states said that adding federal dollars to state funds would allow children to escape underperforming neighborhood schools.

"Right now, families have to wait for schools to implement three- to five-year reform plans," said Kevin P. Chavous, a senior adviser to the American Federation for Children, a nonprofit group that supports school vouchers and tax-credit scholarship programs. "We'd like parents to have quality options as soon as possible."

But teachers' unions, school boards and other supporters of traditional public schools say vouchers undermine the schools that are already struggling to improve.

Vouchers and tax-credit scholarships have "done a tremendous amount of harm in destabilizing already austerity-filled and under-resourced schools all throughout America," said Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, the nation's second-largest teachers' union.

Critics also point out that in some states where vouchers are legal, students have enrolled in schools that teach creationism or schools that have delivered weak academic results.

"The big issue is really that lack of accountability," said Thomas J. Gentzel, executive director of the National School Boards Association. "Frankly, our view is every child should have access to a great public school where they live."

## **Calif. students sue, say tenure protects bad teachers (AP)**

LOS ANGELES — In a packed courtroom, attorneys unveiled opposing views Monday on the emotionally divisive issue of whether California public school teachers should be protected from dismissal if they are found to be grossly ineffective in their jobs.

The opening volleys in what's expected to be a month-long trial came from lawyers for nine students seeking to abolish teacher tenure and seniority, and from attorneys for the governor, state education department and teacher unions who say such extreme measures are not needed.

"The evidence will show that the impact of an effective teacher is profound and undeniable," said attorney Theodore Boutros Jr. "This is the gateway to their success in society."

He said he will present experts and studies showing that achievements in later life can be measured by interactions with good teachers.

One study showed that students taught by ineffective teachers had their lifetime income reduced by \$2 million, Boutros said.

The trial, being heard by Superior Court Judge Rolf Treu without a jury, is the latest battle in a nationwide trend.

Dozens of states have moved in recent years to abolish or toughen the standards around giving teachers permanent employment protection and seniority-based preferences during layoffs.

Unions say eliminating such laws would erase a vital support system for a profession that is already losing talented people to higher paid positions in the private sector.

The first named plaintiff in the case, 17-year-old Beatriz Vergara, will testify about teachers falling asleep in class, sitting and reading newspapers or playing YouTube videos while ignoring students, the lawyer said.

The students oppose the tenure system they say keeps bad teachers in classroom. Boutros said the granting of tenure, which amounts to lifetime employment protection, after 18 months on the job is inadequate to guard against accepting unqualified teachers.

He said there are 275,000 teachers in California but under the current rules, the state dismisses just 10 teachers a year for being ineffective in their jobs.

Lawyers for the state and unions countered that most teachers targeted by such claims usually resign before dismissal is necessary.

Central to the lawsuit is the claim that teachers who fail are shuttled to schools in minority and poor neighborhoods, giving those students an unequal education. Boutrous said that is a violation of the state constitution's guarantee of education.

Deputy Attorney General Nimrod Elias told Judge Treu that 18 months is more than enough time to identify teachers who are "the worst of the worst."

He and attorney James Finberg, representing the teachers union, said the guarantees of tenure, seniority and other benefits are necessary to keep teachers in the low-paying jobs.

"Our schools struggle to retain teachers," he said, noting the challenge is greatest in high-crime areas. Elias noted that Gov. Jerry Brown has made education a centerpiece of his budget and plans to pour funds into schools in low-income and minority areas.

Boutrous said Los Angeles Unified School District Superintendent John Deasy will be among the witnesses called by the plaintiffs.