



Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh
Press Clips
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EDITORIAL: AEA serves system, not the students **(Tuscaloosa News)**

Leave it to the Alabama Education Association to knock efforts to help give children an opportunity for a better education.

AEA lawyer Bobby Segall said businesses and individuals who donate money to scholarship funds and get tax credits in return really aren't all that generous. The donors are getting back a dollar in tax credits for every dollar they contribute.

"There is no philanthropy," Segall said.

Perhaps these businesses and individuals wouldn't be contributing to scholarship funds if they couldn't get something back. We have no way of knowing. But is that really the issue? Isn't it a bit more important that some Alabama children might get a chance to escape failing public schools and get a better education?

Then again, is anyone really surprised when children aren't the focus of an Alabama Education Association argument? For decades, the organization has fought reforms that could have made Alabama's schools better.

The AEA is suing to block the 2013 Alabama Accountability Act, which allows parents of children who attend failing public schools to get up to \$3,500 annually in tax credits to help them send their children to private schools or transfer to public schools that aren't labeled as failing.

The law also allows for the establishment of scholarship funds that businesses and individuals can contribute to in exchange for tax credits. The amount of tax credits is capped at \$25 million. The Alabama Department of Revenue says that contributors reached the cap in 2013.

Maybe these contributors aren't as altruistic as some might have you believe. But how would you characterize AEA's efforts to stop children from escaping bad circumstances and perhaps finding a path to a better life? Is turf protection really admirable?

We don't like the sneaky way the Alabama Legislature passed the Alabama Accountability Act. We aren't sure whether it will deliver as promised. But we'd like to give it a chance to work. The AEA's concern is that it just might work too well.

Alabama House passes bill to create scholarships for dual enrollment job courses (AP)

The Alabama House of Representatives has approved an effort to expand a dual enrollment program that lets high school students take job training classes at two-year colleges.

House members approved the bill Wednesday by a 100-0 vote.

The bill would create up to \$10 million in scholarships funded by donations. Businesses would get up to a 50 percent tax credit for the donations. They could also steer the bulk of their donation to a specific program.

Proponents say the program helps high school students graduate ready for high-paying, skilled careers such as welding and aircraft engine repair.

While the bill passed without opposition, some lawmakers questioned if the state could afford the cost of the tax breaks which could hit \$5 million.

The bill now goes to the Alabama Senate.

House members fuss about state examiner (Decatur Daily)

MONTGOMERY — A discussion about Rep. Ed Henry's bill to put the state examiner of public accounts under the state auditor led to some excited exchanges in a committee meeting Wednesday.

The legislation was largely prompted by chief examiner Ron Jones' decision last year to promote an assistant examiner at the highest salary allowed for the job — \$240,000 a year.

A panel of lawmakers, including Henry, R-Hartselle, criticized Jones' decision but lacked authority to overrule it. Jones, who is paid \$241,000 a year, stood by his decision. Henry's bill essentially transfers examiner's office oversight to the auditor's office.

But during the committee meeting, several lawmakers questioned Henry's agenda. Rep. John Knight, D-Montgomery, asked repeatedly for the purpose of the bill.

The examiner's office "has been irresponsible with taxpayer dollars and if you don't understand that, I don't understand why you're here," Henry shot back.

Knight responded: "I know why I'm here and the people who elected me know why I'm here."

State Code allows the examiner's office to operate differently than other agencies, including with regard to salary structure. Rep. Lynn Greer, R-Rogersville, said the large raise the assistant examiner received was an insult to other state employees who haven't seen a cost-of-living increase in years.

"We've got to think of the taxpayer, and sometimes I think they're the least thought of," Greer said. Later, he challenged fellow lawmakers opposed to the bill to go home and explain that to their constituents.

A vote on House Bill 350 was carried over until next week.

According to its website, the examiner's office can audit the books, accounts and records of all state and county offices, officers, bureaus, boards, commissions, corporations, departments and agencies, and report on expenditures, contracts, or other audit findings found to be in violation of law.

The auditor's office reports to the governor receipts and disbursement of revenues collected and paid into the treasury. It's also responsible for the accounting of state personal property costing \$100 or more.

[Sen. Rodger Smitherman says Water Works bill 'totally unacceptable,' hoping for compromise \(al.com\)](#)

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Sen. Rodger Smitherman said a plan to revamp the Birmingham Water Works Board approved by a Senate committee today is "totally unacceptable," but said he hopes a compromise can be reached.

The bill would weaken the Birmingham City Council's influence over the board by expanding the board and giving appointing authority to others.

The bill makes other changes to the board, including a cap on pay, shorter terms and term limits for board members. It would require public hearings before rate increases.

Smitherman, a Democrat from Birmingham, said he supports those provisions.

"The only sticking point is the composition of the board and the appointing authorities," Smitherman said.

The Senate Fiscal Responsibility and Accountability Committee approved the bill today.

But the chairman, Sen. Phil Williams, R-Rainbow City, agreed not to officially report the bill to the Senate floor to allow more time for negotiations between Smitherman and the bill's sponsor, Sen. Jabo Waggoner, D-Vestavia Hills.

"I think we're working in good faith on both sides and trying to come up with a compromise," Smitherman said. "I don't know if we'll be able to come to that compromise, but we're working in good faith in trying to get there."

Waggoner also told AL.com earlier today that he was willing to compromise.

[Legislation to change Birmingham Water Works Board tilts balance of power away from city \(al.com\)](#)

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- Legislation in Montgomery to change the Birmingham Water Works Board operation and composition goes further than most expected, tilting the balance of power away from Birmingham in favor of outside municipalities.

A Senate committee today approved a bill from Sen. Jabo Waggoner, R-Vestavia Hills, that reduces board member terms and salaries and adds more members outside the city of Birmingham.

The bill now makes its way to the Senate floor.

A surprise addition to the bill includes a provision giving Jefferson County appointing authority for one member who does not live within the city of Birmingham.

Jefferson County representation is in addition to the expected addition of members from Shelby, Blount, St. Clair and Walker Counties. If approved, the nine member board would be comprised of five from outside the city and just four from Birmingham. The new members would be appointed by the county commissions in those areas.

The bill passed the Senate Fiscal Responsibility and Accountability Committee with a lone 'no' vote from Sen. Linda Coleman, D-Birmingham.

Waggoner told AL.com this afternoon that he is still open to some negotiation.

"I've been willing to compromise, and maybe we can come up with something that the other side can live with," he said this afternoon. "I'm not hard and fast with this. I'm trying to be reasonable."

Waggoner said he plans to meet with Coleman Thursday before the bill moves to the full Senate.

The new configuration would put Birmingham in the minority on a newly-composed board, a deal-breaker for Birmingham officials who have lobbied against the bill.

Waggoner's bill also reduces the years of board terms from six years to four years and imposes a two-term limit for service.

Other changes include capping monthly stipends for board members to \$500. Additionally, the bill would require public hearings before water rate increases are enacted.

The provision would make official the gentlemen's agreement already in place where the City Council has appointed one non-Birmingham board member.

However, Waggoner's bill takes away that non-binding promise and makes it a requirement fulfilled by the Jefferson County Commission.

Today's bill shocked some at City Hall.

Birmingham Water Works Chairman Jackie Robinson, members George Munchus, Ann Florie, David Herring and Sherry Lewis.

"I'm a bit taken back because I thought that a compromise could be reached in order to settle the matter on the issues that this bill was seeking to address," said Councilwoman Lashunda Scales, chairwoman of the Utilities Committee.

"As a city of Birmingham official, I would not support any measure that would give outside municipalities more governance than its original owner, in which Birmingham is the largest single customer base of the Water Works board. Why would we have less representation than other municipalities being considered?"

The city argues that the legislation is unfair because it dilutes Birmingham's authority on the board.

Most Water Works Board members oppose the legislation, calling it unnecessary. They have said the authority is already transparent, inclusive and has taken voluntary steps to reduce board pay.

Mayor William Bell had also called for a compromise with legislators and offered to mediate. On the other hand, he recommended the city hire its own team of lobbyists at a cost of \$130,000.

"In his State of the City Address and even during the meeting that was held at Crossplex with a number of elected officials, he was willing to sit down and listen and if necessary, bringing people together," Bell's Chief of Staff Chuck Faush said today. "Today's action stresses there is obviously some discussion that needs to be had, and the mayor is the one to lead that effort as he has successfully brought us together on a number of issues."

Both the Water Works Board and the city have hired their own teams of lobbyists and political consultants to both monitor and help fight the legislation.

A companion House version of the legislation from Rep. Paul Demarco, R-Homewood, has not yet been introduced, but Demarco has said he will present it this session.

As chairman of the committee, Scales in December proposed a resolution calling for compromise on the legislation.

She said reform provisions, such as limiting board pay and mandating public hearings for rate increases. But she questioned the fairness of expanding the board to include other counties and other appointing authorities.

Ultimately, the full council passed a resolution opposing the entire legislation.

The council last month was also set to consider its own rules to institute board member term limits and require the appointment of a non-city resident to the utility, but never brought the issue to a vote.

The Republican-led legislation is certain to bring a fight. Democratic members of the Birmingham and Jefferson County Legislative Delegation have promised a fight to kill the bills comparing it to "guerrilla warfare."

Open Meetings Act revisions clear first hurdle (AP)

PHILLIP RAWLS

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) - A bill to strengthen Alabama's Open Meetings Act passed its first test in the Legislature on Wednesday.

The Senate Judiciary Committee approved a slightly revised version of the bill on a unanimous vote. It now goes to the Senate for consideration.

The bill's sponsor, Republican Sen. Cam Ward of Alabaster, said the Legislature enacted a good Open Meeting Act in 2005, but three recent rulings by the Alabama Supreme Court "ripped it up and threw it out the window."

In response to those rulings, his bill provides that legislative meetings are open to the public, that private citizens can sue for government boards not having open meetings, and that board members can't use private meetings in small groups to avoid the whole board making decisions in open meetings.

The Judiciary Committee modified the last provision to make sure it is not violation for board members to exchange information so long as they don't deliberate and try to influence how a person will vote while talking in small groups. Another revision specifies that gatherings to fill a position, such as a university president, are not serial meetings until the field is narrowed to three candidates or less.

The bill is backed by the Alabama Press Association and the governor.

"It's a lot better than what we've currently got," Press Association attorney Dennis Bailey said.

A similar bill is pending in a House committee, but the Press Association is trying to get Ward's bill moving through the Legislature first, executive director Felicia Mason said.

Ward said passing an open meetings bill is not easy, but it is his top priority.

"I haven't had anyone say they want to bypass open meetings. What I've had is people say is I want to know where the line is so I don't have a violation," he said.

[Bills to limit payday loan, auto title loan rates sidetracked in Alabama House committee \(al.com\)](#)

MONTGOMERY, Alabama — The House Financial Services Committee on Wednesday sent a payday-loan regulation bill to a subcommittee, a move that the bill's sponsor called an effort to kill the legislation.

The bill would cap the annual interest rate at 36 percent on the short-term loans. It also would establish a state database to enforce existing limits on how many loans people can have out at one time.

The committee voted to send the bill to subcommittee after a public hearing. The committee action was the first skirmish this session in the long-running battle between groups who say the businesses take advantage of the poor and lenders who say they provide a service.

"I'm very disappointed because of the thousands of people who will be driven into poverty while we fiddle around on this," bill sponsor, Rep. Patricia Todd, D-Birmingham, said after the vote.

Shay Farley, the legal director of Alabama Appleseed, an advocacy group for low-income people, told committee members that the interest rates charged by the lenders are immoral.

However, Jay McDuffie, CEO of Alabama Cash Services, said customers choose those loans over others types of financial transactions. The charges are less than the fees for overdrawing a checking account or missing a payment on a credit card, he said.

Committee chairman Lesley Vance, R-Phenix City, said Todd's bill could possibly come out of committee this session, but also might not.

"You've got to address the cause of what's causing people to run down there," Vance said of people's use of the lenders.

The committee also carried over a second bill related to the automobile-title loan industry.

Alabama campaign finance records show that the lenders and a related political action committee had contributed to six of the nine committee members. The cumulative contributions ranged from \$1,000 to \$3,900 per lawmaker.

Rep. Jack Williams, R-Vestavia Hills, said the \$500 he received wasn't a factor, noting that his campaign had received more than \$100,000 in total contributions. Williams said he had been bombarded with information from both sides and wanted time to learn more.

Campaign records show Vance received \$1,000 from Alabama Lenders PAC, \$1,500 from Title Max, \$500 from Cash America and \$400 from Check Into Cash. Vance said he didn't remember receiving any industry-related contributions and would have to check his records.

Todd said she thought the contributions were a factor in the bill's demise.

"It's disgusting. I don't know what else to say," Todd said.

[Payday cap bill may be dead for session; title loan legislation still alive \(Montgomery Advertiser\)](#)

A bill capping interest rates that payday lenders can charge was sent to a House subcommittee Wednesday, severely weakening its chances of passage. But a companion bill to regulate title loans may still have a heartbeat.

The bills, sponsored by Reps. Rod Scott, D-Fairfield and Patricia Todd, D-Birmingham, would cap the interest charged by both payday and title loan companies at 36 percent APR and establish a central database to enforce existing limits on the number of loans an individual can take out. The title loan bill would further cap APR at 24 percent on loans of \$2,000 and 18 percent APR on loans of \$3,000.

Advocates pushed similar bills in the 2013 legislative session, but House Financial Services chairman Lesley Vance, R-Phenix City, sent them to subcommittee, effectively killing them for the session. A second bill sponsored by Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston would have established a central database to track payday lenders. However, the legislation failed to come to a vote in the Senate.

Vance made the same move Wednesday morning, following a public hearing on the payday loan bill where advocates said the payday loan industry was trapping thousands of people in a cycle of debt. Under state law, payday lenders can charge up to 456 percent APR on their loans, which last between 14 and 30 days; title loan companies can charge up to 300 percent.

"If you don't think triple digits are usury and immoral, I don't know what we would define usury and immoral as," said Shay Farley, the legal director for Alabama Appleseed.

Alabama Appleseed is one of several diverse groups that support the legislation, including the Alabama Citizens' Action Program, the Alabama Federation of Republican Women, Alabama Arise and AARP of Alabama. More than half of the House has signed on as co-sponsors of Scott's legislation.

Other supporters said that there was a human toll to the industry. Vonda McLeod, a bankruptcy attorney based in Montgomery, said she had received calls from mothers fearing for their children if the industry put them in jail.

"If you're in need of groceries or medicine, you may make a desperate choice," she said. "It's this desperation that payday lenders rely on."

Dick Smart, a representative of AARP Alabama, said the industry went after those least able to pay.

"The payday loan business model is designed to trap people in debt," he said.

Jay McDuffie, CEO of Birmingham-based Alabama Cash Services, was the only industry representative to speak at the meeting. He said the industry provides a service that customers need and that other banking and lending industry areas may not provide.

"You're going to hear from our opponents that we are unfair and charge outrageous rates," he said. "There are other charges that are more than we charge. People use us to avoid those fees."

The reasons for the committee's moves were not clear. Rep. Thad McClammy, D-Montgomery, suggested that towing of his constituents' cars for unpaid traffic tickets was a worse violation, and said that the state needed to take a "holistic" view of the causes of why people turn to payday and title loan companies, saying that regulating them would only address a small portion of the a larger problem.

"If you shut down every payday loan in state of Alabama, you're not going to kill reason the industry exists," he said.

Scott said in response that lawmakers could not solve every problem.

"If the government addressed all the causes of all the things that impair our society, this would be a utopia," he said. "We can only address the things we have the ability to address."

McClammy's last campaign finance report showed that \$2,000 of the \$5,550 he raised in January came from the title loan industry -- about 36 percent. The representative Wednesday denied that the donations affected his stand on the legislation.

"I'm not opposed to the bill," he said. "I'm opposed to the circumstances that's driving this bill."

Vance received \$1,500 from Titlemax and \$500 from Cash America in January, according to his campaign finance report, making up about 30 percent of his contributions that month.

Scott, who sponsored the title loan bill, had his legislation carried over after the committee voted to send Todd's payday bill to subcommittee. Scott and Farley both said after the meeting that the title loan industry appeared more willing to discuss regulations than the payday industry did, and remained hopeful for that legislation.

[Tracking the 2014 session: Lender regulations stall; dual enrollment bill advances \(al.com\)](#)

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- A bill to lower the interest allowed on payday loans got sidetracked by a House committee today.

The House Financial Services Committee sent HB 145 by Rep. Patricia Todd, D-Birmingham, to a subcommittee. It would cap the annual percentage rate at 36 percent, the same allowed under the state's Small Loan Act.

Payday lenders can now charge \$17.50 per \$100 borrowed on a two-week loan, more than 400 percent if calculated as an annual rate.

The committee also delayed a bill to lower rates charged on auto title loans. They can now charge 25 percent a month, an APR of 300 percent, the same as pawn shops can charge.

What they did:

The House:

-- Approved a plan to create a scholarship program to help more high school students take job training courses in community colleges. Goes to Senate.

The Senate:

-- Approved a bill that would exempt barbers who have been working more than 10 years from new regulations passed by the Legislature last year. Goes to House.

Committees:

-- The Senate Judiciary Committee approved a bill to strengthen the Open Meetings Act. Goes to Senate.

-- The Senate Judiciary Committee approved a House bill to make the penalty for causing a death while operating a boat under the influence the same as for causing a death while driving under the influence. Goes to Senate.

-- The Senate Fiscal Responsibility and Accountability Committee approved a bill to expand and change the composition of the Birmingham Water Works Board. Goes to Senate.

-- The House Ways and Means Education Committee delayed action on a bill to authorize up to \$100 million in bonds to help school systems switch from paper textbooks to digital textbooks or tablets.

Coming up:

The House convenes at 9 a.m. today; the Senate at 10 a.m.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

[Alabama lawmaker wants classrooms to begin each day with prayers offered in Congress \(AP\)](#)

An Alabama lawmaker is seeking to let public school teachers begin each day by reading opening prayers that were given in Congress.

The House Education Policy held a public hearing Wednesday on the legislation.

The bill would set aside 15 minutes at the start of each school day to study the procedures of Congress, and give a verbatim reading of a congressional opening prayer.

Bill sponsor, Rep. Steve Hurst, says teachers could choose a prayer that related to the day's lesson. He says teachers might choose a prayer that was said on a particular day in history.

Opponents say the proposal is unconstitutional.

Susan Watson, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Alabama, says the proposal is teacher-led prayer being dressed up as a civics lesson.

[Bill to authorize bonds for digital textbooks, wireless systems delayed in Alabama House committee \(al.com\)](#)

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- A bill to authorize up to \$100 million in bonds to help school systems use tablets or digital devices instead of paper textbooks was delayed today in the Alabama House of Representatives.

The Ways and Means Education Committee delayed action on the Alabama Ahead Act, HB 1, by Rep. Jim McClendon, R-Springville, after a subcommittee questioned the cost and implementation of the plan.

McClendon said he asked for the delay and said he would work to provide more information and try to address the questions. Because of the delay, he was asked the outlook for the bill for this session, which is almost half over.

"I guess it depends on if I can get them comfortable with the cost and get them comfortable with the bond issue," McClendon said.

Rep. Bill Poole, R-Tuscaloosa, the committee chairman, said he was not sure of the outlook for the bill.

Poole said the Legislature would look for ways to help schools make better use of technology and said HB 1 would be part of that discussion.

"Anytime you are borrowing money, just like appropriating money, you want to make sure the money is being invested in an appropriate manner," Poole said.

School systems would apply for the bond money and pay a 25 percent match, which could be waived for poorer systems. The bonds could be sold incrementally, according to need, McClendon said.

School systems could use the money to buy tablets or other digital devices and to install the wireless infrastructure needed to use the devices. They could also use the money to train teachers in how to use them.

McClendon said the bond debt could be offset by what the state will save on paper textbooks.

McClendon said some Alabama school systems are already using digital textbooks and are seeing benefits, such as better test scores and attendance. He mentioned schools in Baldwin County, Huntsville, Vestavia Hills, Piedmont and Sylacauga.

"There's going to be a cultural upheaval in education and hopefully we'll see the results across the state, particularly in systems that can't afford to put in the wireless," McClendon said.

House bill would allow display of the Ten Commandments in public buildings (Montgomery Advertiser)

The House Judiciary Committee passed a constitutional amendment without discussion or debate that would allow the Ten Commandments to be posted in public buildings and schools.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Duwayne Bridges, R-Valley, stipulates that the commandments could be displayed unabridged or unrestrained on public property as long as it's in compliance with constitutional requirements.

Susan Watson, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Alabama, said the Ten Commandments can be displayed legally as long as they're not promoting a religious message. She said she's not sure why the bill is needed at all.

Joe Godfrey, executive director of the Alabama Citizens Action Program, said the reason for the bill is that courts, over and over again, are ruling that you can't display the Ten Commandments. He said they're the foundation to the laws of our nation and society and should be allowed to be on display.

"The founders of this nation explicitly state that there's to be no prohibition of the free exercise of religion," Godfrey said. "(Religion) was meant to be part of our culture."

And this isn't the first time state officials have encouraged the display of the Ten Commandments.

In 2001, Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore commissioned a massive, 2.5-ton granite monument of the Ten Commandments that was placed in the state's Judicial Building. But civil liberties groups brought a lawsuit, and a federal judge ordered the monument to be removed.

When Moore refused, he was thrown out of office by the Alabama judicial ethics panel. But he was re-elected to the position again in 2012.

Summary of action in Alabama Legislature (AP)

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — A summary of action in the Alabama Legislature on Wednesday, the 13th meeting day of the regular session:

HOUSE:

— Approved a bill to create a \$10 million scholarship program to help high school students take job training classes at two-year colleges. Goes to Senate.

SENATE:

—Approved a bill to raise the threshold where low-income Alabamians have to file an income tax return if they don't owe any taxes. Goes to House.

—Approved a bill to exempt barbers with 10 years of experience before Aug. 1, 2013, from regulation by the state Board of Cosmetology and Barbering. Goes to House.

COMMITTEES:

— House Financial Services Committee send a payday lender regulation bill to subcommittee.

—Senate Judiciary Committee approved a bill to strengthen the Open Meetings Act. Goes to Senate.

—Senate Judiciary Committee approved a bill to increase the penalties for a drunken boat driver who kills someone to equal those for a drunken car driver who kills someone. Goes to Senate.

—Senate Finance and Taxation-Education Committee delayed action on a bill to reduce the number of small businesses that have to pay estimated income taxes.

AGENDA:

—House meets at 9 a.m. Thursday and Senate at 10 a.m.

Former Democratic state Rep. Angelo 'Doc' Mancuso hopes to revive political career in Alabama Senate (al.com)

COURTLAND, Alabama - Former Democratic state Rep. Angelo "Doc" Mancuso is attempting to revive his political career.

Mancuso, who represented parts of Madison, Limestone and Morgan counties in the state House from 1998 to 2002, has qualified to run for the Alabama Senate District 4 seat held by Republican Paul Bussman.

District 4 covers all of Cullman County plus parts of Lawrence, Winston and Marion counties. Mancuso is unopposed in the June 3 primary election.

"I will work to improve our schools, recruit new jobs and industry and secure funding to build new roads throughout the district," Mancuso said in a Wednesday news release.

A 58-year-old dermatologic surgeon from Courtland, Mancuso said another priority if elected will be "making quality healthcare available to all Alabamians."

Mancuso was active on health policy issues during his term in Montgomery, serving on the Alabama Health Committee and Governor's Task Force on Teen Smoking. He was also one of 10 physicians nationwide invited to participate in a Healthcare Policy Fellowship.

Mancuso switched parties and ran as a Republican for the open 5th Congressional District seat in 2008, finishing behind Wayne Parker and Cheryl Baswell Guthrie in the GOP primary.

He announced last fall that he was considering entering the lieutenant governor's race as a Democrat.

"The Alabama Republican Party is running a national agenda instead of focusing on what's happening in this state," Mancuso told AL.com in late September. "Government works best from a centrist point of view, and I had a reputation in the House of crossing the aisle and talking to both groups."

Alabama Democrats appear to continue adding candidates after deadline passes (Yellowhammer News)

In early January, Alabama Secretary of State Jim Bennett announced that both major parties had to qualify their candidates by February 7th. The deadline was much earlier than usual, but the Secretary of State's office was working to comply with federal laws concerning military and overseas voters. The abrupt change was due to ongoing litigation with the U.S. Department of Justice, who had gotten involved after Alabama previously failed to give military voters overseas enough time to get their ballots in.

"Though we do not have yet an order from the court, we have agreed with the Department of Justice to move our deadlines up considerably to get ballots to the Absentee Election Managers in each county," Alabama Secretary of State Bennett said at the time. "This will allow ballots enough time to be sent to military and overseas voters well before the federal deadline, which is 45 days before the date of the election."

Bennet said he had been in constant contact with both major parties leading up to the decision, and both of them agreed it was necessary.

As the Feb. 7th deadline passed, both parties failed to qualify candidates in certain races. That is not unusual because some districts lean so heavily toward one party that it's difficult for the other party to find a candidate willing to run.

The final list of candidates for both parties was reported by multiple news sources, including the Associated Press, whose list can be found on numerous sites (Washington Times, ABC, etc.). The Alabama News Network posted an identical list of candidates on their site as well.

The candidate lists from numerous media outlets reflected what was shown on the Alabama Democratic Party's own spreadsheet.

But today, the Party released an updated candidate list with Democrats Burton LeFlore and Avery Vise running in Alabama's 1st and 6th Congressional Districts respectively. The new spreadsheet included the words "subject to amendment" at the top of the candidate column.

The Alabama Secretary of State does not certify the list of qualified candidates until March 13. An official in the Secretary of State's office said Wednesday that they essentially have to take each party's word for it that their candidates qualified ahead of the deadline.

So in spite of the Feb. 7 deadline, will Democrats continue "amending" their list of candidates for the next month?

Bill Armistead, Chairman of the Alabama Republican Party, told Yellowhammer that the move is indicative of Democrats' behavior on both the national and state levels.

"President Obama thinks he can change the rules and legislate from the Oval Office and apparently Nancy Worley thinks she can just make up the rules as she goes, too," said Armistead. "This is not the way America runs its elections."

Armistead said he plans take the appropriate action once the party is able to research the matter further.

A phone call seeking comment from Alabama Democratic Party Chairwoman Nancy Worley was not returned.

No love lost in this political feud between John Rogers and Sandra Little Brown (al.com)

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- A political feud between two well-known Jefferson County elected officials could play out at the polls during the June Democratic primary.

State Rep. John Rogers, D-Birmingham and Jefferson County Commissioner Sandra Little Brown are both running again for their seats. Both want to see the other lose and both are supporting candidates who they believe can make it happen.

The primaries are June 3.

Rogers is solidly behind Shelia Tyson, the Birmingham City Councilwoman, who is among four challengers for Brown's seat in Jefferson County District 2.

Brown, a Democrat, is supporting her pastor, Patrick Sellers, of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Riley, who is running against Rogers in the House District 52 race.

Rogers has been dissatisfied with the way the Jefferson County Commission has handled the downsizing of Cooper Green Mercy Hospital and Tyson has been a passionate supporter of the county owned hospital for the poor.

Records show that Brown has voted to keep the hospital open but her critics say that she also voted to sell the county nursing home and as president pro-tem on the commission failed to use her influence to do more for the hospital or her district.

On the other hand, Brown's supporters say Rogers has not done enough in the legislature to provide the funding to keep open the hospital. They point to a blistering memorandum from a bankruptcy judge in late 2012 which said in part Alabama lawmakers killed the county's occupational tax which " had become the traditional source of funding in substantial part, if not totally, for Cooper Green's continual deficits, and by Alabama's."

They argue that Rogers does more to kill bills than he does to get legislation passed to help his constituents - the same ones served by the County Commission.

Rogers counters that he has worked to bring transparency to county spending on the indigent, including a bill proposed in this session, HB181, which would require the County Commission to submit a quarterly accounting of the collections and payments from the Indigent Health Care Fund to each member of the Legislative Delegation and the public.