



Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh
Press Clips
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[Sen. Paul Sanford hopes changes can ease concerns about marijuana oil bill \(AP\)](#)

MONTGOMERY, Alabama — A Huntsville legislator is working on changes to a bill that he hopes will persuade the Senate to approve the use of marijuana oil to treat children's seizures.

Republican Sen. Paul Sanford of Huntsville and other advocates plan on Tuesday to unveil the changes, which Sanford said should ease some concerns about the measure he has proposed.

Sanford's bill was on the Senate's work agenda Thursday, but the Senate broke for the weekend without getting to it. Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, said he expects it to be back on the work agenda when the Senate resumes work Tuesday afternoon.

Families with children suffering from frequent seizures due to epilepsy have been visiting the Legislature for two months in an effort to emphasize the potential good marijuana oil can do and to dispel fears about its legalization.

Greg Gibbs of Madison has been pushing his granddaughter's stroller along the halls, introducing 19-month-old Charlotte Dolton to legislators and explaining that she has a form of epilepsy called Dravet Syndrome. Because of that, she suffers frequent seizures.

"Each seizure causes brain damage, so we are fighting the clock," he said.

Gibbs' family wants to be able to treat her seizures with a marijuana plant extract called cannabidoil, also known as CBD oil. Sanford's bill and similar legislation offered in the House by Republican Rep. Mike Ball of Madison do not legalize the oil, but give patients and their caretakers a justifiable defense if charged with drug possession. Those in possession of the oil would have to have written proof of a diagnosis such as a seizure disorder.

Gibbs said the evidence he has seen from other states where the oil is available has convinced him it would reduce his granddaughter's seizures significantly and keep her from suffering brain damage.

He said the oil is produced from marijuana that is grown to be low in tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, the main psychoactive substance in marijuana. "It can't get anybody high," he said.

Gibbs tells people the legislation has nothing to do with a broader medical marijuana bill that has been introduced this session or with recreational marijuana. "There is marijuana pot and then there is miracle marijuana," he said.

Barry Yarbrough of Haleyville is also walking the halls, but without his 14-year-old granddaughter, Allie Swann. Her parents moved her from Haleyville to Colorado last fall to be able to use the marijuana oil to legally treat her epilepsy. "She probably wouldn't be alive now if not for going out there," he said.

Sanford said the biggest challenge his bill faces is legislators' concerns about voting for anything pertaining to marijuana in an election year when their opponents might use it against them.

Yarbrough said he understands legislators' concerns, and he was skeptical until he saw the change in his granddaughter.

"She has never gone two or three days of her life without a seizure. She went 21 days without a seizure and her motor skills have improved," he said. "We were hoping for a 10 percent change. We are at 60 percent."

If Sanford's bill passes the Senate, it would still have to be passed by the House and signed by the governor. Ball's bill has not yet been considered by the House.

[Ala. legislature prepares for this week's Common Core showdown \(Yellowhammer News\)](#)

The effort to completely repeal Common Core State Standards in Alabama has been met with fierce resistance over the last couple of legislative sessions, but it appears that a compromise bill may now have a chance to advance in the legislature for the first time.

Senate Bill 443 is sponsored by Sen. Scott Beason and co-sponsored by 12 other senators, including Sen President Pro Tem Del Marsh who had previously said a Common Core repeal bill would not make it to the floor for a vote this year. The bill would allow local school boards to opt out of Common Core and would establish a moratorium on the expansion of Common Core into subject matters beyond math and english, which the state opted into in 2010.

Although it is not the full repeal that many grassroots conservatives were seeking, the so-called "Local Option" appears to have garnered the support of Tea Party leaders who see it as a step in the right direction.

But business groups and some state education leaders are continuing to push back.

"SB443 amounts to a significant usurpation of power by the Legislature. It is simply wrong," said Business Council of Alabama President and CEO Billy Canary. "This is a political application at the expense of students and our future workforce. As we have said before, continued attempts by the

Legislature to assume control of this issue, relegated by law to the State Board of Education, is the very definition of government overreach.”

State Superintendent of Education Tommy Bice also released a strongly-worded statement against the bill, saying “it contains absolutely nothing to support current efforts to ensure students today graduate prepared for college, work, and adulthood in the 21st century.”

Both sides will have an opportunity to voice their opinions Tuesday during a public hearing on the bill scheduled for 10 a.m. in room 304 of the Alabama State House.

Tea Party groups are also planning an organized lobbying effort for Wednesday. Several grassroots organizations are planning to meet Sen. Scott Beason on the steps of the State House at 11 a.m. Wednesday morning before splitting into smaller groups to encourage legislators to support his bill.

Mobile County school board passes resolution to oppose Common Core 'opt out' bill (al.com)

MOBILE, Alabama -- The Mobile County school board unanimously passed a resolution Monday opposing Senate Bill 443, which would give school boards the power to opt out of using the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards, also known as Common Core.

Senate Bill 443, filed March 3, would give local school boards the right to disregard, add to or alter the Common Core standards adopted by the Alabama State Board of Education in 2010 for math and English.

The bill is sponsored by Sen. Scott Beason, R-Gardendale.

Senate Bill 443 would allow local school systems to implement their own academic standards for English and math, so long as the local standards satisfy the curriculum standards in place before the Common Core took effect. Those standards date from 1999 and 2003.

The bill would require that an alternative curriculum would be implemented in each system that opts out of using the standards, and calls for a new entity, a Standards Advisory Commission, to be created to evaluate test results.

But if the bill passes, it would be a big step backward, according to the resolution brought before the board on Monday by schools Superintendent Martha Peek.

"Adoption of Senate Bill 443 would render useless all current locally developed curriculum, instructional resources, professional development in the areas of mathematics and English language arts ... all recently purchased textbooks, digital content and instructional materials, because these resources are not aligned with the antiquated 1999 and 2003 standards for English language arts and mathematics," the resolution reads.

Also, the proposed legislation would usurp the authority of the State Board of Education, "and result in inconsistent and inadequate educational standards from city to city and county to county across the State of Alabama," the resolution reads.

After the vote, school board President Reginald Crenshaw said the school system supports the Common Core standards, and predicted that other school districts would also pass resolutions opposing Senate Bill 443. "We're telling our Legislature that this is not something we want," he said.

Crenshaw also said it wasn't a good idea for state officials to hire a separate agency to develop and administer testing.

The state board of education is responsible for developing academic standards, and if the bill passes, the Legislature would take over that task, among others, he noted. "That's usurping the power of the State Board of Education," he said.

Peek will go to Montgomery on Tuesday to speak about the issue with the Senate Education Committee. "I respect our legislators," she said. "... We have a very capable and competent State Board of Education and state Superintendent. Their total focus is on education. We've got to have that trust, that this is an education issue, and we're going to act in the best interests of our students."

Peek said she would ask the members of the Senate Education Committee to think carefully about Senate Bill 443.

"I'll just say, 'Let's think about this; let's be practical,'" she said.

Lawmaker proposes bill to lure California brewer to Alabama; state's small brewers not included in legislation (Anniston Star)

by Tim Lockette

MONTGOMERY -- A debate over who can brew beer and run a restaurant in the same site may come to a head in the Alabama Legislature this week.

Two similar bills, one in the House and one in the Senate, would allow beer companies that make more than 25,000 barrels of beer per year to open a restaurant on the site of their brewery.

So far, there's no brewery in Alabama that comes even close to making that much beer. Sen. Dick Brewbaker, R-Montgomery, is hoping to change that.

"There's a major brewer that wants to open a brewery east of the Mississippi, and they're taking proposals," said Brewbaker, sponsor of one of the bills. "This bill is attempting to create a situation where they could come here."

Brewing beer is a relatively new industry in Alabama, but a growing one. Twenty-nine small craft breweries have popped up across the state in recent years, each of them producing a locally-made brew that's sold to beer connoisseurs.

"Our goal is not to get Alabamians to drink more beer," said Jason Wilson, president of the Gadsden-based Back Forty Beer Co. "It's to make sure that more of the beer sold in Alabama is from Alabama."

Wilson said that with about 12,000 barrels of beer produced in the past year, his company is probably the largest beer producer in the state. By contrast, he said, Anheuser-Busch produces well in excess of 100 million barrels, and smaller producers are still considered "craft" breweries if they produce less than 6 million barrels.

The spread of small breweries is due in part to recent changes in state law, such as the Alabama Brewpub Act, which allows small brewers to serve beer on the same site where it's made. To run a brew pub, a brewer has to prove, among other things, that it's operating in an area where brewing was done before Prohibition began in 1919.

Some state officials are hoping California-based Stone Brewing Co. will get into the act. The company, which makes more than 200,000 barrels per year, and sells some of its beer through large on-site restaurants, has put out a request for proposals in hopes of building a brewery east of the Mississippi.

Brewbaker said officials of the Economic Development Association, an industrial development lobbying group, asked for the bill, to give Alabama a chance to compete for the Stone brewery. Attempts to reach EDA director Jim Searcy for comment weren't immediately successful Monday.

Brewbaker said several Alabama counties -- including Lee, Madison and Jefferson -- want to submit proposals to get the brewery. According to Stone Brewing's request for proposal, a new brewery would have to be near a major freeway, and would include a restaurant at the brewery -- something that wouldn't be possible under current law, which allows brewpubs only at breweries that produce less than 10,000 barrels per year.

Alabama brewers say they'd welcome Stone to the state, but they also say Brewbaker's bill is flawed. It would create an easier path to opening a brewery-based restaurant, and would allow breweries to sell beer on-site for off-premise consumption, something Alabama's breweries can't do under current law. But those changes would apply only to breweries that make 25,000 barrels or more.

"It's kind of weird to put a minimum cap on it," said Dan Roberts, director of the Alabama Brewers Guild. Roberts and Wilson both noted that the guild promoted a bill this year that would allow the state's existing brewers to do off-premise sales. It's gone nowhere in the Legislature, they said.

Stone Brewing officials, meanwhile, are quick to point out that it didn't ask for Brewbaker's bill and isn't lobbying for it to pass.

"We do not have anything to do with it," said Sabrina Lopiccolo, a spokeswoman for Stone.

Brewbaker, the senator, said the 25,000-barrel minimum could be a negotiable part of the bill. But there's a limited time to negotiate, he said.

Stone Brewing is accepting proposals only until March 15, according to its website, and the door for getting a new bill through both houses of the Legislature is rapidly closing. Tuesday is the 23rd day of the Legislature's 30-day session.

"It's got to be this week, or not at all," Brewbaker said.

[Alabama Legislature has long to-do list with just eight days left \(al.com\)](#)

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Time is growing short for the Alabama Legislature to pass key bills this year, including the two state budgets.

Eight meeting days remain out of the maximum 30 days.

Here's where some of the key bills stand.

SB 184, the \$5.9 billion education budget, passed the Senate and will be debated in the House budget committee Wednesday.

Committee chairman Rep. Bill Poole of Tuscaloosa said he will introduce a substitute bill that takes out a 1 percent pay bonus for education employees approved by the Senate.

The new bill applies more money to the health insurance program for educators, which faces a \$220 million shortfall next year. Poole said a 1 percent bonus wouldn't help educators if it is offset by increased health insurance premiums.

Gov. Robert Bentley said he will veto the budget if it does not include a 2 percent pay raise he proposed.

The Legislature can override the governor's veto with a vote of the majority of members elected in each chamber.

The Ways and Means Education Committee meets Wednesday at 9 a.m.

HB 235, the \$1.8 billion General Fund operating budget for non-education agencies, has passed the House and is awaiting action in the Senate budget committee.

A key issue in the budget is funding for the Department of Corrections, which is under investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice. The House budget included a slight cut for corrections, but the Senate budget chairman has said he expects to propose more for prisons.

The Senate is expected on Tuesday to consider SB 174, called Carly's Law, which would effectively legalize the use of marijuana-derived CBD oil for medical purposes. The oil is believed to help some seizure disorders.

On Tuesday, the Senate Education Committee will hold a public hearing on a SB443, which would allow local school districts to opt out of using Common Core curriculum standards.

The state Department of Education and Business Council of Alabama are among those who oppose that bill.

Also on Tuesday, the House Ethics and Campaign Finance Committee will consider SB 36, which would make changes to the state ethics law affecting public officials.

Sen. Del Marsh introduced the bill to prohibit former legislators from lobbying either chamber of the Legislature within two years after their legislative terms end.

The Senate added an amendment making the law much broader, including provisions that would apply to former governors.

On Wednesday, the Senate Health Committee will hold a public hearing on HB 489, which would increase from 24 hours to 48 hours the period a woman must wait to receive an abortion after receiving state-mandated information on adoption agencies, obligations of the father, and other issues.

The bill is one of four abortion bills passed by the House after a long debate last week.

Also on Wednesday, the House State Government Committee will consider bills that would place new restrictions on welfare applicants and recipients.

-- SB 63 would require drug tests for those with a drug conviction in the last five years.

-- SB 115 would require applicants for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families to apply for at least three jobs before becoming eligible for benefits.

-- SB 116 would prohibit the purchase of alcohol, tobacco, lottery tickets, tattoos and psychic advice services with TANF money.

The House Health Committee on Wednesday will consider SB 168, which would prohibit smoking in public places and workplaces, with exceptions.

[STUDY: Welfare benefits in Alabama can be worth much more than a job \(Yellowhammer News\)](#)

A new report by the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute provides overwhelming evidence that welfare in Alabama and many other parts of the country has become more like a spider web than the safety net it was intended to be.

According to the Cato study, welfare recipients in Alabama can receive benefits that are the equivalent of a \$23,310 yearly salary, which is what they would receive for making \$11.21 an hour at a full-time job.

"Most reports on welfare focus on only a single program, the cash-benefit program Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)," Michael Tanner and Charles Hughes of the Cato Institute explained. "But this focus leaves a misimpression that welfare benefits are quite low, providing a bare subsistence level of income. In reality, the federal government currently funds 126 separate programs targeted toward low-income people, 72 of which provide either cash or in-kind benefits to individuals... Of course, no individual or family receives benefits from all 72 programs, but many recipients do receive aid from a number of the programs at any given time. The total value of welfare received, therefore, is likely to be far higher than simply the level of TANF benefits."

The value of benefits has also increased significantly since that last round of welfare reform in the mid-90s.

When adjusted for inflation, the value of welfare benefits in Alabama has increased \$5,760 since 1995. That's the ninth highest increase in the nation over that time period.

But Alabama is not alone.

Welfare currently pays more than a minimum wage job in 35 states. In 12 more states, an individual leaving welfare for a job paying the same amount would see a decline in actual income. Welfare pays more than \$15 an hour in 13 states. In 11 states, welfare pays more than the average pre-tax first year wage for a teacher. In 39 states it pays more than the starting wage for a secretary. In 3 states welfare recipients can take home more money than an entry-level computer programmer.

The median salary in Alabama is \$29,848. That means a person on welfare can make 78.1 percent of the state's median salary and live at 136 percent of the federal poverty level.

In short, the Cato study suggests that the current level of welfare benefits discourages recipients from going out and getting an entry-level job. Alabama's current minimum wage is \$7.50, and even President Obama's proposal to raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 pales in comparison to what an individual could receive by participating in the various welfare programs available to them.

A package of welfare reform bills is currently making its way through the Alabama legislature.

The bills allow drug testing of some welfare recipients; make it a crime to defraud public assistance programs; require welfare applicants to prove they are trying to get a job; and prohibit welfare recipients from spending benefits on alcohol, tobacco, strippers and gambling.

[Bill pending in Alabama Legislature would allow home-schooled students to play on public school sports teams \(al.com\)](#)

Some parents of home-schooled children are supporting proposed legislation that would allow their kids to play competitive sports with public school students.

HB 503 by Rep. Mary Sue McClurkin, R-Indian Springs, was approved by a House committee last week.

The Montgomery Advertiser reports a home-schooled 15-year-old Dothan boy tried out for a local high school football team and practiced with the squad until he was told he was ineligible to play days before the first game.

The Alabama High School Athletic Association requires students to be enrolled in the school they're representing to play sports.

Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools legislative coordinator Jim Chestnutt spoke out against the idea during a public hearing last week, saying that allowing students who are home-schooled to compete with public school teams would be unfair.

The boy's mother says the local team for home-schooled students didn't have enough players.

[Department of Corrections hires national consulting firm to improve conditions at Tutwiler \(Montgomery Advertiser\)](#)

The Alabama Department of Corrections has hired a national consulting firm to improve conditions at the Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women in Wetumpka, a facility that's been plagued by a culture of sexual abuse and violence for decades.

The Moss Group, based in Washington, D.C., specializes in criminal justice management and sexual safety in confinement. The company has worked in all 50 states, and is known for being "progressive" when it comes to sexual safety responses, Prison Commissioner Kim Thomas said.

"They're going to review policies, processes in place and the material that we use for training," Thomas said. "They'll be mentoring and coaching staff and making sure we've got the support structure in place to continue the reform efforts we've already implemented."

In January, the Human Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice released a scathing 34-page report detailing what it called systemic problems at Tutwiler that have allowed its staff to continue to sexually abuse and harass inmates.

The report noted that the culture of abuse still existed despite previous reports from the DOJ's National Institute of Corrections and the Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit Montgomery-based legal firm that has detailed reports of sexual abuse and violence at Tutwiler and other facilities.

A letter to Gov. Robert Bentley from the DOJ said the conditions at the facility were unconstitutional, and that it would expand its investigation of Tutwiler.

After the NIC assessment, Thomas issued a 58-point directive in January 2013 to address each problem and recommendation it made.

Thomas said the consulting firm is going to help the DOC further the reforms issued in last year's directive as well as help the state enforce the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act.

He said the cost of hiring the firm hasn't been finalized, but the money will come out of ADOC's budget. A contract between The Moss Group and the state should be finalized by next month, Thomas said.

Thomas said ADOC has used the group for training in the past.

The Moss Group has already looked at the NIC's recommendations and the DOJ's report, and have been on site to assess the facility and the measures that have already been implemented. Thomas said he's working with the firm to come up with between five and 10 strategies that will benefit the staff and offenders at Tutwiler.

Thomas said he expects about 12 of the firm's 80 consultants from all over the country, many of whom specialize in different areas of corrections, will be visiting and assisting at Tutwiler. He said policy and procedural changes, as well as PREA compliance, will benefit all prisons in the system.

After the firm "gets their arms around" the situation, the plan is to start making changes as they're identified, Thomas said.

"I think we're also going to need to start thinking outside the box, whether it's (for) Tutwiler or the system as a whole," said state Sen. Cam Ward, R-Alabaster, who is also chairman of the joint legislative prison oversight committee. "We can spend more money here or there, but all we're doing is staying ahead of the controversy."

Ward said he's supportive of ADOC's decision to hire the firm. He said all Alabama's prisons need reform, but Tutwiler is a "special case" because of the seriousness of the allegations.

"It definitely merits a special investigation," he said.

Ward has also been spearheading an effort to get Alabama selected by the Council on State Governments Justice Center for a comprehensive assessment of the criminal justice process in the state.

Robert Coombs, a spokesman for the Justice Center, said last month that only a handful of states are eligible to formally apply, and only a half-dozen are chosen for the six- to 18-month assessment that will help determine policy reform.

The program is funded by the DOJ, and requires that all three branches of government in a state commit to the effort. In January, the Alabama Senate passed a resolution creating the Prison Reform Task Force, which would work with the Justice Center on the application.

Coombs said the program doesn't address prison conditions or abuse. He said the program is designed to help states get a better handle on its prison population and doing a better job of making sure that recidivism rates are as low as possible. Alabama is also known for its overcrowded prisons, which are currently at about 200 percent capacity.

Alabama prison staffing declines, but overtime eats up half of savings (al.com)

During the nadir of the Great Recession, when Alabama's general fund budget sustained sharp cuts, the Alabama Department of Corrections stopped replacing corrections officers who retired or quit.

Brian Corbett, a spokesman for the department, recalled corrections Commissioner Kim Thomas taking office amid a financial crisis in 2010.

"In the next couple years, due to budget constraints, we were forced to cut recruiting programs, and as a result, staffing numbers began to go down," he said.

Despite cutting more than \$12.6 million in salaries from fiscal year 2011 to fiscal year 2013, however, the state ended up saving only a little more than half that amount on payroll because of rising overtime costs.

According to an October corrections report, the most recent one available, staffing was 61 percent of authorized strength. The gap was even larger than that at some facilities. Corbett pointed out that no matter how low staffing levels go, though, prisons need a certain number of people guarding prisoners around the clock.

"As the physical number of bodies who are able to work goes down, overtime has to go up," he said.

Staff cuts do not result in meaningful savings unless the state can close a prison. And with prisons hovering near 200 percent capacity, that is not likely anytime soon.

"In my 12 years here, closing facilities has never been an option," Corbett said.

Overall spending on salaries has remained relatively flat over the past five years, according to statistics provided by prison officials. In the fiscal year that ended in September, the prison system's total payroll stood at \$172.6 million, down slightly from the \$173.6 million that the department spent in fiscal year 2009. That figure does not include health and retirement benefits, which added another \$63.4 million in fiscal year 2013.

From fiscal year 2009 to fiscal year 2012, overtime spending stayed between 7 percent and 9 percent of total payroll. But the overtime portion jumped 22.8 percent from fiscal year 2012 to 2103, rising to 11.1 percent of payroll costs.

State Rep. Steve Clouse, R-Ozark, said the statistics underscore the difference between prisons and other parts of state government.

"I think that's one of the things we've seen in the prison system, unlike other departments," said Clouse, who chairs the general fund budget committee. "It's not like you can take furlough days on a Friday, for instance, like the Department of Human Resources or the Historical Commission."

Clouse noted that the Legislature last year approved a \$17 million increase for the Corrections Department to hire more guards. Increased staffing should reduce overtime costs, but Corbett it takes time to build staffing levels back up.

He said the corrections academy takes three months to complete. Depending on when an applicant is hired, it could be two more months before the next available academy class. Corbett said in extreme cases, it can be as long as six months before a new corrections officer starts the job.

"It slows the whole process down," he said.

Prospective corrections officers must pass a background check. Convictions for a felony and certain misdemeanors disqualify an applicant. Those requirements, Corbett said, are set by the Alabama Peace Officers' Standards and Training Commission.

Clouse noted that funds from the federal government's stimulus program bolstered the prison system's budget in fiscal years 2010 and 2011 and now have run out. That has left lawmakers trying to keep the prisons running on a series of stop-gap measures and one-time funding sources, he said.

"We're getting down to the point where we need to put another \$2 to \$300 million into the general fund on a regular basis to do things like remedy the prison system," he said.

Clouse said the general fund draws money from non-growth sources of revenue, which has squeezed all non-education spending.

"We're trying to find more money for prisons," he said.

Given recent trends, that is not going to be easy.

[Free voter-photo IDs in state \(TimesDaily\)](#)

MONTGOMERY — Voters who don't have a valid photo ID to use in Alabama's elections can get one free at county board of registrars' offices.

Alabama's chief election official, Secretary of State Jim Bennett, said Monday that registrars' offices in every county will be offering the free IDs, starting this week.

The offices are open during regular courthouse hours, he said.

In addition, the required photo IDs are available in the secretary of state's office in the Capitol and, starting March 17, from vans that will be visiting all 67 counties. Their schedules will be announced soon.

"We are covering the state in a broad way," Bennett said.

After Republicans took control of the Legislature from Democrats, they passed a law in 2011 to require a photo ID to vote. The law takes effect with the primary election June 3.

"We think it will help improve our voting system. Voters, of course, ought to be who they claim to be," the Republican secretary of state said.

Many types of photo IDs can be used, including an Alabama driver's license, Alabama non-driver ID, state-issued ID, federal ID, passport, Alabama public or private college ID, college ID from a state college in another state, military ID and employee ID from a federal, state, county or city government.

The secretary of state's office reports that a check of voting records with the state Department of Public Safety shows 20 percent of Alabama's registered voters, or about 500,000 adults, lack a driver's license or non-driver ID issued by the Department of Public Safety.

Bennett estimated half of that group has one of the other acceptable forms of photo IDs.

Those without a proper ID can get one free by going to a registrars' office, the secretary of state's office or one of the vans with documents showing their full legal name, date of birth and address.

Examples of photo IDs that can be used to obtain a free voter ID include a high school ID, an ID from a private employer and a hospital or nursing home ID. Non-photo IDs with a person's full legal name and date of birth can be used, including a birth certificate, marriage record, military record, Medicaid or Medicare document, or official school transcript.

The voter will get a paper ID initially, but should get a permanent ID by mail within two weeks. The permanent IDs don't expire like a driver's license would, Bennett said.

The secretary of state's office reports it is spending about \$800,000 to implement the law. That includes equipment from Police&Sheriff's Press in Valdosta, Ga., van travel and a media campaign, he said.

More than half the states have enacted photo ID laws for voting. Some have not taken effect because of legal challenges or delayed implementation dates.

Magazine ranks Montgomery as a great place to do business (Montgomery Advertiser)

Montgomery is one of the South's top 10 success stories when it comes to economic development strategies, according to a trend-tracking magazine and website.

In its latest issue, Birmingham-based Southern Business & Development ranked the Capital City as one of "the shining examples of economic development that's working in the South." It's the only Alabama city on the list, which includes areas such as Dallas-Fort Worth, Baton Rouge, La., and Columbia, S.C.

The ranking is "based on their performance in recent deals," publisher Mike Randle said.

The article notes that new and existing industries have made more than \$1 billion in capital investments and created more than 5,700 jobs in Montgomery over the past five years.

The total of non-agricultural jobs in the Montgomery metro area rose by about 2,000 over those five recession-stunted years, according to statistics from the Alabama Department of Labor. The metro area includes Autauga, Elmore, Montgomery and Lowndes counties.

Montgomery County's unemployment rate fell from 6.9 percent in December 2012 to 6.2 percent in December 2013, in part because of the number of people leaving the labor force. Still, the area's approach to luring new industry has led to a number of victories over the past year, according to the magazine.

"Montgomery is a community of vast economic diversity," the article states. "In 2013 alone, local leaders landed the headquarters of a national pharmaceutical service company, a global automotive supplier, a major financial corporate and operation center and a Department of Defense Core Data Center."

The article also praises the city's unusual blend of military, technology and manufacturing jobs, as well as amenities such as the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce spokeswoman Melissa George Bowman said the mention was "no surprise."

"This really is a unique community," Bowman said.

Bowman said many of the factors mentioned in the article are in line with the goals of the city's five-year "Imagine a Greater Montgomery II" growth strategy, which started in 2012. Among them is the goal to "strengthen and diversify the regional economy."

Randle was upbeat about the area's future when he spoke at an economic summit here in November. He said manufacturing jobs that went to China a decade ago now are coming back, and they're mostly landing in the South.

"The economic development numbers have looked good since 2010," Randle said in November. "We're making as much money as we made prior to the Great Recession. It's just that it's going elsewhere."

[Will Alabama grant same-sex couple's request for divorce? \(al.com\)](#)

A same-sex couple who married in Iowa in 2012 has filed for divorce in Alabama, creating a potentially complex court challenge in a state that does not recognize same-sex marriage.

The petition filed with the Madison County Circuit Clerk seeks to dissolve the marriage of Shrie Michelle Richmond and Kirsten Allysse Richmond. According to the recorder's office in Dubuque, Iowa, the couple married in Dubuque on Nov. 2, 2012.

Same-sex marriage was legalized in Iowa in 2009. But Alabama is not one of the 17 states that recognize the marriages as valid.

And that leaves the couple without an easy way to untie the knot.

Shrie Richmond's attorney Patrick Hill said the problem for the couple is that most states have a residency requirement in order to grant a divorce. For example, the couple would have to leave Alabama and establish residency in Iowa for one year to be granted a divorce there.

"When she first came to me, to ask what options were, she had no idea," Hill said. "She didn't know she could not just go down to the courthouse and file for a divorce and she had no idea about Iowa's residency requirement.

"We've explored options on this case for almost a year before filing."

Alabama passed the "Alabama Marriage Protection Act" in 1998 which pointedly rejects same-sex marriage. The law says "marriage is inherently a unique relationship between a man and a woman."

It goes on to say the state "shall not recognize as valid any marriage of parties of the same sex that occurred or was alleged to have occurred as a result of the law of any jurisdiction regardless of whether a marriage license was issued."

The divorce petition filed by the Richmonds says they are bona fide residents of Madison and Morgan counties for six months - Alabama has a six-month residency requirement for divorce. The filing contends the women have become incompatible and there is no chance of reconciliation.

While it is an uncontested divorce, simply needing a divorce decree from a judge, Hill said the state's computer court filing system prevented him from filing electronically for the divorce.

The Alafile computer system would not allow it," Hill said. "It accepted all the information I input, but there is a box on it you have to check that designates whether the party is male or female.

"I designated both parties as female - it said the plaintiff and defendant could not be the same gender."

Last month a Montgomery man filed a lawsuit seeking to overturn Alabama's ban on recognizing same-sex marriages performed in other states. The lawsuit challenges the "Marriage Protection Act" and Alabama's "Sanctity of Marriage Amendment," which was passed in a statewide referendum in 2006. The amendment received more than 80 percent of the nearly 860,000 votes cast.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, which is representing Paul Hard in his lawsuit to overturn the state marriage ban, said Alabama needs to change its laws concerning same-sex couples.

"Alabama law treats LGBT citizens as if we don't exist," said David Dinielli deputy legal director for the SPLC. "The state's failure to recognize same-sex marriages, including when they end because of death or divorce, is an example of the state's efforts to demean us and our lives. We and many others are working to fix this so that LGBT Alabamians can live their lives in safety and dignity, without leaving the state they proudly call home."

As same-sex marriage proponents have been successful in the courts in recent years, attitudes in Alabama and across the U.S. seem to be shifting.

Last year, the Alabama Republican Party Executive Committee blocked an effort to silence a college Republican who was critical of the party's staunch opposition to same-sex marriage. And a new poll by

the Pew Research Center found that some 61 of young, self-identified conservatives favor same-sex marriage.

But state leaders show no signs of wavering on the issue.

Last month, in response to the filing of the lawsuit challenging Alabama's marriage ban, a spokeswoman for Gov. Robert Bentley said he would fight the lawsuit and strongly believes in the traditional definition of marriage. House Speaker Mike Hubbard showed no signs of softening on the issue, calling the lawsuit "part of a coordinated liberal agenda that is designed to erode the conservative Alabama values that the citizens of our state hold close to their hearts."

Would you vote for a 'gun-toting governor'? Stacy Lee George gets new look (al.com)

Stacy Lee George, a corrections officer at Limestone Correctional Facility who is running for governor, has a new look to go with his words.

George, a former Morgan County commissioner, posed for a Huntsville Times/AL.com photographer today to provide an enhanced image for his gun-toting ideals.

At a press conference last month promoting a state lottery for education, George, a Republican, discussed why he constantly wears a gun.

"I'm not wearing a gun for self-protection," he said. "I'm protecting the Second Amendment. If Alabama is known for having a gun-toting governor, people know Alabama supports Second Amendment rights. It sends a message to the President of the United States that if you can't take the governor's gun, you can't take the people's guns either."

George posed for a Times/AL.com photographer last month but while wearing a coat and tie.