



Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh  
Press Clips  
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## **[Birmingham-Hoover rated 19th out of 50 largest metros in job creation \(al.com\)](#)**

The Birmingham-Hoover metro area rated in the top half of the Gallup Job Creation Index, which was updated with new data late last week.

Gallup builds its index by asking businesses whether they plan on adding or reducing staff. It surveys at least 1,000 businesses in each metro on its list.

In Birmingham, nearly 4 out of 10 businesses (38.8 percent) said they were hiring, while 15.3 percent of businesses said they would be reducing staff. Those percentages net out to a 23.5 "job creation index," ranking Birmingham-Hoover 19th in a list of the 50 largest metros in the U.S.

The percentage of businesses in Birmingham-Hoover that said they would expand was larger than in Kansas City, San Francisco, or Nashville. But because fewer businesses in those areas said they planned on contracting, each metro was ranked higher than Birmingham.

Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown in Texas was the highest rated metro. There, 43.7 percent of businesses say they are hiring, while just 11.7 percent of businesses say they are contracting.

The lowest-ranked metro was San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, where 20.5 percent of businesses said they planned on contracting. New York-North New Jersey-Long Island came in second to last.

## **Bill makes tampering with communication a felony (Anniston Star)**

by Brian Anderson

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A bill awaiting the governor's signature would target those who clog potentially live-saving lines of communication, making it felony to tamper with public safety communications.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Randy Wood, R-Saks, passed the Alabama legislature last week. It makes interference with official communication between law enforcement agencies, fire services and 911 communications a class C felony. Under Alabama law, a Class C felony is punishable with up to 10 years in prison.

The bill includes radio broadcasts, telephone communication and electronic channels allocated by the Federal Communications Commission.

Kevin Jenkins, director of Calhoun County 911, said the agency wrote the bill and was instrumental in getting it pushed in Montgomery. Jenkins said it's needed to keep lines of communication open that first responders depend on to do their jobs.

"These communication channels are their lifeline," Jenkins said. "You ask any law enforcement or emergency service, and they will tell you that."

The legislation is broad, and would include everything from interfering with police phone calls, to disrupting emergency signals, such as tornado sirens. Jenkins said it would also include tampering with encrypted communication between officials.

Jenkins said two-way communication between first responders has become more prevalent in the last decade, and is a tool that safety officials depend on. Tampering or interfering with that communication can cause serious problems for public safety, he said.

Although the law is new to the state, interfering with public safety communication is already a federal offense. But Jenkins and Wood said that to the best of their knowledge, no cases, local or statewide, have involved tampering with public safety communication.

"We're trying to be proactive and not reactive," Wood said. "If this happens down the road, we want to be ready with this law."

Jenkins and Wood said Alabama's laws are similar to other states'. Meghan McCluskey, who handles media relations for the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officers International, a group that advocates for communication officials, said the organization does not comment on state or local issues. Attempts on Monday to reach officials with the association's Alabama chapter, including the chapter's president, Amanda White of the Florence Police Department, were unsuccessful.

Mike Fincher, director of safety and security for Calhoun County Schools, said federal regulations don't provide enough enforcement, and said this bill gives local law enforcement the ability to prosecute cases quickly.

"This expedites the process," Fincher said. "It gives the state leverage in dealing with this."

Fincher serves as a board member for Calhoun County 911, and prior to joining the school system, worked for the Anniston Police Department. He said he couldn't recall a particular incident in his career that involved tampering with communication, but said the bill is an important way of protecting the interest of public safety and the officials who use the communication.

"It's just a tool to make sure public safety officials can keep those airwaves open," Fincher said. "We depend on those, and you just can't have someone interfere with them."

## **[Bill would limit sex offenders on school campuses \(Anniston Star\)](#)**

by Tim Lockette

MONTGOMERY — A bill before the Alabama Legislature would require registered sex offenders to warn principals before they enter K-12 school campuses, and would give school systems the power to monitor them while they're in a school.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Steve Hurst, R-Munford, said he was surprised to find that sex offenders aren't already banned from campuses entirely.

"Most people think this has already been done," Hurst said.

Under Alabama law, it's a felony for a sex offender to "loiter" within 500 feet of a school. Hurst says school systems have far less power to block a sex offender who can state a reason for being on campus — particularly if the offender has children who attend the school.

"If they're not loitering, they can just walk in and say, 'I came here to see so-and-so, eat lunch with my grandchild,' even go on a field trip," Hurst said.

Hurst's bill, which passed the House of Representatives 95-0 earlier this month, would require adult sex offenders, if their offense was against a minor, to report to the principal any time they set foot on the school. The bill would allow school systems to establish policies for supervising sex offenders whenever they are on campus.

A similar bill, sponsored by Sen. Vivian Figures, D-Mobile, is working its way through the Senate. One of those bills will have to pass both houses to reach the governor's desk.

Eric Mackey, director of School Superintendents of Alabama, said the bills were sparked by a recent incident in which a woman, convicted in the past of a sex offense, entered a school to apply for a position as a substitute teacher.

Mackey didn't disclose the name of the school to The Anniston Star. He says he did share the story with other superintendents — and was surprised to find that a number of them had encountered similar problems.

"We know of about six cases in the past 24 months," Mackey said.

A former superintendent of Jacksonville City Schools, Mackey said he never saw a similar incident in Jacksonville, and he didn't know of an incident in any school system in Calhoun County.

Bills to limit sex offenders' access to schools have to be crafted carefully, Mackey said, because past lawsuits have struck down sex offender bans.

"It's become very difficult, because of the constitutional rights the courts have recognized," he said.

As a result, Hurst's bill would apply only to sex offenders who, as adults, committed offenses against minors. Mackey said the offenses-against-minors provision would narrow the bill to comply with past court rulings.

Mackey said educators also wanted to exempt juvenile sex offenders from the bill, in part because of "Romeo and Juliet" cases in which two juveniles have sex even though both are too young to legally give consent.

Attempts to reach Susan Watson, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Alabama, were unsuccessful Monday. ACLU branches in other states have challenged sex offender "banishment zones" in some instances.

The bill has support from crime victims' advocates, including Ohatchee resident Krystena Shuler. Shuler told The Star she was attending an Ohatchee High School football game in 2009 when she encountered a man who, eight years earlier, had pleaded guilty to raping Shuler.

"It completely derailed my recovery," she said.

Shuler was an adult at the time of the sexual assault, and she acknowledges Hurst's bill wouldn't have covered the 2009 incident. She said the bill could help someone else, though.

"It's a step in the right direction," she said.

In most cases, The Star doesn't identify victims of sex crimes by name. Shuler contacted The Star to tell her story.

Hurst's bill will have to jostle for time on the Senate floor when the Legislature resumes its session on April 1. There are only three days of deliberation left before the 2014 legislative session ends.

**[From captain to lawbreaker: Former top Tutwiler guard explains 'inmate con game' \(al.com\)](#)**

WETUMPKA, Alabama -- William Miller was once the top guard in a women's prison that a U.S. Department of Justice report this year blasted for "unabated staff-on-prisoner sexual abuse and harassment."

While he was there, the Wetumpka resident led a team of about 40 guards and had dreams of becoming a warden. But his 27-year career in law enforcement began to unravel in September 2009 when Alabama Department of Corrections investigators learned he kissed a Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women inmate.

Miller, 54, pleaded guilty to misdemeanor harassing communications and received one year's probation after getting charged with felony custodial sexual misconduct in fall 2009.

He was one of six guards at Tutwiler to be successfully prosecuted for employee-on-inmate crimes including sexual misconduct and abuse from 2009 to 2011. A total of 18 cases involving 30 corrections employees were referred to the Elmore County district attorney's office in the past five years, according to figures provided to AL.com by Gov. Robert Bentley's office.

"I found the shampoo, and she found me, and kissed me. Hindsight being 20/20, I should have knocked her head off."

Bentley's office released the information after the DOJ issued a report in January finding that Tutwiler staff sexually abused and sexually harassed inmates with impunity for more than two decades. At the time, Department of Corrections Commissioner Kim Thomas said he was surprised the DOJ gave so much weight to "unverified allegations."

Miller took it a step further, insisting that Tutwiler's prison guards are just as often the victim of scheming prisoners.

"With the inmate con game, (prison guards) are set up because the inmate will use you in whatever way they can because as long as they get what they want everything is fine," Miller told AL.com.

"Whenever something is going on that looks like it's about to cause them to get caught, then they will scream, 'I was raped.'"

Bright beginnings

In 2008, Miller was a DOC employee on the rise.

He was a captain at the Alexander City Work Release Center, and he was angling to become a warden when he was transferred to Tutwiler.

"It was the longest six months of my life," Miller said.

It had been a long journey for Miller, who was 22-years-old when he started working for the DOC. Formerly a textile factory worker, Miller took the state job because of its benefits.

Early on, Miller showed a knack for paperwork. He knew how to type so he worked in the prison's administrative office where he interacted with his bosses and filled out reports and other documents that go hand-in-hand with the day-to-day operations of a prison.

"I was good at that and being exposed to the shift office also exposed me to the day to day workings of an institution," Miller said.

Miller began climbing the DOC ladder, working his way up from prison guard to sergeant to lieutenant and, finally, to captain – the highest ranking guard in any Alabama prison.

Closet kisses, phone call fantasies

Miller was assigned to Tutwiler in 2009 after the prison's former captain was transferred out. He admitted his prior experience working with male inmates didn't translate to Tutwiler.

"If that's indicative of what's out there in the street, I'm glad I'm not in the dating arena," said Miller, a US Army reservist on active duty. "It's a whole different world."

Miller became the target of a DOC investigation in September 2009 after DOC authorities were notified that Miller and an inmate were talking on the phone, court records show. A review of 122 phone calls showed that Miller kissed the inmate on June 26, 2009.

The kiss happened in a supply closet, Miller said. He was in charge of doling out shampoo, soap and other hygiene items churches had donated. One day, an inmate came to Miller outside the supply closet asking for shampoo, he said. When he went in to get her some, she followed.

"I found the shampoo, and she found me, and kissed me," Miller said. "Hindsight being 20/20, I should have knocked her head off."

[ What's your experience with Alabama's prison system? [Click here to share your story](#) ]

Miller scolded the inmate and told her to never do it again, but he didn't report the incident to his bosses because he "didn't want the trouble," he said.

The inmate began calling Miller after obtaining his phone number through her friend, he said. Miller said he and the inmate were "talking smack talk," on the phone and the inmate would reveal her fantasies to him.

"In her (mind), it was reality," Miller said.

Facing the law

Miller was transferred to Staton Correction Facility once the DOC investigators began evaluating the complaint against him, he said. With the DOC's probe hanging over his head, Miller knew he would never be a warden.

A grand jury indicted him on charges of custodial sexual misconduct and the Elmore County district attorney offered to reduce the charges to a misdemeanor if he would plead guilty and resign from the DOC, he said.

He accepted the plea deal and retired. Miller's last day was Jan. 1, 2010.

"After 27 years of service, I left on a bad note," Miller said. "I didn't get a retirement plaque that says 'thank you for all the lives you've saved, the bones you've broken, the stitches you have received.'"

## **Judge extends temporary restraining order on Alabama abortion law (Montgomery Advertiser)**

A federal judge has extended a temporary restraining order against an Alabama abortion law, saying the court needed more time to consider how to move forward in a lawsuit brought against it.

The restraining order prevents the state from enforcing a portion of the Women's Health and Safety Act, signed by Gov. Robert Bentley last year, that requires every physician that works at an Alabama abortion clinic to have admitting privileges at a local hospital. Currently, the clinics are required to have at least one physician with those privileges, or to contract with one who does.

U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson extended the restraining order to April 2 in a ruling last Wednesday. The ruling did not give specific reasons why the court needed the additional time.



Three clinics, including Montgomery-based Reproductive Health Services, have sued to stop the admitting privileges requirement, saying it is medically unnecessary and that the safety of abortion procedures means it would be impossible for every doctor to have the minimum number of patients hospitals usually require to extend admitting privileges.

The plaintiffs say that they will be forced to close their doors if the provision goes into effect. The attorney general's office, representing the state, says the impact of the requirement won't be known until the law goes into effect.

Both sides want to avoid trial and have sought summary judgment in the case. At a hearing last month to determine what would happen if Thompson denied summary judgment, the judge noted that the plaintiffs and the state had significant differences on the facts of the case, which might require a trial to resolve.

Andrew Brasher, solicitor general of the state of Alabama, representing the state in the case, said Monday he expected a decision before the restraining order expires next week.

Wayne Sabel, an attorney representing the plaintiffs, said he remained hopeful on the outcome.

"Legally, by far we have the best case," he said Monday. "Our experts have proven that it's not necessary to have admitting privileges to provide safe procedures."

Had Thompson not acted, the restraining order would have expired today.

The state of Alabama currently has five abortion clinics. Clinics in Huntsville and Tuscaloosa have said they can meet the admitting privileges requirement, at least for now.

The law also makes it a felony for a nurse, nurse practitioner, physician's assistant or anyone who is not a doctor to administer an abortion-inducing drug, and requires abortion facilities to be built up to ambulatory clinic standards. Those provisions have not been challenged in the lawsuit before Thompson. Clinic operators have said they can comply with the building requirements, although they will be costly.

Further appeals are likely following Thompson's decision. The U.S. Supreme Court last November allowed a Texas law with similar requirements to go into effect while a lawsuit against it goes forward; abortion rights activists argued in that case that the requirement is responsible for closing a number of Texas' abortion clinics. A 2012 Mississippi admitting privileges law, which formed the basis of Alabama's statute, has also been challenged in federal court.

## **Kansas ruling could result in Alabama enforcing proof of citizenship for voter registration (AP)**

MONTGOMERY, Alabama — A court ruling in Kansas could lead to Alabama enforcing part of its immigration law that has never been used.

The 2011 law required people registering to vote in Alabama for the first time to present evidence of citizenship. Such proof could include a birth certificate, passport, driver's license or a non-driver ID card issued by Alabama or another state that requires proof of residency to issue the license.

Alabama's chief election official, Republican Secretary of State Jim Bennett, said the requirement was not put into effect because of litigation over similar requirements in Kansas and Arizona.

A federal judge in Wichita, Kan., ruled last week that federal officials must help Kansas and Arizona enforce laws requiring new voters to document their U.S. citizenship. District Judge Eric Melgren ordered the U.S. Election Assistance Commission to immediately modify a national voter registration form to add special instructions for Arizona and Kansas residents about their states' proof-of-citizenship requirements.

One of the authors of Alabama's immigration law, Republican Sen. Scott Beason of Gardendale, said he was glad to see the decision. "It's a good ruling. We must ensure citizens are the only ones who votes if we are to have honest elections," Beason said.

Bennett said he had been cautiously optimistic that Kansas and Arizona would prevail. He said no decision has been made yet about what to do in Alabama, and that will depend, in part, on whether the Kansas ruling is appealed.

"It would seem that Alabama would have the same strong footing regarding this issue in our state," Bennett said.

Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, who consulted with Alabama legislators on the state's 2011 immigration law, said last week he believes the ruling "has paved the way for all states to enact proof-of-citizenship requirements."

One of the attorneys who successfully challenged parts of Alabama's immigration law, Sam Brooke of the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, said the proof-of-citizenship part was not challenged

because the state wasn't trying to enforce it. He said the wise approach would be for the state to continue to keep that portion of the immigration law on hold while an anticipated appeal is pursued in the Kansas and Arizona case.

If Alabama does proceed, a new suit could be filed challenging the law as a hindrance to voting, he said.

Until Alabama tries to enforce the proof-of-citizenship requirement, people can register to vote by giving their Alabama driver's license number or the last four digits of their Social Security number.

Alabama's next election is the primary election on June 3, which will feature contests ranging from governor to county offices.

## **Need for mental health services increase (Montgomery Advertiser)**

Clinics that provide mental health care are seeing an increase in people seeking help, and many people seem to be turning to affordable alternatives.

Those alternatives include Samaritan Counseling Center, which provides licensed therapists, and Montgomery Area Mental Health Authority, which has licensed psychiatrists.

Some mental health care providers said the increase is at least in part because of a weak economy in which people are struggling to find jobs.

"You have a whole generation of people having trouble finding jobs that will support them," said Nancy Thomas, Samaritan's executive director of clinical services.

Samaritan saw about a 15 percent increase in new clients in 2013 compared with 2012, Thomas said.

Henry Parker, executive director of MAMHA, said he did not have exact numbers, but he estimated the authority currently is taking in 45 to 50 new patients a week compared with 20 to 25 a week two years ago.

Crossbridge Behavioral Health, a psychiatric facility run by Baptist Health, also has seen a rise, with about a 15 percent increase this year compared with last year, Baptist spokesman Tommy McKinnon said.

Mental health care providers also pointed to the limited mental health services available in Montgomery and throughout Alabama.

The state's Department of Mental Health closed Greil Memorial Psychiatric Hospital in August 2012 as part of a move toward more community-based care.

The MAMHA moved into the building in 2013, and although Parker said the authority offers services that are as good or better than those provided at Greil, he concedes there are a lack of options in the area.

"I will be the first to admit we need more mental health services in the tri-county area," Parker said.

What is available

Samaritan is a nonprofit that has been around since 1999 and offers high-quality therapists with flexible payment options, Thomas said. While the center is faith-based, people of all faiths are welcome, she said.

"We do not proselytize," Thomas said.

The center provides help with issues such as anxiety and depression but also offers marriage and family counseling, premarital counseling and health counseling.

Thomas and therapist Christy Holding said part of the reason for the increase could just be modern life, including the pressures created by technology.

Social media, for instance, can be a tool for bullying and in many cases can create situations for children that the parents do not know how to handle, they said.

Holding said more awareness of the benefits of counseling also is contributing to an increase in new clients. Still, she said, not everyone who could use the help is receiving it.

"It is hard to get care, and I think there is still a stigma about coming to counseling. A lot of people could be helped," Holding said.

One barrier could be in the process of changing, Thomas said.

The Affordable Care Act requires insurance companies to cover mental health and substance abuse disorders equal to their coverage of physical care.

Thomas said that as of now, there still are too many people who are uninsured or underinsured when it comes to mental health care.

The therapists at Samaritan cannot prescribe medication, although the clinic sometimes can work with a family doctor to provide medication to those who need it.

The center treats close to 8,000 people a year.

Other cases

Many people who require inpatient psychiatric care go to the MAMHA, a nonprofit that Parker said is the "safety net" for those in the area with insufficient insurance coverage.

In addition to the Montgomery location, the MAMHA has locations in Prattville, Wetumpka and Hayneville that provide therapy and drug counseling.

The center has 40 beds for people who have been determined to be in crisis. Parker said he often has to figure out other ways to accommodate patients.

"I used to look forward to Fridays. Now I dread them because I know I'm going to have some people committed that I have got to move," Parker said.

Often, he said, he will have to buy a bed from Hill Crest Behavioral Health in Birmingham or Bullock County Hospital. That puts a strain on the authority's budget.

"It is a juggling act because funding is not going up," Parker said. "The funding stays the same, and we have more and more people to take care of on the same dollar."

**[Eleven blacks on the ballot as Republicans in Alabama's June primary \(al.com\)](#)**

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- The Alabama Republican Party says 11 black candidates are running in the GOP primary on June 3, and officials say that shows the party is making strides with African Americans.

State Republican Party Chairman Bill Armistead, who hired a full-time minority outreach director last year, said he thinks the GOP can build on the number.

"It's by far the largest we've ever had," Armistead said. "Is it where we want to be? No. We will have more in the future."

Republicans hold every statewide office in Alabama and a majority in the Legislature, but none of those seats are held by black Republicans.

Joe Reed, longtime leader of the Alabama Democratic Conference, said blacks won't move to the Republican Party on any significant scale because of GOP opposition to programs such as Obamacare, raising the minimum wage, extending long-term unemployment benefits and other "bread and butter" issues that Reed said help working families.

There are five black Republican candidates for the state House of Representatives, one for the Public Service Commission, two for sheriff, two for seats on county commissions and one for a county school board seat, according to Troy Towns, minority outreach director for the state GOP. Another black Republican is running in a special election to fill a vacant House seat in Birmingham to complete a current term..

Towns said there was only one black Republican in the 2010 primary and one in 2012. He thinks this year's number is not a fluke, but a sign of things to come.

"The thing that makes this so impressive is that it destroys the paradigm that blacks cannot be Republicans or run for office as Republicans," Towns said. "I think that's big news in a state like Alabama."

Some of the black Republicans are recent converts.

B.J. Major, 33, who is running as a Republican for the Cherokee County Board of Education, said he has always considered himself a conservative but did not become a Republican until the last year.

Major said he became a Republican because he saw the nation tilting too far to the left, an opinion based partly on what he said was a growing dependence on government programs. He said he believes the majority of blacks are church-going conservatives who oppose abortion and same-sex marriage.

"I believe the majority of blacks actually side with conservative views," Major said. "They just don't realize it."

Katrina Wallace, 66, a retired teacher, is running for the Escambia County Commission, her first political race.

She grew up in Alabama but lived in New Jersey for 42 years, where she taught school and her husband was a minister and educator.

She said they were Democrats during the time in New Jersey, but after moving back to Alabama in 2008 changed parties when they got involved with some of their new neighbors who were Republicans and were politically active.

"They kind of welcomed us with open arms, and that was a change, being friendly and just open-minded," Wallace said.

Wallace's husband, Coleman Wallace Sr., was elected to the Escambia County Board of Education in 2012.

Bill McCollum, 65, who is running for Fayette County sheriff, joined the GOP in 2000. A retired railway special agent, McCollum lost a run for sheriff in 2002. He has been vice chairman of the Fayette County Republican Party executive committee for more than 10 years, according to Joe Acker, the committee chairman.

"He's got a good shot at being the next sheriff of Fayette County," Acker said.

McCollum said having the 11 black candidates in the GOP primary was a milestone. He said it would be historic to have a black Republican elected sheriff in Alabama.

The influence of groups like the ADC has waned and black voters are more independent, McCollum said.

"They're hard working people, and they'd love to see their money stay in their pockets as opposed to being wasted on taxes and social welfare programs and things of that nature," McCollum said.

But the ADC's Reed says low-income whites are the ones who should switch parties.

"There's no reason in the world for a poor white person to be aligned with the Republican Party," Reed said. He said poor whites and poor blacks have much more in common than they realize.

"And they've got to know who the enemy is -- anybody who votes against working folks needs," Reed said.

Jess Brown, professor of government and public affairs at Athens State University, said he thinks the increase in the number of black GOP candidates is noteworthy.

He said Republicans have typically gotten 10 percent or less of the black vote.

"You've got to give them credit," Brown said. "They really don't have much of an incentive to go out and recruit African-American candidates. And African-American candidates haven't had much incentive to run as Republicans."

Brown said the dominance of the Republican Party in Alabama could be one factor to draw aspiring black politicians to the GOP.

"If they're going to go to Montgomery and be an insider, they're going to have to have an R next to their name," Brown said.

Population trends could also be driving Republican Party outreach efforts, with blacks and Hispanics expected over time to gain ground on whites as a proportion of the electorate, Brown said.

Black candidates who are running in the Republican primary on June 3.

-- Tijuanna Adetunji, House District 78 (Montgomery)

-- Pamela Blackmore-Jenkins, House District 46 (Birmingham area)

-- Phillip Brown, Public Service Commission Place 2

-- Ralph Carmichael, House District 103 (Mobile)

-- Darius Foster, House District 56 (Birmingham area)

-- Bill McCollum, Fayette County sheriff

-- BJ Major, Cherokee County Board of Education

-- Sam Rowlin, Autauga County sheriff

-- Randy Taylor, Morgan County Commission



-- Katrina Wallace, Escambia County Commission

-- Ron Wilson, House District 85 (Henry County)

Willie Casey is running in the April 1 special election in House District 53 to complete the term of Demetrius Newton, who died.

## **[By the numbers: AT&T invests more than \\$1.35 billion in Alabama networks from 2011-13 \(al.com\)](#)**

AT&T invested more than \$1.35 billion in wireless and wired networks across Alabama from 2011 to 2013, the company announced in a news release late last week.

Here's a quick by-the-numbers look at AT&T's 2011-13 investment plan:

957 – Number of AT&T network upgrades in Alabama in 2013, including new cell sites, addition of wireless and wired network capacity and new broadband network connections.

36,000 – Number of new customer locations with access to AT&T U-verse Internet and video services.

1,664 – Number of business locations receiving AT&T fiber-optic connections.

81 – Number of multi-tenant business buildings and parks receiving AT&T fiber-optic connections.

12 – Number of Alabama markets with access to AT&T's new or expanded LTE network in 2013. Markets include Auburn-Opelika, Birmingham, Cullman, Decatur, Florence-Muscle Shoals, Greenville, Huntsville, Mobile, Monroeville-Evergreen, Montgomery, Troy, and Tuscaloosa.

280 million – Number of Americans with AT&T's 4G LTE service.

Read what state officials are saying about the AT&T expansion:

Alabama Department of Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield: "Expanding the availability of mobile Internet services across our state will help Alabama's citizens and businesses compete and thrive in a global marketplace. These investments are laying the technological foundation for continued economic

growth and for new services and applications that will impact our lives in many areas, including education, medicine and commerce."

Rep. Mike Hill, R-Columbiana: "AT&T's network investment is an investment in the economic future of Alabama. Wider availability of mobile Internet service ensures that people across the state have access to the online services and applications they need to succeed at home and at work in a global economy. The pro-business policies of our state make such investments possible."

Last May, AT&T announced the launch of 4G LTE coverage in the Huntsville area and creation of 350 new jobs statewide.

The company said in December it was in the process of hiring for 120 positions, 80 of which were new jobs in more than 25 cities across the state.