



Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh
Press Clips
Tuesday, July 08, 2014

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[DeMarco, Brooke lead 6th District fundraising, both with more than \\$1 million as primary nears \(al.com\)](#)

Paul DeMarco and Will Brooke, two of the seven Republican candidates in the race to become the next congressman in Alabama's 6th Congressional district, have both raised more than \$1 million so far,

with DeMarco just leading Brooke. Two other candidates – Chad Mathis and Gary Palmer – have raised more than \$600,000.

Candidates in the 6th District filed pre-primary campaign finance reports last week covering the period up until May 14 – the last major report until the Tuesday, June 3 primary. DeMarco, an Alabama state representative and attorney from Homewood, reported raising \$1,075,000, with more than 90 percent of that coming from individual contributions. Harbert Management executive Will Brooke raised \$1,038,000, though a substantial chunk of that sum – \$450,000 – came from loans he made to his own campaign.

Indian Springs orthopedic surgeon Chad Mathis raised the third most, reporting \$647,000, including \$110,000 in loans he made to his own campaign. Alabama Policy Institute co-founder Gary Palmer raised \$633,000. Tom Vigneulle, a Pelham business owner, has raised \$60,000, and Alabama state Sen. Scott Beason raised \$31,000. Retired Mountain Brook attorney Robert Shattuck has not raised or reported any funds.

Despite running sixth in fundraising, Beason, a high-profile state senator from Gardendale, has polled second in the race in the two public third-party polls of the crowded field. DeMarco, the top fundraiser, has led both of those polls.

DeMarco also reported the most cash on hand as of May 14, with \$358,000. Palmer and Brooke reported the second and third most cash on hand, respectively, with Palmer's \$144,782 and Brooke's \$143,585. Mathis reported \$133,000 cash on hand. Beason and Vigneulle had \$15,000 and \$7,000 cash on hand, respectively.

Brooke made the most in loans to his own campaign, loaning \$450,000. Mathis made the second largest, with \$110,000. Vigneulle loaned his campaign \$11,800, and Beason loaned \$3,480. None of the other candidates made loans to their own campaign.

DeMarco raised the most from PACs, at \$84,000, with Mathis' \$76,500, Brooke's \$31,000, and Palmer's \$16,500 following. Beason raised \$5,000 from PACs, and Vigneulle raised \$2,000.

These numbers are based on the FEC pre-primary reports for the period that ended May 14. All numbers are applicable only as of May 14. Candidates who continue to raise funds between May 14 and the June 3 primary must file 48-hour fundraising reports – these numbers do not include the 48-hour reports.

There are seven candidates in the 6th District Republican primary: Scott Beason, Will Brooke, Paul DeMarco, Chad Mathis, Gary Palmer, Robert Shattuck, and Tom Vigneulle.

Avery Vise is running unopposed in the Democratic primary.

The primary for the AL-06 congressional election is scheduled for Tuesday, June 3.

Three District 6 candidates band together, hit back at Chad Mathis attacks; Mathis responds (al.com)

Three candidates for Alabama's 6th Congressional district held a joint press conference Tuesday, a week from the June 3 Republican primary, to hit back against attacks by their opponent, Chad Mathis, and organizations that support Mathis.

Early in the campaign, the Chad Mathis campaign produced campaign videos and mailers attacking four of his fellow Republicans – Scott Beason, Will Brooke, Paul DeMarco, and Gary Palmer – and labeling them "The Gang of Four." (Beason, on Tuesday, joked that they like to be called "The Fantastic Four"). On Tuesday, three members of the "Gang of Four" – Beason, Brooke, and Palmer – held the press conference after continued sparring between the candidates, especially Brooke and Mathis.

"It's very unusual for multiple candidates in any race, much less a Republican primary, to come together to speak to the media at the same time about the same thing, but the principles involved here are very important," Brooke said.

"We're here today because we feel that Chad Mathis, one of the candidates in the 6th district Congressional Republican primary, is not telling the truth in the course of this race."

Brooke said mailers and ads by Mathis are "misrepresentations that amount to fabrications and deceptive practices."

Mathis' campaign noted that Brooke has, in the past, donated to Democrats, including Democrats who support abortion and Obamacare. Brooke and his campaign have noted that donations to Democrats made up 2 percent or less of his donations – the rest were Republicans – and noting his own pro-life stances, including participating in marches.

"We think it's important that the people of the 6th District pay attention to this, because if someone would do this in the course of a campaign, they will only move on to perpetuate the dysfunction that

haunts us in Congress, where name-calling and back-biting seems to serve a greater purpose than telling the truth and finding solutions," Brooke said.

Palmer went on the offensive against Mathis, saying that "he would cause irreparable harm to our economy."

Mathis' attacks mention Palmer's support – as co-founder of the Alabama Policy Institute – of various reforms, including support of expanded Capital Improvement Bonds, a trust fund to cover unfunded liabilities to teacher health benefits, and an adjustment in the state's tax base that would have raised property taxes.

Palmer said not supporting these initiatives would mean companies like Airbus would not be recruited to Alabama, and the state would have defaulted on teacher retirement obligations.

"I stand here with two fine gentlemen," Beason said. "They are my competition, and frankly, I want to beat both of them and am working hard to do so, but that does not mean I am willing to say and do anything to win. I would not be here today if the Mathis campaign apparatus was not completely aware of how they are twisting the truth on my record."

Beason said the Mathis campaign has been using half-truths, and in his household "half-truths are whole lies." Mathis' attacks accuse Beason of working with Democrats on some bills while in the Alabama Legislature. Beason said Tuesday that any Republican could be accused of that any time a Democrat votes the same way on a bill as a Republican.

"To know the truth and keep repeating a lie does not eventually make it true in Alabama," Beason said. "It might work in Indiana where Chad is from, but it doesn't work here."

"The message to people is to try to spin me as some liberal," Beason said. "You know and the people of Alabama know that no one is ever going to call me a liberal, but people from Washington D.C., who aren't from here, who don't understand that, are probably coming in, weighing in, and saying hey, if you want to beat some conservatives, just call them liberal over and over and over if you're in Alabama."

Mathis spoke to members of the press outside the Harbert Center in downtown Birmingham about an hour after the three candidates spoke there.

Chad Mathis responds to Beason, Brooke, and Palmer press conference Tuesday, May 27, 2014

"I guess we've ruffled a few feathers, but this is what happens when you bring out the record of career politicians and political insiders – they look to see the blame, put it on other folks, looking everywhere except themselves," Mathis said.

Mathis said that the other campaigns feel "entitled" to the 6th District seat and have given the Mathis campaign short shrift. "Now, with a week out, they've come to the realization that someone like me, who's not a part of their political club, has a real shot at this thing."

Mathis defended the allegations his campaign has made, directing voters to TheGangof4.com, a website where he breaks down allegations against the candidates. He also mentioned an internal poll that puts him one point over Paul DeMarco, winning the primary. The two third-party polls of the race have put DeMarco in first, Scott Beason in second, and Mathis in third.

"As a voter, I would want to know this information."

Mathis said other candidates have not approached him about the attacks. "I don't recall anyone ever approaching me personally about it." Asked specifically if Palmer or Brooke had approached him, Mathis said "Not that I recall."

Brooke said during the press conference that he "talked to [Mathis] face to face about some of these problems at other events, as well."

"I told him I'm praying for him," Palmer said.

Later Tuesday, Mathis campaign manager Dean Petrone told AL.com that any mention of the attacks directly to Mathis have been remarks in passing after a forum, like Palmer's "praying for you" comment – not a formal sit down. "This has been all of them just passively aggressively explaining their displeasure."

Asked how he would respond to Ronald Reagan's famous "Eleventh Commandment" – Thou shalt not speak ill of any fellow Republican – Mathis said the primary is the race.

"I say the whole race is the primary in this district," Mathis said. "It's the reddest district, and the voters need the information so they can make an informed decision."

The press conference came a week after Club for Growth PAC, a conservative Super PAC that has endorsed Mathis, ran an attack ad against Brooke. Brooke responded last week with an ad of his own, calling on voters to reject Mathis and 'shadowy' Washington groups, and by inviting Mathis to a debate on his ads. Mathis called the latter tactic a "sideshow stunt."

While the Club for Growth did endorse Mathis, as a Super PAC it is prohibited by law from coordinating with him or his campaign or any other candidates. However, the Super PAC may make independent expenditures in favor of particular candidates.

In addition to Brooke, Mathis, Beason, and Palmer, there are three other Republican candidates in the race for AL-06: Paul DeMarco, Robert Shattuck, and Tom Vigneulle.

Avery Vise is running unopposed in the Democratic primary.

The primary for the AL-06 congressional election is scheduled for Tuesday, June 3.

Significant money poured into Senate 31 primary race (Dothan Eagle)

A lot has changed since Jimmy Holley first won elected office in the Alabama House of Representatives in 1974.

Holley is no longer a representative. He's a Senator. Holley is no longer a Democrat. He became a Republican in 2007 as the Grand Old Party began to overtake the state's elected positions.

Campaigns are no longer won or lost with a few push cards, a newspaper ad or two, a fish fry and some door knocking.

It takes money. A lot.

District 31 Sen. Jimmy Holley and his opponent in the Republican primary, Garreth Moore, have combined to spend more than \$560,000 in the primary, with a week left before election day. The winner still faces Democrat opposition in November from Larry Greenwood.

"It seems like this campaign started six months ago," Holley said. "It seems much more immense. Things have changed a lot."

Moore says he is the only true Republican in the race, citing Holley's party switch in 2007. Moore was the first Republican ever elected to represent House District 91 in 1994. He served one term.

He is now being labeled a liberal.

"I think anybody that knows me laughs at that," said Moore, a real estate appraiser in Enterprise. "I know they can't find any votes to attest to that. I'm a lifelong Republican."

Moore, who is not related to current House District 91 representative Barry Moore, said he would be a true representative of the district, claiming Holley sold out to special interests in years past. He pointed to Holley's last-minute change of stance on the electronic bingo issue. Holley had been opposed, but switched to support a gambling bill just weeks before a scheduled vote.

"I believe there is a significant leadership issue in the Senate," Moore said.

Holley said he will not respond to Moore's claims.

"I don't respond. I have my program, my way, to relate to the voters. I try every chance I get to keep it positive," Holley said.

Supporters of Holley, however, have made Moore's campaign contributions a focal point. The vast majority of his campaign funds have come from the Alabama Voice for Teachers for Education PAC, which is tied to the Alabama Education Association. The PAC has contributed \$350,000 to Moore's campaign. Moore has spent \$335,000 thus far.

"I have taken significant contributions from the AEA. I'm not a wealthy man. I have to have significant resources and those are hard to come by. I have made no commitment to (the AEA) and they have asked for no commitment," Moore said. "I think the big mules in Birmingham and Montgomery have made the AEA the big enemy. It used to be the trial lawyers and now the trial lawyers are giving 95 percent of their money to Republicans."

TRIAL PAC gave \$3,000 to the Holley campaign last month.

Moore said he would make local job recruitment a top priority if elected.

"We've been neglected over the years when it comes to serious job recruitment. I think you see a lot of major projects going all around the state but they don't seem to come here," Moore said.

Holley, who has spent \$227,000 so far in the campaign, said he would continue to seek major employers, but planned to focus on small business growth ideas, including efforts to improve the skilled workforce in the Wiregrass and throughout the state.

Holley said he believes dual enrollment, which allows a student to enroll at a 2-year college while still in high school, has "immense possibilities."

"It will take a lot of resources, especially in rural parts of the state, but I think we can work on ways to better utilize the equipment we have, the material and supplies, and work to make it something that can help our students and our businesses at the same time," Holley said.

Common Core key to board races (Decatur Daily)

MONTGOMERY — The June 3 Republican primary will decide who will represent parts of the Tennessee Valley in two State Board of Education districts.

There are two Republicans in both races. And in both races, one candidate is opposed to Common Core.

District 6 includes Morgan County and the seat of board member Charles Elliott, a Decatur Republican who isn't seeking re-election. Jacksonville State University professor Cynthia McCarty and former K-12 educator Patricia McGriff, who opposes Common Core, both want the seat.

In District 8, which includes the eastern portion of Limestone County, incumbent Mary Scott Hunter, a defender of the education standards, is being challenged by Mike Parsons, a former Air Force colonel turned educator.

"That is going to be the race that will clearly be the referendum on Common Core," Athens State University political science professor Jess Brown said. "If you want to see where Republicans stand on Common Core, that may be the best race to look at."

Common Core's national math and English benchmarks, designed to ensure Alabama students are learning the same concepts in the same grades as students anywhere else in the country, were adopted by the Board of Education in 2010.

Common Core was developed by the National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers. Some federal grant money has been tied to it, but Alabama hasn't received federal money related to the standards.

Opponents of Common Core, including many tea party groups, equate the standards to federal intrusion and privacy concerns and have asked state leaders to drop them.

Hunter

Hunter has spent a lot of time in the last two years talking about Common Core and why it improves education.

"It is really important that those who are concerned know that the Alabama College and Career Standards do include Common Core, but they also include Alabama standards," said Hunter, who has three children in public school.

"I get it that we have to feel confident that there are no political schemes afoot and students' data isn't unnecessarily collected and if achievement data is collected, it is safe," Hunter said.

Asked if she thinks her stance will hurt her on June 3, Hunter said a board member's job is larger than one topic.

"It is a big job and it's not just K-12 issues," she said. "It is a job that has real implications for the citizens of Alabama. I think my voters know that."

Hunter, an attorney and former Air Force Judge Advocate General, said she wants to keep community colleges affordable. Right now, the average tuition is about \$111 per credit hour.

"For our citizens who are making minimum wage, making \$350 a week, when you think about having to pay \$300 or \$400 for one class, that's not affordable," Hunter said. "That's a week's or two weeks' pay."

Another priority for Hunter, who briefly considered a run for governor last year, is attracting and retaining good jobs so that Alabamians can earn a good living.

"That has to be at the forefront of what we do and it starts with education," she said. "Employers that we want to attract or want to keep, the No. 1 thing they look for, even beyond incentives, is the quality of employees. If you can't hire good employees, you can't have a business here."

Parsons

Parsons said recently that it was his concern about Common Core and its future implications that got him into this race.

He said Common Core is more than just standards, which he said are unproven. He's concerned about student assessments, privacy and data collection.

As far as the argument that Alabama created and controls the standards, he called the state's 15 percent contribution, "the icing on a three-layer federal cake."

More than 40 states have signed on to Common Core, but Parsons would rather see states try new things, learn from each other and improve.

"I am an old guy, but I happen to like competition," he said. "With Common Core, you get your little 15 percent."

Parsons is a former Air Force fighter pilot and vice wing commander. Most recently, he taught at Butler High School in Huntsville for eight years and was in charge of the ROTC program.

Parson said he grew up "dirt poor" in Alabama, but there was never any doubt in his home that he would finish high school. He said he didn't see that same support for many students he taught.

"The motivation to do better is an issue we're dealing with ... it's not that they can't, it's that they're not motivated to do better," he said.

Aside from repealing Common Core, Parsons said, his priorities include improving school safety, ensuring that teacher evaluations aren't based on standardized testing and to "promote integrity in grading."

Parsons said teachers should be allowed to focus on teaching, not chasing statistics.

"The system that we're developing, it looks like to me there is some pressure on teachers to change grades," he said.

McCarty

McCarty has been an economics professor at Jacksonville State University for 23 years. Each year, she sees students from 40 to 50 Alabama high schools, as well as some community college transfers.

"I see every day in my classrooms, first hand the strengths and weaknesses of Alabama high school graduates," McCarty said. "It gives me a sense of the strengths and weaknesses of our education system in Alabama."

One thing that needs improvement is the number of students entering college out of high school and needing remedial math or English courses. In 2012, more than 40 percent of local high school students needed the high school-level courses before they could move on to college-level work.

"We have to do a better job," McCarty said. "I am conservative, and I despise wasting taxpayer dollars — and when we have a student for 13 years (in K-12) and that student is not prepared, in my mind that is a waste of taxpayer dollars. I'm adamant that we should do better."

McCarty said she's against federal intrusion into education, which she defines as "anything where the federal government dictates what you do."

"The people in the trenches at the local level know what their needs are and how to best use their resources," she said.

Along those lines, she said the state should give local school boards and superintendents more flexibility and freedom to make academic and financial decisions.

McCarty said she's talked to educators, parents and the business community about Common Core.

"I believe the way Alabama has adopted these standards is positive," she said. "All these standards do is give a minimum of what each child should know at the end of each grade. As I've read the standards, it does seem to me they are an improvement over the previous standards in that they improve critical thinking and problem solving."

McGriff

McGriff, a former elementary teacher with 26 years of experience and current Alabama Commission on Higher Education board member, said she started thinking about running last year. Before she decided, she spent two weeks praying over the decision, and researching Common Core, she said.

"I don't know all about it, but I know enough to know I don't like it," she said. "I didn't like No Child Left Behind; as states, we have a right to control what's in our classroom. For a long time now, the federal government has been easing into our school system."

McGriff said the state has made significant improvements in education in recent years, before Common Core, and the standards should be repealed.

McGriff said she's also running because the state board needs retired teachers, "People who have been there and done that."

"I want the teachers of Alabama to know that I'm with them," she said. "I feel their pain."

As a teacher, McGriff said one of the most successful programs she saw was one that took at-risk students and put them in smaller classes with a teacher and two other adults.

"They were soaring above grade level when they came out of that program," she said.

A lot of time, students just need the support of adults, but in classrooms with 35 students, one teacher doesn't have time to address each child. She'd like to see retired teachers encouraged — and compensated — for spending a few days a week in classrooms.

Another priority for McGriff is "creating well-rounded children" who learn not just math and science, but also the arts and life skills.

She said she's a supporter of two-year colleges and technical schools.

"Not everybody wants to go to a four-year college, and it's not for everybody," she said.

[Good news for the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences \(al.com\)](#)

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama - After a rigorous five-year process, the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences has achieved international accreditation.

It is the first time in Alabama history the ADFS has completed the steps to meet the strict standards of the International Organization for Standardization by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors-Laboratory Accreditation Board, said ADFS Director Mike Sparks. The accreditation is acknowledgement by the national and international forensic science community that ADFS is performing high-quality scientific forensic analysis, Sparks said.

Under the accreditation, each ADFS employee involved in forensic case analysis must meet stringent standards, and every test method, procedure and instrumentation used in casework analysis must pass rigorous test parameters.

ADFS officials said the accreditation is the second bit of great news received by the agency this year. It recently got a boost in its budget, one that was badly needed to fight the ever-growing backlog of drug testing.

The ADFS provides forensic science services to law enforcement agencies, district attorneys, and the overall criminal justice system throughout Alabama. There are five labs statewide: Huntsville, Hoover, Montgomery, Mobile and Auburn. The agency also has an Implied Consent lab in Pelham that operates the statewide DUI breath-testing program, but that lab doesn't do drug chemistry analysis like the others.

The agency was hit with drastic budget reductions in the economic downturn in 2008, which led to a dramatic backlog of drug chemistry cases waiting to be tested. In 2011, ADFS closed labs in Florence, Jacksonville, and Dothan.

More than 36,000 drug cases are backlogged, with over 800 drug cases being submitted more than three years ago. The oldest drug chemistry case in the backlog was submitted in December of 2009.

The spike in the use of synthetic cannabinoids, such as Spice, is posing new analytical challenges, which also is adding to the backlog. The drugs, most of which originate from China, are difficult to identify compared to routine drug chemistry cases, officials said, because the chemical design and structure is often more complex.

This year, Sparks said, the Alabama Legislature made assisting ADFS a top legislative priority, and increased the agency's budget by \$1.5 million for 2015 to help combat the growing drug chemistry backlog. ADFS will use the increased funding to buy specialized instruments to help in the detection and identification of the emerging synthetic drugs, as well as to help decrease the overall drug chemistry backlog.

Sparks said he appreciates Governor Robert Bentley, House of Representatives Speaker Mike Hubbard, Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, Senate Finance and Taxation Chairman Arthur Orr and House of Representatives Ways and Means Chairman Steve Clouse, as well as others, for their support in 2014 legislative session. "This 2015 increase will be dedicated to reducing the backlog in drug chemistry. Additional drug chemistry personnel will require extensive training and new instrumentation requires validation prior to utilization," Sparks said. "The 36,000 drug case backlog was accumulated over a five year period and will not be eradicated quickly. However, it is our most pressing problem and will be our first priority on a daily basis."

[State Senate District 17 candidate Shay Shelnett gets support from Alabama Farmers Federation \(al.com\)](#)

The Alabama Farmers Federation is endorsing local businessman Shay Shelnett in his bid for election to the Alabama State Senate in District 17.

"Shay Shelnett is a businessman who will work hard for farmers and the people of our district at home and in Montgomery," said Jefferson County Farmers Federation President Randy Gilmore in a news release. "He understands our needs and will represent us well."

He is a small business owner and realtor in the district, which includes parts of Blount, Jefferson, St. Clair and Talladega counties. In addition to his current business, Shelnett was a high school math teacher for 10 years, although he has never been an Alabama Education Association (AEA) member.

"I am grateful the Farmers Federation chose to endorse me from such a broad slate of candidates," said Shelnett. "I've grown up with farming all my life. I've often told people our farmers are part of our national defense, because we cannot become dependent on other countries, and we must fight to sustain our own food production."

Shelnett is running for the seat being vacated by State Sen. Scott Beason. He is one of seven Republicans seeking the Alabama State Senate Seat for District 17.

[Click here](#) for stories about the Senate District 17 race, including the candidates' responses on increasing state revenues and education.

The Republican primary will be held June 3.

Funding secured for Phase III of Alabama Robotics Technology Park; facility could open in 2015 (al.com)

TANNER, Alabama - The third phase of the Alabama Robotics Technology Park in Limestone County could be operational in 2015 now that construction funding has been secured.

Gov. Robert Bentley is scheduled to visit the park on Thursday and announce that \$9-10 million has been identified to finance the project.

Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, told AL.com today that \$6-plus million from the Alabama Incentives Finance Authority to go along with \$3 million from the Capital Improvement Trust Fund. Orr sits on the trust fund's commission.

Once Phase III is complete, about \$73 million will have been invested in the park - including robotics equipment - according to the park website.

The third phase of the park is expected to provide a boost to the auto manufacturing business in Alabama, Orr said, as Phase III also incorporates plans for a Phase IV.

"We were talking at one point about a Phase IV for painting technology," Orr said. "That is something all the auto companies -Mercedes, Hyundai, and the others in the state - have really been needing to train workers using robotic technology on the painting the exteriors of automobiles. We decided to combine phases III and IV."

With the \$3 million that was set aside for the project last year, Orr said that preliminary work on the facility is already underway. Construction bids are expected to go out this summer and Orr said "it's very possible" that the facility will be operational in 2015.

"I've been reminding Gov. Bentley for four years now - ever since he was a candidate - that this was an important project to north Alabama and to the state," Orr said. "He acknowledged its importance and I'm very pleased we've finally been able to get some funding committed to the project and get it done."

The park opened in 2010 with more than 100,000 square feet combined in the first two buildings on the campus across U.S. Highway 31 from Calhoun Community College. In addition to paint technology

training for automobiles, Phase III will also allow companies to build and adapt automation for new and existing manufacturing process.

East meets West in major construction project for Chinese manufacturer in Alabama (al.com)

PINE HILL, Alabama -- The \$100 million Chinese copper tubing factory that will officially open in Wilcox County Wednesday is significant in symbolism: It promises more than 300 new jobs in one of the country's poorest areas.

But the facility's physical size also is notable.

With 500,000 square feet under one roof, it is big enough to house nine football fields. And its 83.2 million pounds of concrete is sufficient to pave 82 miles of city sidewalks.

Birmingham's Hoar Construction was the general contractor on the project for GD Copper USA, part of Golden Dragon Precise Copper Tubing Group Inc. of China.

The project created 440 construction jobs at its peak. It also drew a group of about 45 Chinese engineers and technical advisers to the Pine Hill site, where they lived in a trailer compound.

Gabe Moore, project director for Hoar, said the Chinese workers' presence brought an international flavor to the construction site.

His crew built them a garden, which they divided up into small plots for each worker to grow food. The crew also built a retention pond, which the Chinese workers stocked with fish so they could go fishing.

Together, the Chinese and American workers shot fireworks during a Chinese New Year celebration, and a gourmet chef from China cooked meals at the trailer compound.

"I took them snapper fishing on the Gulf, and they brought them back, they cooked them and had us over for dinner," Moore said. "It was really, really good."

But Moore said there were challenges in communications between his crew and the Chinese workers, although translators were on hand to help facilitate. Also, this was Golden Dragon's first project in the U.S., so their workers were unfamiliar with certain building codes and regulations.

"We did not realize how different culturally we were, but it worked out well," he said.

Future output at the facility, which has been in trial production since February, is expected to be 100 million pounds of copper tubing per year.

Golden Dragon has been a much-heralded addition to Wilcox County, which is in Alabama's poverty-plagued Black Belt.

State officials have previously said the project could eventually create as many as 500 jobs, and it is in line for an incentives package valued at about \$200 million.

Gov. Robert Bentley is expected to join company representatives Wednesday for an official opening ceremony.

Emergency room doctor testifies in abortion trial (Montgomery Advertiser)

The Attorney General's Office Tuesday began putting its experts on the stand in a trial over a new abortion law that requires every physician connected with a clinic to have admitting privileges at a local hospital.

A doctor with several years' experience in emergency rooms testified that it would benefit women to have abortion doctors with admitting privileges at a local hospital. Later in the afternoon, a sociologist testified that one could not gauge the effect the admitting privileges requirement would have on the state's clinics.

Attorneys representing three abortion clinics in Alabama, who are suing to stop the requirement, challenged the doctor's expert credentials and his connection to a controversial pro-life activist, while questioning some of the sociologist's citations and conclusions.

Expert: Distance reduces abortion access

Both experts put on by the state have testified in other abortion trials, usually for restrictions. Dr. James Anderson, a family practice and emergency room doctor, said in U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson's courtroom Tuesday morning that he believed that communicating with physicians who

performed abortions could help diagnose any complications that may arise in an abortion patient who seeks ER treatment later.

"It would always be helpful," Anderson said during a little over two hours of testimony. "When starting off brand new with a patient, you have to be like a detective . . . if I had a call from an abortion provider giving information, I'm not at all starting in the dark."

Abortion clinic director takes stand

The clinics say that their doctors are unable to obtain admitting privileges at local hospitals. Witnesses for the plaintiffs have argued in court that the admitting privileges requirement would be medically unnecessary, due to the low number of complications from abortion procedures. Plaintiffs have also argued that physicians who apply for privileges they know they cannot obtain could have rejections reported to a national database. That, they said, could raise questions about their professionalism.

However, Anderson argued that the connection with the physician providing the abortion could help him diagnose any bleeding or infection that may result from an abortion, saying that the stigma some attach to abortion sometimes means they do not tell doctors they've had one.

"When you get a 14 or 15-year-old lady who's had an abortion and is scared to death, you can't get an answer from her," he said.

Under direct questioning from Assistant Attorney General Jim Davis, Anderson also said that hospitals would only report rejections of admission applications to a national database if there was an issue of patient safety involved. Witnesses for the plaintiffs have said doctors need to guarantee a certain number of admissions to hospitals before privileges can be granted.

Anderson also challenged plaintiffs' assertions that abortion was a safe procedure, saying that most states do not require reporting of abortion complications. Challenged on that during cross-examination by Dyanne Griffith, an Washington, D.C.-based attorney for the plaintiffs, Anderson said that he believed Virginia, where he practices, does not require reporting, and "assumed" other states followed the practice.

Griffith also challenged Anderson's connection with Vincent Rue, a pro-life activist who has suggested links between abortion and subsequent mental illness in women, an idea that has been twice rejected by the American Psychological Association; Rue assisted Anderson in preparation of his expert statements. Griffith asked Anderson if he knew that Rue had been "discredited" in other trials; Anderson, who earlier testified that depression could be a complication of abortion, said he did not.

Griffith also noted that Rue's degree was from the University of North Carolina's School of Home Economics.

Judge Thompson also questioned Anderson about his relationship with Rue, asking if Anderson had any knowledge of where Rue worked or his professional credentials. Anderson said he did not, a response that seemed to surprise Thompson.

"You don't know his employment or any organization he belongs to?" Thompson asked. "Why do you trust him?"

Anderson said he had worked with Rue on other abortion cases, and found him reliable. On redirect, Anderson said his opinions on the law were entirely his own.

In the afternoon, Peter Uhlenberg, a sociologist at the University of North Carolina, challenged testimony last week from a plaintiffs' witness who cited studies suggesting that the distance from a clinic limits access to abortion. Uhlenberg was also skeptical of plaintiffs' assertions that increased travel distance would impose a greater burden on poor women, who make up the substantial majority of abortion patients. That conclusion, he said "suggests women who are poor are incapable of planning and carrying out a trip of more than 100 miles to obtain something important."

On cross-examination by Andrew Beck, an attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, Uhlenberg acknowledged that he did not do direct research on abortion or abortion demography; that he had once testified in federal court that the studies on the impact of distance on abortion were "quite solid," and that he had no evidence that the clinics would remain open if the law went into effect. On redirect, Uhlenberg said one could only speculate about the impact of the law.

The state called Carter Sims of the Alabama Department of Public Health's Bureau of Health Provider Standards to testify about the January closing of a Planned Parenthood clinic in Birmingham. Planned Parenthood officials have testified that they closed the clinic voluntarily after discovering employees were selling abortion drugs in the parking lot; the state has used the incident to suggest that the clinic was not in compliance with ADPH rules governing abortion clinics.

Sims testified that Planned Parenthood did not contact ADPH about the closing, as required under state health regulations, and also said a visit to the clinic suggested there were some paperwork issues at the facility. Under cross-examination from Planned Parenthood attorney Jennifer Sandman, Sims said the issues uncovered did not directly affect patients' health, and that he could not say whether an admitting privileges requirement would have affected the deficiencies in any way.

Study's author calls for reform of Alabama pension plans (al.com)

By Eileen Norcross

The once "sure bet" of a public pension has become a roller coaster ride for American governments, employees and taxpayers. Alabama is no exception; despite recent reforms, its pension plans are at risk of running out of money in the next 10 years.

As I detail in *Pension Reform in Alabama: A Case for Economic Accounting*, released today by the Johnson Center at Troy University, if steps aren't taken to address the state's flawed accounting practices, the money that working Alabamians have been promised might not be there when they retire.

The news is full of examples of pension mismanagement from places like Illinois and New Jersey. Alabama is in better shape, but uses the same accounting sleight-of-hand that has led to financial ruin elsewhere: measuring pension debt—in effect, the amount the system must put aside now to pay retirees later—based on how plan managers expect these funds to do when invested in the market. In other words, pensions bet on their own investment prowess, rather than on steady annual contributions, to pay the bills.

Confusing what a plan owes retirees (a guarantee) with expected investment returns (an assumption) is a common practice across the United States, creating large and unrecognized pension funding gaps. Alabama's three retirement systems report a debt of \$14 billion, which prompted the governor and the legislature to pass some minor reforms last year.

Alabama calculated that figure based on the assumption of an eight percent annual investment return. However, if the state used the guaranteed rate of return of a government bond (3 percent) for this calculation it would reveal Alabama's funding gap to be an eye-popping \$59 billion.

There is another problem with this accounting train wreck: It leads plan managers to take on increasing investment risk. In some states, assets are heavily invested in hedge funds, alternatives and real estate to make up for losses during the Great Recession.

Alabama has taken its own unique course over the years. The state invests about 10 percent of its funds in ventures aimed at bringing jobs and economic development to the state. These include the

widely acclaimed Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, Raycom Media, Walmart and Community Newspaper Holdings.

This is a noble goal, but Alabama's retirees deserve to know their money is being invested to do one thing: secure their retirements. Pension funds are held in trust for the employee, not as lures for businesses or any other purpose.

When their favored projects go well, managers point to job creation, tourism and a growing economy. Yet these are subsidized by tax dollars and pension contributions. It also introduces a new risk—when the in-state investments falter, as they have in recent years, so does the pension fund.

The good news is Alabama has time to fix the problem. The first step is to accurately calculate pension debt so the state knows how much it must contribute to pay the bills. Next, reconsider the investment strategy. Ensure the plan is fully funded and hedge against the risks of changing wages, interest rates or inflation. Fretting over achieving high market returns is no way to fund a pension.

Lastly, offer workers more retirement options. A 401(k)-style plan, similar to what most private-sector workers have, can still include some of the low-risk features of the classic pension. This would give employees control and ownership over their savings, and options like investing in a life-cycle fund or converting savings to fixed payments.

Through my research, I've seen an unmistakable trend among states and cities that are currently underwater: they didn't address this problem when early warning bells were sounding. Alabama has a chance to set a positive new example for others to follow.

Alabama's Aderholt goes toe-to-toe with First Lady Michelle Obama (Yellowhammer News)

Rep. Robert Aderholt (AL-04) has taken the lead on trying to roll back costly school lunch regulations that have been a priority for the Obama Administration, especially First Lady Michelle Obama. Today, Mrs. Obama is pushing back in what the AP described as "an unusual move for the first lady, who has largely stayed away from policy fights since she lobbied for congressional passage of a child nutrition law in 2010."

The Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, which Rep. Aderholt chairs, last week passed a bill allowing schools to apply for a waiver if they are experiencing financial difficulty meeting the nutrition standards created by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

The bill was part of Mrs. Obama's "Let's Move" campaign, which has the stated goal of reducing childhood obesity. It gave the USDA the authority to set nutritional standards for all foods sold in schools, including vending machines, "a la carte" lunch lines, and school stores. The USDA has since then set limits on the amount of fat, calories, sugar and sodium in school foods. The Act also increased the number of children eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.

But while the Obama Administration has described the program as a positive step toward reducing childhood hunger and obesity, many conservatives see it as another onerous government regulation that is difficult and expensive to implement across the nation.

Advocates for stricter school nutrition laws have lashed out at Republicans' recent efforts to weaken the standards, accusing them of "taking a step backward and allowing schools to serve more unhealthy food to children."

Today, White House chef Sam Kass called Aderholt's bill "a real assault" on one of the Administration's priority initiatives, and partnered with the first lady to organize an event at the White House to "highlight the success of the health guidelines."

"She wants to have a conversation about what is really happening out in the country," Kass told the AP. "These standards are working."

But according to Aderholt, "what's happening out in the country" is exactly what led him to write the bill to push for the temporary waivers until Congress considers renewing the school foods law in 2015.

"I have been in the school lunchroom, I have sat down with the individuals responsible for preparing student meals, and I have sat down with the students about this," he explained. "As well-intended as the people in Washington believe themselves to be, the reality is that from a practical standpoint these regulations are just plain not working out in some individual school districts."

Aderholt believes he is siding with schools whose budgets have been stretched to the breaking point by onerous government regulations, and he doesn't plan to back down.

"I am standing with our nation's schools to provide them the flexibility they are requesting from Congress," he said. "The language in this bill simply provides those schools that are having difficulty complying with the regulations the ability to obtain a temporary, one year waiver."

Suppressors OK'd for use during hunting season (Montgomery Advertiser)

The woods in Alabama may be a bit quieter during future hunting seasons since the state's game department supports lifting of the ban of firearms suppressors for hunting.

The Conservation Advisory Board, the group that helps set policy and regulations for the Alabama Department of Conservation, approved the change. The action is susceptible to legislative oversight, but the move likely will go forward, said Kevin Dodd, chief of the department's enforcement division.

"It's a big change, but the advisory board feels it's needed," Dodd said. "The department looked at this long and hard, and we feel there are three primary reasons for the change. The biggest one is noise and recoil reduction when you fire a gun.

"We have been working for years to get more young people and women interested in hunting. For some people, the loud noise of a high-powered rifle going off is a problem."

When a gun is fired, gases escape the muzzle, producing the well-known report. A suppressor captures those gases, reducing the noise level significantly.

Contrary to what some might think, and what Hollywood images might portray, a suppressor is not a silencer. The device is attached to the muzzle of a rifle or handgun and muffles the sound of the gun being fired. With a suppressor, you still can recognize the sound as a gun going off, but the noise is reduced to such a level that it won't damage a person's hearing when they aren't using ear muffs or other protection.

Alabama would become the 33rd state in the country to allow the use of suppressors while hunting, according to the National Rifle Association's website.

Other reasons for lifting the ban include wildlife management and improving the image of hunting, Dodd said.

"We allow the hunting of feral hogs at night," he said. "With a suppressor, you may be able to get off several shots instead of just one at a group of hogs. And more and more people are moving into the rural areas. We get a lot of complaints of people hunting too close to somebody's house.

"In reality, that rifle shot may be three miles away; it just sounds closer. Gunfire can make some people nervous, so using suppressors will help the image of hunters and hunting."

But buying and legally registering a suppressor with the federal government is an expensive and lengthy process.

A quick Internet search shows suppressors for handguns and small-caliber rifles going from about \$350 to more than \$800. Suppressors for high-powered rifles are anywhere from \$750 to more than \$2,200.

The cost is based on materials used in construction, design and what caliber the suppressor is made for.

When hunters find out about the costs and what's involved, they might pass on buying a suppressor, said Ben Davis, a Prattville deer hunter.

"A lot of my friends have been talking about getting one," he said. "Then they find out how expensive they are, and the fact you have to wait months to get approval. I'd just as soon spend that money on a better scope for my rifle."

Suppressors fall under the National Firearms Act, which controls the sale and registration of machine guns, suppressors, short-barreled rifles and shotguns, and other devices, said Sara Jones, who works with the NFA branch of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Registering a suppressor includes filling out lengthy forms, in duplicate, with the person's name, personal information and information about the suppressor. Each form must be accompanied by a 2-inch-by-2-inch passport style photo of the applicant. Applicants also must provide their fingerprints to be used for an FBI criminal background check, and the chief law enforcement officer of the applicant's county, usually the sheriff, must sign the forms stating they know of no reason why the person should not have the suppressor.

Each registration also requires a one-time \$200 transfer tax, she said.

The forms can be downloaded from the ATF's website, www.atf.gov. The completed forms and other required items are mailed to the NFA branch in Martinsburg, West Virginia. Once the forms arrive, the process takes about 10 months, Jones said.

And not every gun shop can sell suppressors. It requires a special ATF license. Patriot Gun Sales in Montgomery sells suppressors. There's been an increase in customers asking about suppressors since the advisory board made its decision, but no real spike in sales, said Jim Allen, who runs the business with his father, Stan.

If you buy a suppressor from Patriot Gun Sales, the business will fill out the required forms. The applicant foots the bill for the transfer tax.

For years, suppressors had a nefarious image as being a poacher's tool, Dodd said. That explains why so many states in the past had banned their use in hunting. Those same states are now reversing their stands on suppressors and hunting, he said.

The likelihood of someone breaking the law with a legally registered suppressor is slim, Jim Allen said.

"I couldn't imagine people who are buying these things doing anything illegal with them," he said. "It's quite a process. You have to have quite a clean background to buy one. I don't see an increase in poaching or night hunting at all.

"In fact, I think it'll do good things. It'll bring kids and people who are otherwise scared to shoot out into the woods, and I think it's a good thing."

for your information

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