



Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh
Press Clips
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[Beason won't seek re-election in Ala Legislature \(AP\)](#)

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) - Republican Sen. Scott Beason of Gardendale won't seek another term in the Alabama Legislature.

Beason issued a statement Friday saying it's time to end his time at the Statehouse.

He was first elected to the Alabama Legislature in 1998.

Beason was behind Alabama's sweeping immigration bill, considered the toughest in the nation before it was largely gutted by the courts.

The lawmaker also the sponsor of Alabama gun legislation last year. The bill pitted the National Rifle Association against business groups over the issue of guns in workplace parking lots.

Beason has been mentioned as a possible candidate for the 6th District congressional seat being vacated by U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus.

Beason lost a primary bid to Bachus in 2012, but he hasn't said whether he will run this year.

Beason will not seek re-election to Senate, stoking Congressional speculation (Yellowhammer News)

Sen. Scott Beason, R-Gardendale, announced Friday that he will not seek a third term in the Alabama Senate, stoking speculation that he may run for congress in Alabama's Sixth District, as he did previously in 2012.

Beason has been a conservative lightning rod in the legislature in recent years. He led the charge on Alabama's toughest-in-the-nation immigration law, as well as the recent push to repeal Common Core.

"It has not always been comfortable or easy," Beason said in a statement. "Enemies accumulate when you stand for something, but there is a huge difference between support and leadership. In Alabama, almost everyone running for office 'supports' a conservative agenda. The hard part is actually leading on those issues after taking office and when the arrows are coming from all sides."

Sen. Beason cited "personal convictions" as his reason for stepping down.

"It is time for this chapter in my life to come to a close, and it is such a strange feeling," he said. "I have been in a hard fought campaign every four years since 1994. When I first ran for the legislature I was 24 years old, and now 20 years later when I finally have the chance to run without opposition, I feel led to step away. It almost doesn't seem real."

Despite his decision to leave the State Senate, Beason was clear he plans to remain active promoting conservative principles. However, it's unclear if that means he is considering running for Congress.

"I plan to continue to be a voice for the time tested principles that have long made this country great: a belief in hard work and ingenuity, a commitment to Christian values, and a firm faith in our Constitution as the means by which liberty, opportunity, and prosperity can be ensured," Beason said. "All of us, whether we are in elected office or not, must do our part to preserve the blessings that were passed down to us."

Beason was first elected to the Alabama State House in 1998 and was then elected to the State Senate in 2006. Along with his wife Lori and three children, he resides in Gardendale, AL.

Alabama Senator Trip Pittman pushes drug testing (AP)

By Phillip Rawls

MONTGOMERY (AP) — With a first name like "Trip," an Alabama senator was bound to prompt jokes by pushing a bill mandating drug testing for legislators.

But Sen. Trip Pittman says he's serious.

"It's a fairness issue," the Republican from Daphne said.

Pittman said he proposed legislative drug testing after some lawmakers criticized a bill he introduced to require welfare applicants with a misdemeanor or felony drug conviction in the last five years to take a drug test. Anyone who failed three times would be denied benefits, but their children could receive them.

"We are willing to lead by example," the senator said.

His welfare drug testing bill has been approved by a Senate committee and is waiting for a vote in the Senate. His legislative drug testing bill is awaiting a vote in committee.

Pittman acknowledges the bill needs some work before getting committee approval. In one place, the bill provides for testing of legislators when there is a reasonable suspicion that a person might be using illegal drugs. In another place, the bill provides for drug testing of all legislators at intervals the Legislature determines appropriate. Any legislator with a failing test would be referred to the House or Senate ethics committee, but there is no removal from office.

Pittman's bill is a proposed constitutional amendment that would have to pass the House and Senate and be approved by voters in a statewide referendum before taking effect. That referendum would coincide with this year's legislative elections.

Other senators say they will support the bill if it comes to a vote, but it is not on the priority bill lists of either the Senate or House Republican caucuses.

"I don't have a problem with it," Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, said.

Marsh said the manufacturing business he used to own in Anniston had to perform drug testing to get certified by the Federal Aviation Administration. "As a business owner, I required it for my employees and myself for years," he said.

Democratic Sen. Bobby Singleton of Greensboro is among the senators who criticized Pittman's drug testing for welfare applicants. Singleton said if the state is going to test some welfare applicants, then it ought to test anyone who gets state assistance, including business owners who get tax breaks or financial incentives for locating factories in the state.

Singleton said he has no fear of a drug test. "I'm certain I'll pass it," he said. But he said he doesn't see any desire by the Legislature to do drug testing on members.

"It will never come to the ballot," he said.

In the House, Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, said Pittman hasn't discussed the bill with him.

Pittman's idea for drug testing is not new. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Kansas Legislature passed a law in 2013 for testing of its members and other key state officials, but implementation of the law has not been finalized.

In 2003, Louisiana repealed a law for random drug testing of elected officials, and in 1997, a Georgia law about drug tests for candidates was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Forestry industry: Bill will cost jobs (TimesDaily)

MONTGOMERY — A bill in the Alabama Senate regarding environmentally friendly construction standards in public projects is pitting one of the state's oldest industries — forestry — against several others, including steel manufacturers.

At issue is the use of the Leadership in Energy and Environment Design certification, commonly called LEED, on government buildings.

On one side, the forest industry, still a large one in the state, says the LEED certification shuts out a majority of Alabama wood products.

"The crux of the problem is that taxpayer dollars are being used by state agencies to deny jobs to Alabama workers and sales to Alabama companies," said Chris Isaacson, executive vice president of the Alabama Forestry Association.

Isaacson's group is pushing Senate Bill 152, which would essentially end LEED certification on buildings paid for with public money, unless LEED makes more allowances for wood product certification.

"We are the original green industry in Alabama," Isaacson said. "Growing trees and turning them into products people use and then replanting them ... that's about as green as you get."

Opponents of the bill say throwing out the LEED certification now would be a waste.

Ernie Glenn, of the Alabama Iron and Steel Council, said many steel companies have put too much time and money into producing LEED-certifiable products to see the system ended on public projects.

"It goes against the hard work that the iron and steel industries, and many other industries in Alabama, have done to be part of what we think is a very sound and sensible procedure," Glenn said last week.

"In terms of our competitive future ... we are participants in a lot of public building projects, so the work and steps our companies took to become LEED certified have a part in their bottom lines and ability to continue to support jobs."

Meanwhile, the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that came up with LEED about 15 years ago says there is room for Alabama forestry products in the certification.

"As long as it comes from Alabama, it earns points," said Jeremy Sigmon, director of technical policy at the U.S. Green Building Council.

Throwing out LEED certification over concerns for one product doesn't make sense, he said. "It's like demanding that we go back to rotary phones because you don't like an app on your smartphone," Sigmon said.

The bill

Senate Bill 152 is sponsored by Sen. Marc Keahey, D-Grove Hill. He says his bill would level the playing field for forestry in LEED certification.

It would do that by expanding from one to three the forest certification standards — the groups that certify the actual forests — allowed.

Currently, LEED uses the Forest Stewardship Council's standards. The problem, Isaacson said, is that only about 2 percent of Alabama forests are certified by that group.

Sustainable Forestry Initiative and American Tree Farm System are more popular in Alabama, but not recognized by LEED.

Until the other two certifications are recognized by LEED, Keahey wants it discontinued on state projects.

"(Forestry is) the second-largest industry in the state, and we shouldn't shut the door on our own, whether it be forestry or steel or what have you," he said.

"The detrimental effect that the current situation is having on the wood industry is far greater than the detrimental effect this legislation would have on the steel industry, in my opinion."

Steelmaker Nucor Corp., which has a site in Decatur, doesn't agree.

"The state's use of green building standards has helped level the playing field and guards against the use of cheaply made, inferior steel products from countries such as China, which are made with no regard for environmental laws and dumped in our market often at prices below what it costs U.S. companies to produce steel," Nucor spokeswoman Katherine Miller said in an emailed statement. "Unfortunately, SB 152 would prohibit the use of green building standards in state-funded construction projects, yet do little to accomplish its goal of incentivizing the use of Alabama forest products in state construction projects."

While lawmakers in Montgomery debate this bill — it has received committee approval and could come up for a Senate floor vote this week — Gov. Robert Bentley took a stand for foresters last year, when he signed an executive order regarding LEED certification.

Bentley's order stipulates green building standards used on state projects must give equal credentials to wood products certified under the three programs, not just the current one, and "must treat wood products fairly when compared with non-renewable materials."

It also stipulates state agencies are encouraged — but not required — to consider green building standards if they'll result in cost savings.

"Over 45,000 jobs are produced by the forest products industry in Alabama," Bentley said in a statement last week. "The goal of this executive order is to support products that are grown here in Alabama. By leveling the playing field among all third-party certified landowners, we will continue to support Alabama jobs and Alabama families."

Bentley's executive order is only good while he's in office.

"We have been working with the governor and his staff since last year ... to try to arrive at a solution that everyone can accept," said Glenn, of the iron and steel council.

National debate

Keahey said constituents in his forest-heavy south Alabama district made him aware of the issue and possible legislation. But other states have considered similar actions.

In December, the Associated Press reported lobby groups were asking Congress to ban the use of LEED in federal projects. In several states, including Maine, Georgia and Mississippi, LEED standards essentially have been banned in public construction.

North Carolina, Florida and, most recently Ohio, also have seen anti-LEED legislation.

Meanwhile, alternatives to LEED have emerged. Those who support the other, newer certification programs say LEED is too cumbersome; LEED supporters say the alternatives are too lax in their standards, the Associated Press reported.

For now, forestry industry leaders want LEED done away with in Alabama.

"As soon as LEED changes, all this controversy goes away, but as long as it discriminates, taxpayer dollars shouldn't be used to discriminate," Isaacson said.

What is LEED?

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design is a voluntary, third-party certification program run by the nonprofit U.S. Green Building Council.

Building projects and renovations earn LEED points based on things such as sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency and materials selection. With enough points, the buildings are deemed LEED certified.

[State Sen. Gerald Allen introduces bill that would allow grandparent visitation \(Tuscaloosa News\)](#)

State Sen. Gerald Allen, R-Tuscaloosa, has introduced a bill in the Alabama Legislature that would allow grandparents to ask the court for visitation rights with their grandchildren.

Allen's Senate Bill 190, also known as the Grandparents Visitation Act, will allow a grandparent to petition the court for visitation rights if the marital relationship between the parents of the grandchild has been affected by divorce, death or separation.

"This legislation addresses grandparents rights in those unusual circumstances where a grandchild is denied a visit to their grandparents. Our bill does not take anything away from parents and provides stability and emotional well-being for children," Allen said in a news release.

Senate Bill 190 is pending before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Under the Dome: Legislators may revisit rules after losing days to weather (Montgomery Advertiser)

Lawmakers said they had no choice but to convene last week, despite weather that virtually shut down the state. It's prompting discussion that the rules governing the Legislature should be changed to prevent it from happening again.

The House convened Tuesday with only 40 of the chamber's 102 members present, and adjourned for lack of a quorum. The Senate managed to meet Tuesday, but with only 22 of 35 members present. Leadership in both chambers urged members to stay home if the conditions were too treacherous. Still, the chambers themselves had to convene Tuesday.

That, said House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, was because the rules of the chamber do not allow leadership to change meeting dates after they have been set. The Alabama Constitution allows the governor to convene the Legislature outside Montgomery or move it to another location should it "become impossible or dangerous for the legislature to meet or remain at the Capitol," but is silent about whether anyone can change meeting times of the chambers because of emergencies.

In addition, the rules of the Legislature require the bodies to reconvene at 10 a.m. the following day, if no quorum is present. With roads still treacherous on Wednesday, both Hubbard and Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, decided to cancel legislative business, losing a legislative day.

"It's really something we never intended," Hubbard said Thursday. "The rule needs to be there, and there needs to be a rule (so) if there is a filibuster, you need to come back the next day."

Talk about making the change began Tuesday afternoon in the Senate, when Marsh and Senate Minority Leader Vivian Davis Figures, D-Montgomery, both said they were looking for ways to prevent lawmakers from coming to Montgomery during dangerous weather situations. Although the proposal is still being developed, Hubbard said Thursday he expected it to allow leadership to reschedule meeting days should the governor declare a state of emergency for the entire state.

Changing the rules requires the approval of four-fifths of the membership to take effect, but Hubbard said he expected the votes to be there.

"After seeing what happened this week, it can't happen (again)," he said. "It may not happen again for 50 years, but it's incumbent on us to have a rule in place."

Wren answers the call

Despite the cancellation of business Wednesday, the House was still technically in session, and there was a representative at the podium for the extremely brief meeting.

"We did open the House," said Rep. Greg Wren, R-Montgomery, on Thursday. "Clay Redden, assistant Clerk of the House, was present, I was present. Between the two of us, we went back and forth with the prayer and Pledge of Allegiance and roll call to establish a quorum, and there wasn't one. So that caused us to adjourn."

The "extensive prayer," Wren said, called for aid for those impacted by the weather and for the efforts of first responders in the weather. The representative drove from his east Montgomery home to the chamber, saying it "took awhile to find roads that were passable."

"Sometimes unique things like this happen in government," he said. "We just have to operate as normal, even when things don't appear that way."

Montgomery or bust

Rep. Jim Patterson, R-Meridianville, left early enough for the session Tuesday that he avoided the worst of the weather and managed to be in Montgomery all three days this week.

It's a more notable feat when you consider the Madison County representative lives closer to Tennessee's capital of Nashville (90 miles away) than his own state's (200 miles away).

"Our roads are open," he said. "It's really Cullman south where the problems are."

The week ahead in the Legislature (Montgomery Advertiser)

A look ahead at expected action this week in the Alabama Legislature. All events are subject to change.

House of Representatives

The House of Representatives is scheduled to convene at 1 p.m. Tuesday. House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, said they would work off the calendar Tuesday, with special order calendars coming as early as Wednesday. He said he hoped to get a bill from the Senate that would limit

lobbying by former members of the Alabama Legislature, as well as legislation dealing with community college enrollment.

In committees:

- The House Military and Veterans Affairs committee is scheduled Wednesday to take up legislation sponsored by Rep. Chris England, D-Tuscaloosa, that would delete a wartime service requirement for scholarships available to veterans' spouses, widows or children. A Senate committee has passed similar legislation sponsored by Sen. Bryan Taylor, R-Prattville.
- The House Technology and Research committee is scheduled Wednesday to take up a bill sponsored by Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, that would make it a crime to make a patent infringement claim in bad faith. The Senate passed the bill last week.

Senate

The Senate is scheduled to convene at 2 p.m. Tuesday. Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, said the chamber will take up sunset bills for various state agencies. Marsh also said he hopes to bring up his legislation limiting lobbying by former members of the Alabama Legislature, as well as a bill sponsored by Rep. Paul DeMarco, R-Homewood that would establish an independent court to hear tax appeals.

In committees:

- The Senate Judiciary committee Wednesday is scheduled to take up legislation from Sen. Cam Ward, R-Alabaster, aimed at strengthening the Open Meetings Law. Critics say recent Alabama Supreme Court decisions have all but gutted the law.
- The Senate Judiciary committee Wednesday is also scheduled to take up legislation sponsored by Sen. Paul Sanford, R-Huntsville, that would make medical necessity a defense in prosecutions over marijuana possession.
- A bill sponsored by Sen. Bryan Taylor, R-Prattville that would require able-bodied recipients of public assistance who are not working to perform community service is scheduled to appear in the Children, Youth and Human Resources committee Wednesday.

[Weed derivative could become legal \(Decatur Daily\)](#)

MONTGOMERY — Legislation pending in the Statehouse would legalize the medical use of cannabidiol, an oil that comes from marijuana.

Unlike previous medical marijuana-related legislation, this one is sponsored by Republicans.

The bill from Sen. Paul Sanford, R-Huntsville, and Rep. Mike Ball, R-Madison, allows for cannabidiol use by patients with certain medical conditions and who were prescribed cannabidiol from a physician with whom they have a "bona fide physician-patient relationship."

Medical conditions outlined in the bill include seizures, severe or chronic pain and "any other condition that is severe and resistant to conventional medicine."

Senate Bill 174 is scheduled for a vote in the Senate Judiciary Committee this week. Under existing law, possession of marijuana for personal use is a Class A misdemeanor. This legislation would give cannabidiol users — as allowed in the bill — a legal defense from prosecution.

Rep. Patricia Todd, D-Birmingham, is a co-sponsor of the House bill. Todd previously has carried medical marijuana legislation, but has never gotten much traction.

"This is a very narrowly focused bill that's not as broad as mine in the past," Todd said. It doesn't open any floodgates to legalizing marijuana in general, she said.

"We have children that are suffering, and this bill will help them," she said. Meeting and talking with children who suffer from seizures that can be prevented with cannabidiol has gotten lawmakers' attention, Todd said.

"This is a compassionate piece of legislation," she said.

Todd also has a bill that would reduce the penalties for people caught with small amounts of marijuana.

"If you're caught with an ounce or less, it's not a criminal offense — it's like a speeding ticket," she said.

A second offense would be a misdemeanor, and a third would be a felony.

Todd said she doesn't want to weaken the penalties for drug dealers, but personal possession convictions are unnecessarily clogging up the court systems.

Drug testing lawmakers

Speaking of marijuana. ...

Republican lawmakers this year have sponsored legislation that would require drug testing for some welfare recipients and some Alabamians on unemployment.

They also seem OK with drug testing themselves.

Senate Bill 222 said lawmakers "shall be subjected to periodic drug screenings upon such intervals as the legislative body determines appropriate."

Lawmakers would have to pay for the screens, and any tests that show drug use will be referred "to the appropriate legislative committee governing the internal affairs of the body to which the legislator was elected."

The bill was scheduled for a committee vote last week, but that was delayed when bad weather prevented lawmakers from getting to Montgomery.

The bill calls for a constitutional amendment, meaning that even if passed by lawmakers, Alabama voters would still have to approve the measure.

It is sponsored by Sen. Trip Pittman, R-Daphne. Pittman also has a bill that would require recipients of a form of public assistance to be drug tested if they have prior drug convictions.

About a dozen Republican senators co-sponsored the bill, including Arthur Orr, of Decatur and Paul Bussman, who represents much of Lawrence County.

[Former Alabama Gov. Jim Folsom Jr. files paperwork to run for lieutenant governor \(al.com\)](#)

Former Alabama Gov. Jim Folsom Jr. filed paperwork Friday with the Alabama Secretary of State's office indicating he would run for lieutenant governor.

Folsom filed a form announcing he was creating a principal campaign committee, which is required to receive and spend campaign donations.

Folsom has been elected lieutenant governor three times, in 1986, 1990 and 2006. Republican Kay Ivey defeated him in the 2010 race.

Folsom became governor in 1993 after then-Gov. Guy Hunt was convicted in an ethics case.

Primary qualifying deadline is Friday (Gadsden Times)

By Andy Powell

Democratic and Republican party officials expect additional candidates before Friday's deadline. Both parties said few people have qualified since shortly after the process opened last month.

The qualifying deadline was moved up from previous years so ballots could be distributed to persons overseas or in the military.

The Republican and Democratic primaries will be June 3 and the general election will be Nov. 4.

Etowah County GOP Chairman Joe Nabors said Friday he has had several people discuss running with him, but they have not officially qualified.

Etowah County Democratic Party Chairman Whitt Torbert said he expects additional candidates to qualify this week and that weather likely kept some from qualifying last week.

Gov. Bentley: Cities and counties must pay storm costs out of pocket (al.com)

Cities and counties that incurred recovery costs from this week's snow storm will have to pay those costs out of pocket, Gov. Robert Bentley said Friday.

During other natural disasters, such as tornadoes and hurricanes, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has reimbursed local jurisdictions for cleanup costs, but this week's storm did not rise to the threshold to qualify for those funds, the governor said.

Earlier this week, the mayor of Leeds told AL.com that the state would pay for towing and impound costs, after the city directed towing companies to move abandoned cars from roadways there.

But the governor's office quickly replied, saying that no such agreement existed.

The Leeds City Council will vote tonight whether to pay for towing costs. Regardless, those funds are not coming from the state. It is up to local jurisdictions to set aside reserves for such emergencies, the governor said.

"They should, and they do, most of them," he said. "This will be up to them to take care of anything, any expenses that they incurred."

Ala. not adding more snow equipment to arsenal (AP)

The state of Alabama probably won't go shopping for snowplows despite last week's winter storm.

The Alabama Department of Transportation already has trucks, snowplows and equipment to spread sand and salt water, and spokesman Tony Harris said purchasing many more doesn't make much sense.

The equipment isn't used very often, he said Friday, and the cost of additional machinery outweighs the benefit.

"We'll look at it, but the last ones we bought rusted after 1993," said Harris, referring to the state's last major snowstorm.

Before last week, the state's last major traffic problem linked to snow and ice happened a year ago in north Alabama. Hundreds of motorists were stuck for hours on Interstate 65 in Cullman County after a storm predicted for days dumped 4 inches of snow.

This time, the forecast was the problem. The storm dumped about 2 inches of snow and ice on central Alabama, including metro Birmingham, despite forecasts that only a trace of snow would fall.

Based on forecasts the storm would strike closer to Montgomery than Birmingham, Transportation Department workers took snow plows and spreading equipment south before last week's storm, Harris said. The equipment had to be returned north once the scope of the problem was evident.

Some counties have their own snow removal equipment, and Harris said the state took a "real hard look" at its resources and purchased more bumper-mounted snow plows after the 2013 traffic snarl in north Alabama.

Aside from those plows, which can be attached to large pickupss used year-round, Harris said the state has as many as 10 plow blades that fit on dump trucks for larger jobs.

"We have hundreds of dump trucks that are capable of operating, and sand spreaders. We've probably got 10 to 20 spreaders just here in Montgomery," he said.

Transportation officials will assess the state's response to the storm as early as this week.

Ending a conflict of interest in Alabama's tax appeals process (Opinion from Cameron Smith)

For several legislative sessions, the Alabama Legislature has considered bills to create an independent tax tribunal in the state, but the idea has repeatedly stalled. More than half of the states in America currently utilize independent tax tribunals and eight states considered creating them in 2013.

The reason for independent tax tribunals is simple: Taxpayers should have a truly neutral, cost-effective means to appeal tax assessments. For now, the Administrative Law Division housed within the Alabama Department of Revenue first hears tax appeals in Alabama. In spite of a record of apparent fairness by the current Administrative Law Judge, any judge employed by a party so closely tied to a tax dispute faces the perception of a conflict of interest.

The "Taxpayer Bill of Rights," currently before the Alabama Legislature, creates the Alabama Tax Appeals Commission (ATAC), which will transfer the current functions of the Administrative Law Division within the Department of Revenue to an independent agency. Not only would the ATAC hear appeals of Revenue-administered taxes, but the authorizing legislation will allow taxpayers to appeal assessments of sales, use, rental, and lodging taxes from self-administered cities and counties unless the city or county affirmatively opts out of the ATAC appeals system.

Alabamians should not be forced to appeal their tax assessments to the same entities that levied the tax in the first place. Whether business or individual, meaningful access to a neutral arbiter in a tax dispute is crucial to the integrity of the state's tax system. While Alabamians must pay the taxes they owe, they must also have a system that protects them against being forced to pay what they do not.

Alabama's political leaders must ensure that the benefit of ending the conflict of interest is not offset by creating yet another agency in search of ever-increasing funding. The legislation that currently proposes the ATAC also opens the door for additional judges to be added to the commission. While increases in spending could be offset by fees for expedited revenue rulings proposed by the bill, legislators considering the measure would be wise to ensure that the ATAC closely mirrors the Administrative Law Division's current budget until those revenues are proven to be reliable.

As Alabama continues efforts to attract job creators, the state should not be forced to compete against a self-imposed perception that neighboring states offer a fairer, more efficient tax appeals process. With Mississippi and Georgia both enjoying independent tax appeal bodies, Alabama must not wait to remove any doubts of impartiality in the state's tax review system. Not only will Alabama join a growing number of states to do so, but Alabamians will also have more confidence that their tax appeals are as fair as possible.

Kathy Peterson to run for Alabama Public Service Commission (AP)

MONTGOMERY, Alabama — Retired businesswoman Kathy Peterson is making another race for the Alabama Public Service Commission.

Peterson announced Saturday that she will run against incumbent Jeremy Oden in the Republican primary June 3.

Peterson ran for PSC president in 2012 and finished third in the Republican primary with 24 percent of the vote.

Peterson says she would use a position on the state's utility regulatory board to speak out against the Environmental Protection Agency and to try to lower energy bills.

500 International Paper workers to lose jobs next month as Courtland mill prepares for closure (al.com)

COURTLAND, Alabama – International Paper is in the home stretch as it gets ready to lay off a few hundred workers and shut down its final two paper machines to prepare for the closure of Lawrence County's largest employer in March.

Laura Gipson, spokeswoman for the Courtland mill, said the plant's last two paper machines – C34 and C35 – will be shuttered during the next several days and approximately 500 workers will be cut the week of Feb. 10.

Next month's layoffs will be International Paper's second major workforce reduction since early December, when about 100 Courtland employees lost their jobs following the closure of the plant's first two paper machines in November.

Although the Courtland mill will seem like a ghost town after it lays off at least 500 workers in February, Gipson said a closure team of about 200 employees will remain on site for a period of time to help maintain the facility.

"The business has determined that certain equipment at Courtland will need to operate beyond the shutdown of the paper machines to support the transition of products and customer services to other locations," she said.

The closure team will also help secure equipment and infrastructure at the site. Gipson said no decisions have been made regarding the future of the 43-year-old plant, which had an annual production capacity of 950,000 tons.

Citing declining demand for uncoated freesheet paper, International Paper announced on 9/11 last year that it will close the Courtland mill, which employs 1,096. Annual budgets in Courtland, Lawrence County and the school system are expected to lose a combined \$2.3 million after the plant shuts down.

Of the nearly 400 Courtland mill workers who expressed an interest in relocating to another International Paper facility, Gipson said 316 received offers to transfer. About 55 percent of the mill's employees were eligible for retirement when International Paper made the announcement that it would close this year.

An external job fair in November, which attracted 660 Courtland mill workers, brought in more than 40 companies, generated nearly 300 interview requests and/or skills testing, and resulted in 80 external job offers, according to Gipson.

Lawrence County, which has 318 salaried and hourly IP workers, is among several other counties, including Morgan (255 workers), Lauderdale (262 workers) and Colbert (140 workers), that will be most impacted by the closure. Several thousand foresters and loggers in Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi will also feel the effects of the shut down.

The Courtland plant, which originally opened as Champion International in 1971 but was later bought out by International Paper, makes paper for envelopes, labels, copiers, forms, printers and magazines.

Gipson said Feb. 1 is the final deadline to apply for an International Paper Foundation grant before the Courtland mill closes for good. Since Jan. 1, Gipson said the plant has received nearly \$100,000 in requests for funding from schools and nonprofit agencies.

For more information, including funding guidelines and restrictions, or to submit an application, click [here](#).

"The Courtland Mill was very pleased to be awarded its full allotment of funding for the 2014 calendar year; however, the funds will be distributed at one time rather than dispersed throughout the year," she said.

Real estate broker and Moulton native Nick McDaniel told AL.com in November that the impending closure has already caused several deals to fall apart within his Century 21 Prestige Properties office in Decatur.

McDaniel's colleagues have reported similar scenarios, such as changes in purchasing plans or rejected financing.

"I think that it is very much a grieving process that many are going through and a process that each person handles differently," he said. "This is something that shakes people to their core and causes them to question something that they have always believed. Nobody ever thought that this central icon of life in Lawrence County would ever go away."