



Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh  
Press Clips  
Saturday, March 01, 2014

- [State worker raises in peril: House panel's budget also contains no added prison funding as yet \(Montgomery Advertiser\)](#)
- [Beason files bill to repeal Common Core curriculum \(Montgomery Advertiser\)](#)
- [Panel defeats bill to stop Alabama common core goals \(AP\)](#)
- [Alabama Association of School Boards blasts Sen. Scott Beason's Common Core repeal bill \(al.com\)](#)
- [Efforts to reform payday and title loans continue week after House committee defeat \(Montgomery Advertiser\)](#)
- [Ala. senator blasts Medicaid expansion: 'We're taxed enough already' \(Yellowhammer News\)](#)
- [Bill would create research, development tax credit \(TimesDaily\)](#)
- [Alabama bill to crack down on synthetic 'spice' drugs called law enforcement's 'most important' \(al.com\)](#)
- [Alabama Senate passes bill taking jurisdiction over telephone service complaints from the PSC \(al.com\)](#)
- [Alabama Senate passes, barely, bill to reduce crime of falsifying voter ID application to misdemeanor \(al.com\)](#)
- [Ala. Legislature Votes To Regulate Tanning Salons \(WAKA\)](#)
- [Alabama Senate delays action on \\$100 million bond issue for digital textbooks \(AP\)](#)
- [Alabama Senate committee approves bill to regulate lawsuit lending \(al.com\)](#)
- [Marijuana-derived medical treatment for seizures gets Epilepsy Foundation's support \(al.com\)](#)
- [Tracking the 2014 session: Alabama House approves Ten Commandments bill \(al.com\)](#)
- [The day in the Legislature: February 20, 2014 \(Montgomery Advertiser\)](#)

- [Jacksonville plant to expand, adding 106 jobs \(Anniston Star\)](#)
- [Auto supplier announces 200 new jobs for southeast Alabama \(al.com\)](#)
- [Bentley promotes sales tax holiday \(AP\)](#)
- [Alabama's Republican leaders would oppose efforts to unionize state auto industry, U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby says \(al.com\)](#)
- [Volkswagen labor leader threatens to block southern U.S. investments if workers aren't unionized \(al.com\)](#)
- [Saban confirms partnership with Mercedes dealership \(AP\)](#)

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## **State worker raises in peril: House panel's budget also contains no added prison funding as yet (Montgomery Advertiser)**

The House's Ways and Means General Fund committee Wednesday approved a \$1.8 billion General Fund budget for the 2015 fiscal year that increases funds for Medicaid, but gives no additional funding to the Department of Corrections and likely won't provide cost-of-living increases for state employees.

However, the document — which now goes to the full House for consideration — still is a work in progress for lawmakers, particularly when it comes to funding for the DOC.

Although the DOC came out of the House committee essentially level-funded, both House Ways and Means General Fund chair Steve Clouse, R-Ozark, and Senate Finance and Taxation General Fund chairman Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, have said they want to find more money for the department, which is facing severe overcrowding and understaffing issues.

The U.S. Department of Justice currently is conducting an investigation of Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women in Wetumpka, saying in a letter to Thomas last month that Alabama was violating Tutwiler inmates' Eighth Amendment protection against cruel and unusual punishment "by failing to protect women prisoners at Tutwiler from harm due to sexual abuse and harassment from correctional staff."

"We continue to meet with (DOC Commissioner Kim Thomas) on the demands he's getting from the federal government, and what we need to do with the prison situation," Clouse said after Wednesday's meeting. "That (number) may very well change as we move forward in the process."

An attempt to reach Thomas for comment was unsuccessful Wednesday afternoon. The commissioner told the Advertiser last week that he had met with the budget chairs, but was not privy to their funding discussions.

The House proposal closely follows Gov. Robert Bentley's budget proposal from January that increases Medicaid funding but level-funds almost all other departments.

Medicaid, the largest single component in the budget, would get about \$685 million in the budget proposal, an increase of about \$70 million over its current state funding level. The agency had requested \$700 million, and Dr. Don Williamson, who is overseeing efforts to overhaul delivery of Medicaid services, said the \$685 million does not cover other contingencies, such as an ongoing dispute with the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services over enrollment of children in the program, which could cost the agency tens of millions of dollars.

Alabama Medicaid has some of the strictest enrollment requirements in the country. Childless adults are almost never eligible, and parents of children can only qualify if their income is 11 to 13 percent of the poverty level. Despite that, the program covers about 20 percent of the state's population and pays for more than half of the live births. The federal government picks up more than two-thirds of the costs of running the program.

Like Bentley's budget, the House version includes a conditional appropriation of \$22 million to help fund a 4 percent state employee pay raise. However, that raise would only come if money becomes available, and lawmakers are pessimistic that any additional funds will come into the perpetually cash-strapped budget.

Rep. John Knight, D-Montgomery, proposed an amendment to the budget to make the raises the first priority if money became available, but the committee voted it down. He said Bentley made a commitment about conditional pay raises in his state of the state address last month.

"Many of us feel we want to release this as the first conditional," said Rep. Charles Newton, R-Greenville. "But to tie our hands today doesn't seem prudent."

Several committee members said they agree the pay raises are important, but they don't want to commit themselves now in case an appropriation needs to be made to another department or agency — such as Corrections or Medicaid — later.

"We're not adding anything to the prisons here, but we may have to as the session goes on and we get more information," Clouse said.

The General Fund budget gets most of its revenues from three dozen sources, most of which post flat growth year-to-year. The Legislative Fiscal Office projected in January that revenues in the General Fund would be down by about \$83 million; lawmakers have made up the difference by seeking money from other areas, such as unclaimed property and the business license tax.

Clouse said they were "comfortable" with those projections.

The attorney general's office did not receive any money in the General Fund budget. In a statement, Attorney General Luther Strange said he hoped "it was a mistake."

"Given everything my office is working on across the state, like defending laws passed by the Legislature and prosecuting the BP oil spill case, it's troubling not to receive guaranteed funding for the office," the statement said.

The House could take up the budget next week.

## **Beason files bill to repeal Common Core curriculum (Montgomery Advertiser)**

Conservative Republicans are once again trying to repeal the state's Common Core curricula for schools, which some critics have accused of everything from usurping local control of education to indoctrinating children about President Barack Obama.

Sen. Scott Beason, R-Gardendale, filed promised legislation Thursday that would repeal the standards, a popular cause with conservative Republicans but one that likely faces long odds in the Legislature.

The legislation would replace the "current common core curricula standards" with courses of study in place prior to the implementation of the curricula. The bill, if passed, would allow the state to restore those standards in 2017, if they so desired.

"If they see this as the great educational panacea they're trying to sell to us, they have the opportunity to go back," Beason said Thursday morning. "But Common Core is not going to educationally do what proponents say."

The Alabama College and Career Ready Standards, based on the Common Core developed by the National Governors' Association, have the support of the business community and the Alabama State Department of Education.

The ALSDE has said the standards were developed within the state and without any involvement from the federal government.

The standards were designed so all states would have a uniform educational standard. In a statement, State Schools Superintendent Tommy Bice said he was reviewing the bill "as to its far-reaching and negative potential impact on not only K-12 public education and the students we serve but our current alignment with Alabama's community colleges, institutions of higher education and business and industry."

The Alabama Association of School Boards also issued a scathing statement on the bill, saying it would "throw Alabama back into the educational dark ages" and calling it "politics at its worst."

"By dictating what is taught in our classrooms, the Legislature would waste hundreds of thousands of hours spent implementing higher standards and would cause school systems to trash classroom materials based on these world-class standards and replace them with old, outdated materials," the statement said.

Legislative leadership has been reluctant to get involved in the debate over Common Core. House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, said last year that he felt the issue was more properly decided by the Alabama State Board of Education. Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, has said he will not bring the matter up in the Senate.

"I told Sen. Beason early on, and I was very clear, I believe in states' rights," Marsh said Thursday. "I want to see those decisions made at the local level, and I believe they are being made (at the local level)."

Beason, who is leaving the Senate to run for a congressional seat being vacated by U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus, R-Vestavia Hills, said he would continue to speak with Marsh on the issue.

"We seem to have a definite disagreement about Common Core," Beason said. "It's one of those processes. I hope he allows the Senate to vote on it, if it comes to a vote in the Senate."

## **Panel defeats bill to stop Alabama common core goals (AP)**

Alabama's common core standards for public schools survived a legislative challenge Wednesday.

After a house subcommittee vote, it appears legislation to abolish the standards is unlikely to pass the Legislature.

The Common Core standards for learning in math and English were recommended by the National Governors Association.

Bills were introduced in the House and Senate to prevent adoption of the standards. The Senate bill has been indefinitely postponed. A subcommittee of the House Education Policy Committee voted Wednesday to kill the bill.

Subcommittee chairman Lesley Vance said the bill will be sent back to the full committee with a negative recommendation. He said the bill could be resubmitted but added it's not likely to pass.

Supporters of the standards said they offer clear, consistent guidelines on what students are expected to learn.

Those who want to abolish the standards worry that the standards could lead to a federal takeover of education in Alabama.

However, Schools Superintendent Tommy Bice says those fears are unfounded.

He also denied a claim by common core opponents that it would lead to collecting data on students.

The sponsor of the bill, Republican Rep. Jim Barton of Mobile, said he wants Alabama to have one of the best education systems in the country.

"But I don't want to get there with the federal government in the classroom deciding what the curriculum in the classroom will be," Barton said.

Asked about the committee action on the bill, House Speaker Mike Hubbard said he wants to leave the issue up to the Alabama Board of Education. Asked whether the bill was dead, Hubbard said he would let the committee process run its course.

Committee member Rep. Thomas Jackson said he believes the standards are good for Alabama. He called the opponents of the standards "the same people who just want to do away with everything that's good for education."

## **[Alabama Association of School Boards blasts Sen. Scott Beason's Common Core repeal bill \(al.com\)](#)**

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- The Alabama Association of School Boards calls a bill to repeal the state's use of Common Core standards in public schools a "giant leap – in the wrong direction."

Sen. Scott Beason, R-Gardendale, proposed SB 380 today, which would repeal the standards until 2017. Beason said that would allow the state to see how effective the standards are in other states. The State Board of Education voted in 2010 to adopt the standards, which apply to English and math and are used by most states.

The school boards association called Beason's bill "politics at its worst."

"This ill-conceived legislation would throw out new, world-class standards being taught today in classrooms across the state and throw Alabama back into the educational dark ages by forcing schools to teach 2003 math and 1999 English language arts standards," AASB's statement said.

"Those standards do not align with those used by any other state or global competitor and would leave our students unprepared for the jobs of the future."

Alabama GRIT, which stands for "Graduate Ready. Impact Tomorrow." also issued a statement today supporting Common Core.

GRIT includes 33 statewide organizations representing parents, business leaders, educators and military personnel, according to a statement from the group.

Jessica Hammonds, executive director of GRIT, said that under previous academic standards, too many high school graduates have had to take remedial courses before starting college or a career.

"Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards were put in place by a democratically elected school board to help give our children the real life skills they need to be successful after they leave the classroom," Hammonds said.

"Alabamians believe this is a conversation for the State Board of Education, and we encourage our State Senators and Representatives to allow that conversation to continue."

## **Efforts to reform payday and title loans continue week after House committee defeat (Montgomery Advertiser)**

Payday and title loan reform in the Legislature may not be dead.

A week after a House committee dealt a blow to payday and title loan reform, efforts on the issue are continuing, in the form of negotiation and legislation.

Sen. Scott Beason, R-Gardendale, filed legislation Thursday that would cap the interest charged by payday lenders at 30 percent. For title loans, the bill would establish three tiers of title loan interest: 30 percent on the first \$2,000 of a loan, 24 percent on a portion of a loan ranging from \$2,000 to \$3,000; and 18 percent on loans exceeding \$3,000.

The legislation also would limit the number of loans a person could take out in a year, and establish a central database to enforce loan limits, two common aspects of payday and title loan reform.

Currently, payday lenders can charge up to 456 APR on loans they give their customers, which typically extend for 14- to 30-day periods. Title loan lenders, who are governed under a separate law, can charge up to 300 percent APR. Critics have accused the industry of trapping their customers in cycles of debt, where customers take out multiple loans to pay back the interest and principal on earlier ones.

"I don't profess to know where interest stops and usury begins, but I believe we're way past that point when we're at 300 percent interest rates," Beason said Thursday.

The industry has said that it provides lending services that traditional lenders do not, and that caps on the interest they charge would drive them out of business. An attempt Thursday to reach Buck Wilson, president of the Modern Financial Services Association of Alabama, an industry group, was unsuccessful.



Last week, members of a House committee, many of whom had received contributions from the industry, voted to refer a payday loan cap bill sponsored by Rep. Patricia Todd, D-Birmingham, to a subcommittee, severely weakening its chances of passage during the current session.

Rep. Rod Scott, D-Fairfield, who is sponsoring similar legislation to cap title loan companies, moved to have his bill carried over to give time to sit down with title loan companies.

Scott said Thursday he had briefly spoken with representatives of the title loan industry this week.

"We understand the parameters, we just don't have hard numbers," he said. "I still think that's the case. We're down to the negotiating part."

Shay Farley, legal director of Alabama Appleseed and a proponent of payday and title loan reform, said Thursday she "loved" Beason's bill.

"From our standpoint, having it in one bill will keep it alive, because of what happened (to the legislation) in the House," she said.

The prospects for the Senate version are uncertain. The Alabama Banking Department last year announced efforts to create a central database to track payday and title loans, in order to enforce existing caps on the loans individuals can take out. However, the industry almost immediately sued to block the database, saying the Banking Department was going beyond the law.

Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, who sponsored legislation last year to establish a database for payday loans, has said his preference is to allow the database to take effect and collect data on the issue before moving onto more sweeping measures, a position he reiterated Thursday. However, he has acknowledged the lawsuit, and said Thursday he would be willing to consider legislation specifically related to a database.

"If we need to move forward to pass legislation to open up the database, I want to do that," he said.

**[Ala. senator blasts Medicaid expansion: 'We're taxed enough already' \(Yellowhammer News\)](#)**

Sen. Clay Scofield, R-Arab, rose for a point of personal privilege on the floor of the Alabama Senate today and offered a blistering critique of the impact expanding Medicaid under ObamaCare would have on the state.

"ACA expansion does not include 'free money,' as some say," Scofield said. "It is our money taxed and borrowed by the Federal Government."

Scofield pointed out the stunning rise in Medicaid spending in recent years, which has been a significant contributor to the skyrocketing national debt.

"Federal debt is currently \$17.2 Trillion," he said. "Nationally, Medicaid has increased 180 percent since 1980, adding an additional 35 million people to its rolls. Medicaid spending has increased 1,1519 percent over that same period. Medicaid and Medicare now consume 23 percent of federal spending, and experts estimate that 30 percent of health care spending is waste."

Scofield then laid out the detrimental impact expanding Medicaid would have on small businesses in Alabama.

"Employers with 50 or more employees may cut back on number of full-time employees or conduct layoffs to stay below the 50 employee threshold," he said. "That suppresses growth. Penalties will be assessed on employers who do not provide 'affordable' coverage, as defined by the federal government... A survey of Alabama small businesses indicated that 84 percent of them believe the state should not expand Medicaid as envisioned by the Affordable Care Act. They are confused by the constant changes from the White House. Business owners can't even get a straight-forward indication of the actual costs."

Scofield closed by discussing the stunning impact that Medicaid expansion would have on Alabama's General Fund Budget. Expanding Medicaid would increase the General Fund by \$15 million in 2015, but that number shoots up to \$189 million by 2020, due to the fact that the state takes on a greater burden of the costs as time goes by.

"The only way to expand Medicaid is to raise taxes on hardworking Alabamians, and they're taxed enough already," Scofield said.

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley has consistently said that he will continue to hold the line against expanding the broken program.

## **Bill would create research, development tax credit (TimesDaily)**

MONTGOMERY — A bill passed in the state Senate today would give Alabama its first research and development income tax credit.

“A lot of states have them, the federal government has them, but Alabama does not,” bill sponsor Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, said. “The goal would be to attract more research dollars to the state.”

The tax credits will be available to businesses, but research universities will also benefit, Orr said.

“When people give research projects to UAB or anyone else, it helps create jobs,” Orr said.

The bill now goes to the House.

## **Alabama bill to crack down on synthetic 'spice' drugs called law enforcement's 'most important' (al.com)**

A bill that law enforcement called the most important of the session moved closer to becoming law this morning.

The House Judiciary Committee approved SB 333 by Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, which makes changes to the state law on synthetic drugs sold under many names and sometimes called “spice.”

“This is the most important piece of legislation that we have this year,” State Law Enforcement Secretary Spencer Collier told the committee.

Collier said makers of the drugs are constantly adjusting their products to stay ahead of what the law defines as illegal.

“It’s a constantly evolving crime,” Collier said.

He said use of the drugs is a huge problem and said he appreciated the Legislature moving quickly on an urgent issue.

The committee approved SB 163 by Sen. Jerry Fielding, R-Sylacauga. The bill would make it a crime to intentionally buy or install a counterfeit or nonfunctional airbag in a vehicle. That has happened in other states, proponents of the bill said. The counterfeit bags are available over the Internet, they said.

The committee also improved SB 151 by Sen. Tom Whatley, R-Auburn, that would make bestiality or the promotion of bestiality for commercial purposes a crime.

## **Alabama Senate passes bill taking jurisdiction over telephone service complaints from the PSC (al.com)**

The Alabama Legislature gave final passage to a bill today to remove complaints about telephone service from the jurisdiction of the Public Service Commission.

AT&T sought passage of the bill, arguing that it is no longer needed because of competition that has emerged since deregulation of retail telephone service.

Sen. Jabo Waggoner, R-Vestavia Hills, said AT&T has promised to set up a toll-free number to handle the complaints that now go to the PSC. He said callers will talk to a person and not a recorded message.

The PSC did not take a position on the bill.

The bill passed the Senate by a vote of 33-0. It had passed the House last week by a vote of 86-5 and now goes to the governor.

## **Alabama Senate passes, barely, bill to reduce crime of falsifying voter ID application to misdemeanor (al.com)**

It's not often that Alabama lawmakers pass a bill to reduce a criminal penalty.

The get-tough-on-crime bills are more common.

But today the Alabama Senate barely passed a bill to reduce from a felony to a misdemeanor the penalty for falsifying or fraudulently making an application for a state-issued voter photo ID card.

Alabama's new voter photo ID law, which takes effect with the June 3 primary, requires the state to issue free photo IDs for those who don't have a driver's license or other government-issued photo ID.

Voters applying for the new voter IDs must list date of birth, eye color, weight and height on the application.

Some lawmakers noted that under the current law, a person could conceivably be charged with a felony for incorrectly listing their weight or eye color.

Senate Bill 164 by Sen. Bobby Singleton, D-Greensboro passed by a vote of 14-13. Four Republicans joined nine Senate Democrats and independent Sen. Harri Anne Smith of Slocomb in approving the bill.

It goes to the House.

## **Ala. Legislature Votes To Regulate Tanning Salons (WAKA)**

The Alabama Legislature is set to regulate the use of tanning salons by teens.

The Alabama Senate voted 23-3 Thursday to give final approval to a tanning bed regulatory bill. It passed the House earlier this month 92-2.

The bill prohibits children 14 and under from using tanning beds unless prescribed by a physician. 15-year-olds could get a tan if a parent is present and gives written permission. 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds could get a tan with written permission from a parent.

The Senate sponsor of the bill, Republican Greg Reed of Jasper, says the goal of the bill is to educate parents about the dangers of children overusing tanning beds.

The bill will take effect in six months if the governor signs it into law.

## **Alabama Senate delays action on \$100 million bond issue for digital textbooks (AP)**

MONTGOMERY, Alabama — The Alabama Senate delayed action Thursday on a bill authorizing the state to borrow \$100 million to help move Alabama students to digital textbooks.

The bill's sponsor, Republican Sen. Gerald Dial of Lineville, said switching from paper to digital textbooks would save money over the long run. "This is an opportunity to move Alabama ahead," the former high school coach said.

Dial's bill would authorize the state to sell \$100 million in bonds over several years. The money would be divided among school systems based on their attendance to install the infrastructure and buy or lease the tablets or other electronic devices for students to read their textbooks and do their homework digitally.

Schools systems would have to put up 25 percent of the funding, but the state Department of Education could waive the requirement for poor districts. This is the second year Dial has tried to pass similar legislation.

He ran into opposition from some fellow Republicans. GOP Sen. Paul Bussman of Cullman questioned whether the state should be selling any more bonds because more than \$1.1 billion in bonds have been authorized since 2011. "I'm afraid we are headed in the same direction as the federal government. We are spending money we don't have," he said.

Others questioned the financial soundness of borrowing money for 20 years to buy technology that could be outdated in a few years.

After more than an hour of debate Thursday, Dial asked the Senate to set his bill aside and give him time to round up support. The Senate agreed, which will allow Dial to try to pass his bill again later in the legislative session.

Some schools in Alabama have already used their local money to supply students with tablets.

## **Alabama Senate committee approves bill to regulate lawsuit lending (al.com)**

Plaintiffs in personal injury-type lawsuits sometimes take out loans in anticipation of jury awards or settlements.

A bill to regulate lawsuit lending cleared a committee in the Alabama Senate today after proponents said the loans have “exorbitant” interest rates and can hurt consumers and affect the civil justice process.

Senate Bill 231 by Sen. Cam Ward, R-Alabaster, called the Alabama Consumer Lawsuit Lending Act, would cap the interest rates at 10 percent. It would require the lenders to obtain state licenses and be subject to regulations by the State Banking Department.

Eric Schuller, director of governmental affairs for Oasis Legal Finance, a lawsuit lending company, said the 10 percent rate cap would put the company out of business in Alabama.

Schuller said four states have passed laws regulating the industry, but none have interest rate caps.

He said people seeking a civil judgment for damages often need the upfront money for basic needs, such as paying rent or house payments and utility bills.

Ward said the Business Council of Alabama, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Alabama Association for Justice, the state trial lawyers’ group, took part in negotiations on the bill.

Ward said the loans can affect civil courts because plaintiffs are sometimes less likely to agree to settlements after taking out the loans because repaying the debt poses a new liability for them.

Rep. Greg Wren, R-Montgomery, president of the National Conference of Insurance Legislators, said the lawsuit loans are a national issue. He expects the NCIL to draft model legislation to address the issue later this year.

The committee approved the bill after adopting an amendment by Sen. Roger Bedford, D-Russellville, that struck the criminal penalty from the bill.

**[Marijuana-derived medical treatment for seizures gets Epilepsy Foundation's support \(al.com\)](#)**

As Alabama lawmakers consider legalization of a marijuana-derived medication to treat seizures and other health issues, the national Epilepsy Foundation released a statement today in support of patients having access to medicinal marijuana as a treatment option.

"The Epilepsy Foundation supports the rights of patients and families living with seizures and epilepsy to access physician directed care, including medical marijuana. Nothing should stand in the way of patients gaining access to potentially life-saving treatment," according to the statement from Epilepsy Foundation President and CEO Philip M. Gattone and Epilepsy Foundation Board of Directors Chairman Warren Lammert.

"If a patient and their healthcare professionals feel that the potential benefits of medical marijuana for uncontrolled epilepsy outweigh the risks, then families need to have that legal option now -- not in five years or ten years. For people living with severe uncontrolled epilepsy, time is not on their side," according to their statement.

The group's statement includes commentary from Dr. Orrin Devinsky, professor of neurology, neurosurgery and psychiatry and director of New York University's Comprehensive Epilepsy Center, in support of the foundation's position.

"Until we have the scientific data, we should make medical marijuana available to physicians who care for people with treatment-resistant epilepsy and their patients," said Devinsky, who is a member of the Epilepsy Foundation National Board of Directors.

"We need to make a balanced decision about compassionate use," Devinsky said. "Trying marijuana or related compounds should be regarded like any other experimental treatment -- a shared decision between patient/parent and doctor, that takes into account the severity of disease, risk and benefits of treatment, and existence of alternate treatment options, all guided by the principle of 'first do no harm.'"

In Alabama, proposed legislation known as Carly's Law aims to legalize the use of the marijuana-derived cannabidiol, also known as CBD, for treatment of adults and children suffering from seizures that other prescription drugs and medical procedures have been unable to control.

The CBD treatment does not create the intoxicating effects produced by typical marijuana ingestion, and many families in Alabama are urging the Legislature to legalize the substance that is allowed in Colorado, where some are moving to use the medication.

Birmingham-area parent Dustin Chandler, whose daughter is the bill's inspiration, said the Epilepsy Foundation's stance helps support the arguments for legalizing CBD oil in Alabama.



"Obviously it's huge news for the suffering children of Alabama and the people of Alabama for one of the leading neurologists in the country to say that they need access now," Chandler said in an interview today. "I think this bolsters Carly's Law's chance of passing through the Legislature. In my opinion, lawmakers cannot ignore such a strong endorsement from the Epilepsy Foundation."

Geography should not dictate where medical treatments are available, according to the Epilepsy Foundation's statement.

"The Epilepsy Foundation believes that an end to seizures should not be determined by one's zip code. ... Families looking to access medical marijuana as a treatment are facing terrible decisions," according to the organization's statement. "In the past, when therapies not yet approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) were available abroad and left only to those who could afford to travel, we fought for compassionate access. We are here to continue the fight."

The Epilepsy Foundation urges caution and the need for further research on the matter.

"Treatments for epilepsy with any form of marijuana come with risks, as there is much that is not known about its effects. The consistency of available formulations also needs to be addressed. Caution is appropriate, and we strongly recommend that patients with uncontrolled seizures seek out an epilepsy specialist," the organization said.

"However, existing therapies have real side-effects both known and unknown, and, just as there are risks with any treatment, every day without seizure control is a risk to life. Every seizure is a possible opportunity lost to live, learn, and grow," the group said.

The Epilepsy Foundation calls for the Drug Enforcement Administration to end restrictions that limit clinical trials and research into medical marijuana for epilepsy. "Certain components of medical marijuana, including CBD, have shown effectiveness in animal studies, and there have been encouraging anecdotal reports from patients. But further research and unbiased clinical trials are needed to establish whether and in what forms medical marijuana is or is not effective and safe," the group states.

Supporters of Carly's Law are holding a rally at the Pelham Civic Complex from 2 to 6 p.m. on March 1. Speakers include state Rep. Mike Ball of Madison who sponsored the bill and Colorado's Paige Figi, whose young daughter Charlotte Figi had suffered 300 seizures a week but dropped to a couple or so a month after using the marijuana-derived treatment.

"That is what we are asking for is the chance of hope that we have another option in the state of Alabama," Chandler said. "There are kids out there that need access now and the Epilepsy Foundation agrees with us."

## **[Tracking the 2014 session: Alabama House approves Ten Commandments bill \(al.com\)](#)**

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- After a rambling two-hour debate, the Alabama House of Representatives passed a proposed constitutional amendment to allow displays of the Ten Commandments on state property and in public schools.

House Bill 45 by Rep. Duwayne Bridges, R-Valley, now goes to the Senate.

The bill passed by a vote of 77-19, with Democrats casting all the no votes.

If approved by the Senate it would also have to be approved by voters statewide.

Thursday was the 16th meeting day of the legislative session.

What they did

Senate:

-- Gave final passage to HB 254, which requires teens to get parental permission to use tanning salons. Goes to governor.

-- Gave final passage to HB 155, which takes jurisdiction of complaints about telephone service from the Public Service Commission. Goes to governor.

-- Passed SB 164, which would change from a felony to a misdemeanor the penalty for falsifying an application for a new state-issued photo voter ID.

-- Passed SB 79, which makes mandatory the use of a preferred vendor program that gives Alabama companies a 5 percent advantage in competing for some state contracts.

-- Passed SB 85, which allows veterans' families to benefit from a scholarship program regardless of whether the veteran served during war time.

-- Debated, but took no action on a bill to regulate wind farms and a bill to authorize a \$100 million bond issue to help school systems convert to digital textbooks.

House:

-- Approved a bill clarifying that the state sales tax applies to prepaid calling cards.

-- Passed a number of sunset bills, which are periodic reviews of state agencies.

-- House Judiciary Committee passed a bill to strengthen the state law on synthetic "spice" type drugs and a bill to make it a crime to knowingly install a counterfeit airbag in a vehicle.

Coming up

The House returns at 1 p.m. Tuesday; the Senate returns at 2 p.m.

## **[The day in the Legislature: February 20, 2014 \(Montgomery Advertiser\)](#)**

A look at the action in the Legislature on Thursday, the 16th legislative day.

House of Representatives

Passed HB 373, sponsored by Rep. Bill Poole, R-Northport, which would subject prepaid wireless services to sales and use tax.

Passed HB 87, sponsored by Rep. K.L. Brown, R-Jacksonville, which would strengthen consumer protection over preneed contracts and cemetery endowment care funds.

Passed HB 78, sponsored by Rep. Bill Poole, R-Northport, which would allow municipal planning commissions to adopt minor subdivision approvals without notice or a public hearing under certain conditions.

Passed HB 45, sponsored by Rep. Duwayne Bridges, R-Valley, which is a constitutional amendment that would authorize the display of the Ten Commandments on public property.

Passed a variety of Alabama sunset bills, which would allow the following departments and agencies to exist and function, including the State Radiation Control Agency, the Board of Home Medical Equipment Service Providers, the Alabama Manufactured Housing Commission, the Sickle Cell Oversight and Regulatory Commission, the Alabama Athletic Commission, the Alabama Construction Recruitment Institute and the Alabama Surface Mining Commission.

The House will return at 1 p.m. on Tuesday.

Senate

Passed SB 318, sponsored by Sen. Roger Bedford, D-Russellville, authorizing the Alabama Mental Health Finance Authority to state entities that can sell and lease their property.

Passed HB 155, sponsored by Rep. Mike Hill, R-Columbiana, which would eliminate a complaint process to the Public Service Commission for telecommunications.

Passed SB 319, sponsored by Sen. Bill Holtzclaw, R-Madison, related to ignition interlock devices.

Passed SB 85, sponsored by Sen. Bryan Taylor, R-Prattville, extending scholarship benefits to veterans who served during peacetime.

Passed SB 79, sponsored by Sen. Dick Brewbaker, R-Montgomery, which would award state contracts of \$100,000 or less to state businesses that come within five percent of the lowest reasonable bid.

Passed SB 164, sponsored by Sen. Bobby Singleton, D-Greensboro, lowering the penalty for falsification or fraud on the application for an Alabama voter ID card from a Class C Felony to a Class A Misdemeanor.

The Senate will return at 2 p.m. on Tuesday.

## **[Jacksonville plant to expand, adding 106 jobs \(Anniston Star\)](#)**

by Laura Gaddy

JACKSONVILLE — Workers in hard hats, a few international business people and local elected officials encircled Gov. Robert Bentley in a Jacksonville plant Thursday to hear that Shelco Foundries is expanding.

The announcement had been expected for several months. The company, which makes iron components for large engines, plans to add 106 jobs by the end of 2015. The workers who take the new jobs will fill a new 65,000-square-foot machining facility to be built at the company's current location on Francis Street.

"This has been a good week," said Bentley, referring to the 2,000 new jobs expected for a Remington Arms manufacturing plant in Huntsville. "One hundred and six jobs here in Jacksonville are just as important to Jacksonville as 2,000 jobs are to Huntsville."

Gnutti Carlo USA, an engine component manufacturer with a presence in at least seven countries, bought Shelco Foundries' former parent company, WH Industries, in January 2012. In so doing, it also took ownership of Shelco Foundries and began making improvements at the Jacksonville business, said Paul Buchanan, Gnutti's managing director.

Buchanan said that when Gnutti took over, Shelco employed 44 workers. Today it employs 97, he said.

Since purchasing the foundry, Gnutti has also paid \$100,000 to clean an existing machine shop and improve the building there. In addition, Buchanan said, the company has invested \$250,000 in equipment upgrades at the foundry in the last year.

The city of Jacksonville, the Calhoun County Commission, the Calhoun County Economic Development Council and the state worked together for several months to woo the company to expand in Alabama. Shelco Foundries already had a machining facility in New Jersey, which the company will close Dec. 31 to end its presence in that state.

Buchanan said the New Jersey machining plant is outdated and there is little land around it to expand. By moving the operation to Alabama, he said, the company will have its foundry and its machining facility within walking distance of each other.

Buchanan said those factors heavily influenced the company's decision to move to Alabama, but Gnutti also had a financial incentive from the city, county and state.

"The right place for our future was not in New Jersey, the right place for our business was right here in sweet home Alabama," Buchanan said.

The company will receive breaks on sales, use and property taxes. Jarrod Simmons, Jacksonville's financial control officer, said the city is estimating the value of the tax break on use and sales taxes — which applies only to goods and services bought for the expansion — at \$207,500.

An additional property tax abatement will save the company \$815,000 over the next 10 years, Simmons said.

On top of that, the company may receive incentives for reaching its employment goals. If it reaches the benchmarks, the state will give the company \$150,000, the city will donate \$62,500, the Calhoun County Economic Development Council will provide \$62,500 and the Calhoun County Commission will add \$25,000.

The company will receive half of the money upon hiring 50 percent of the planned additional employees, and the remaining amount upon hiring all 106 additional employees, Simmons said.

The Thursday announcement began with a groundbreaking ceremony for the new machining facility. That was followed by a series of remarks to foundry employees and a luncheon at Jacksonville State University. In addition to city leaders, university administrators, and economic developers, Mario Gnutti, vice president of the company, and Paolo Groff, the company's CEO, attended the ceremonial events.

The luncheon ended shortly after Mayor Johnny Smith handed Gnutti a ceremonial key to the city and explained the significance of having the company expand in Jacksonville.

"Think about it," Smith said. "That's 106 families that are going to have somebody in that family employed, that might not otherwise have a job."

## **[Auto supplier announces 200 new jobs for southeast Alabama \(al.com\)](#)**

ENTERPRISE, Alabama -- HS Automotive Alabama, which recently completed a 100-job expansion, will add another 200 jobs to its Enterprise operations.

The auto supplier's announcement came Wednesday during a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the expansion that was announced last year, an event that drew Gov. Robert Bentley and others.

The move was driven by the addition of new product lines, according to Jonathan Tullos, executive director of the Wiregrass Economic Development Corp.

"We're thrilled," he said. "We think the Wiregrass has some of the best workers in the nation. It's another opportunity for people to have jobs who maybe lost them during the recession and the sequestration at Fort Rucker."

HSAA is a Korean company that produces weather stripping, tubing and automotive pressure hoses for automakers including Hyundai, Kia, Chrysler and General Motors.

The company, which arrived in Enterprise in 2003, now employs close to 300 people there. Hiring is underway for the 100 new jobs announced last year and the 200 announced today, Tullos said.

The new jobs will bring HSAA's total employment in the region to about 600.

The 100-job expansion involved a \$20 million investment and the construction of a 117,000-square-foot building, he said. Those numbers were originally pegged at \$12 million and 65,000 square feet, but the estimates grew.

Incentives for that project included statutory property tax abatements, excluding school taxes, as well as sales and use tax abatements on construction materials. There were no discretionary incentives.

The expansion announced Wednesday will involve a 50,000-square-foot expansion to the new building, as HSAA increases its brake hose and tubing operations and robotics division, Tullos said.

The original tax abatements will carry over to this project. In addition, Bentley offered a \$300,000 economic development grant to be paid as the 200 jobs are created, according to the Alabama Department of Commerce.

Read more state auto industry news in this week's Driving Alabama.

## **[Bentley promotes sales tax holiday \(AP\)](#)**

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Ala. Gov. Robert Bentley wants people to take advantage of this weekend's sales tax holiday for severe weather preparedness.

He is urging residents to stock emergency kits.

The holiday runs Friday through Sunday and waives the 4 percent state sales tax on common disaster supplies costing \$60 or less.

Generators costing \$1,000 or less are also exempted

## **[Alabama's Republican leaders would oppose efforts to unionize state auto industry, U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby says \(al.com\)](#)**

LINCOLN, Alabama -- U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby, who toured the Honda plant in Talladega County this morning, said he believes most of Alabama's Republican leaders would speak out against any intensified efforts to unionize workers in the state's auto industry.

Shelby, a Republican and Alabama's senior senator, is touring businesses in every county as part of his statewide jobs and industry tour.

Last week, employees at the Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga, Tenn., rejected the United Auto Workers union's bid to represent them. The vote was closely watched throughout the industry; the UAW also has a similar but smaller campaign at Alabama's Mercedes-Benz plant.

Asked about his reaction to the union vote at Volkswagen, Shelby said he was pleased.

"If they had unionized the plant in Chattanooga, I think it would have been very negative," he said in an interview this afternoon.

And that would have resonated in Alabama, he added.

Shelby said the UAW's limited presence in the South has helped the region build its auto industry.

Some have suggested that the UAW may redouble its efforts elsewhere in response to the loss at Volkswagen. If that happens at the Mercedes plant, Shelby said he believes most of Alabama's Republican leaders would respond.

"If we didn't, we would be failing our people," he said.



In Chattanooga, Republican lawmakers were harsh critics of the UAW drive, and some threatened to block tax incentives for future expansion of the Volkswagen plant if the union prevailed in the election.

Republican U.S. Sen. Bob Corker was particularly outspoken, saying Volkswagen would make an additional investment in Chattanooga if the vote failed. The automaker, however, contradicted that claim.

Shelby said people do have a right to petition for a union election, but workers in Alabama also have a right to not join a union.

The UAW represents workers at some Alabama auto suppliers, but none of the state's auto assembly plants are unionized.

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley already has publicly opposed the UAW's campaign at Mercedes, saying a unionized plant would hurt the state's economic development efforts.

As for the Honda plant, Shelby said he was impressed with the growth at the 4,000-worker factory since his last visit.

In the last three years alone, the company has added more than 450 jobs and spent more than \$508 million at the Alabama operations.

Last week, the company added another 50 jobs. Read more about how to apply.

## **[Volkswagen labor leader threatens to block southern U.S. investments if workers aren't unionized \(al.com\)](#)**

The top labor representative for Volkswagen on Wednesday threatened to work to block further investments by the German automaker in the southern U.S. if workers aren't unionized.

Reuters reported the comments by Bernd Osterloh, head of VW's works council, which were published in a German newspaper.

They follow last week's election at the company's Chattanooga, Tenn., auto plant, in which employees rejected the United Auto Workers union.

"I can imagine fairly well that another VW factory in the United States, provided that one more should still be set up there, does not necessarily have to be assigned to the south again," Osterloh said.

The UAW also is trying to organize at another German automaker in the southern U.S.: Alabama's Mercedes-Benz plant.

Read local reaction to the VW vote: UAW goal of organizing Alabama's Mercedes-Benz plant unchanged, despite tough loss for union at Volkswagen

The UAW said it wanted to set up a German-style works council at the Chattanooga plant, saying it could be a new model for labor relations in the U.S. Such panels, common in Germany, are made up of both members of the rank and file and management.

The German labor union IG Metall has been assisting the UAW with organizing efforts at VW and also at Mercedes.

Tennessee state officials and conservative groups were vocal critics of the union drive. One of those groups is now planning to bring its anti-union campaign to Alabama.

VW's works council has said it will continue efforts to set up labor representation in Chattanooga.

Read the full story from Reuters.

Read the latest state auto industry news in this week's Driving Alabama.

## **[Saban confirms partnership with Mercedes dealership \(AP\)](#)**

IRONDALE — Nick Saban says he's getting into the car business.

The Alabama head football coach confirmed he and a partner are working to open a Mercedes-Benz dealership in the Birmingham area after lawyers for a competing dealer said they intend to subpoena Saban to find out if he was doing business with Mercedes.

"My partner and I have entered into a letter agreement with Mercedes-Benz to open a new dealership in Irondale," Saban said in a statement Monday provided by his attorney, Bobby Plott. "We are

honored to join the Mercedes family and are extremely excited about the benefits this dealership will bring to the citizens of Birmingham, Irondale and surrounding areas.”

Saban’s partner, Joe Agresti, told al.com that land has been purchased for the new dealership near Irondale’s Grants Mill Road auto mall. But he said construction is delayed until a civil suit filed by another area Mercedes dealer is resolved.

Attorneys for Crown Automobiles of Hoover sued Mercedes-Benz USA in December, saying word that a second Mercedes dealership was planned for the Birmingham area derailed plans to sell the Hoover car lot and caused its owners “immediate and irreparable harm.” Mercedes-Benz attorneys have argued the automaker is within its rights to open another dealership.

Saban isn’t a party in the lawsuit. But his name came up when Crown Automobiles’ lawyers filed a notice of intent to subpoena the coach in an effort to uncover any business ties he had to Mercedes. Plott said the coach will comply with any subpoenas that end up being issued.

Agresti, who already sells Mercedes-Benz vehicles in Louisiana, said Saban years ago expressed an interest in partnering on an Alabama dealership.

“He told me, ‘I don’t have a minute to run it, but I love the brand,’” Agresti said.

Mercedes-Benz won’t allow the planned dealership to bear Saban’s name, Agresti said, but the coach will help with advertising and marketing and plans to appear at special events for customers.