



Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh  
Press Clips  
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- [July 15 runoff: Money flows to establishment candidates \(Montgomery Advertiser\)](#)
- [Alabama Labor Commissioner Tom Surtees stepping down \(AP\)](#)
- ['From stilettos to steel toes:' Can job training fix prison overcrowding and save Alabama money? \(AL.com\)](#)
- [North Alabama's only abortion clinic to surrender its license by Monday, close downtown Huntsville facility \(AL.com\)](#)
- [Alabama congressman urges Obama to use National Guard to lock down border \(Yellowhammer News\)](#)
- [Did falsifying 1,200 records endanger VA patients in Montgomery? Rep. Martha Roby says 'yes' \(Montgomery Advertiser\)](#)
- [U.S. Senate debates new voting rights law Wednesday \(Montgomery Advertiser\)](#)

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## **July 15 runoff: Money flows to establishment candidates (Montgomery Advertiser)**

The first campaign finance filings for the July 15 Republican runoff make two things clear: The establishment has made its choices, and there's a lot of money going into a local Senate race.

Former Autauga County Commission chairman Clyde Chambliss, seeking the Republican nomination for the Senate District 30, raised nearly \$64,000 in the first weeks of June, according to campaign finance reports filed Monday. Chambliss, who faces businessman Harris Garner in the runoff, received \$15,000 from Progress PAC, the political action committee of the Business Council of Alabama, and \$10,000 from the Alabama Realtors Association.

Garner raised over \$75,000 during that time period, mostly from two political action committees heavily funded by the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, who operate casinos in Atmore, Montgomery and Wetumpka.

Senate District 30 includes Autauga County and northern and western Elmore County.

In perhaps the highest-profile statewide race, Chip Beeker, a former Greene County Commissioner challenging incumbent Terry Dunn on the Alabama Public Service Commission, raised \$9,600 in the first month of June, with \$5,000 coming from the Alabama Farmers Federation. According to campaign finance reports, Beeker also lent his campaign \$100,000 from his catfish business, and spent nearly \$64,000 in the wake of the June 3 primary.

Beeker reported about \$59,000 on hand. Dunn, whose campaign is largely self-financed, raised \$500, and reported \$61,000 on hand.

Rep. John Merrill, R-Tuscaloosa, running for Secretary of State, reported raising just over \$54,000 over the first half of June, according to campaign reports filed Monday. Almost a fifth of Merrill's contributions -- \$10,000 -- came from Progress PAC.

Merrill also received \$5,000 from the Alabama Farmers Federation. The candidate reported just over \$93,000 on hand.

Former Montgomery County Probate Judge Reese McKinney, running against Merrill for the nomination, did nearly as well, bringing in just over \$44,000. McKinney's biggest contributions came from separate \$5,000 checks from Guice Slawson, an executive with Southeast Wood Treating Inc. and Larry Morris, an Alexander City attorney.

The Alabama Farmers Federation also provided State Auditor candidate Jim Zeigler with \$1,000 of the \$2,000 he raised for his runoff with businessman Dale Peterson, who won national attention in 2010 for a confrontational television ad cut for his campaign for Agriculture Commissioner. Peterson, who has just over \$14,000 on hand, did not report raising any money, according to campaign finance reports. Zeigler reported about \$11,000 on hand.

**[Alabama Labor Commissioner Tom Surtees stepping down \(AP\)](#)**

MONTGOMERY, Alabama — Alabama Labor Commissioner Tom Surtees is stepping down after a decade of leading major state agencies for two governors.

It's rare for someone to serve in key positions in two administrations. Surtees was hired as state revenue commissioner in 2004 by Gov. Bob Riley. Then he moved to the Department of Industrial Relations in 2007. He remained in the post when Gov. Robert Bentley took office in 2011, and he became labor commissioner when the departments of Industrial Relations and Labor were merged under Bentley.

The 64-year-old commissioner says he has loved his job because it makes a difference in people's lives. That was especially true during the recession. Surtees says his agency paid \$29 million in unemployment compensation benefits to 115,000 Alabamians during the worst week of the recession.

## **'From stilettos to steel toes:' Can job training fix prison overcrowding and save Alabama money? (AL.com)**

DEATSVILLE, Alabama – For Alabama inmates, the opportunity to learn how to detail a car or upholster a chair can be life-changing.

J.F. Ingram State Technical College focuses exclusively on correctional education and offers about 20 vocational programs for people incarcerated at facilities throughout the state.

"If we get it right, we transform a life and we develop a responsible citizen," J.F. Ingram President Hank Dasinger said. "They go back to their community and to their family. They're a better father, brother, mother, sister."

J.F. Ingram's services are funded through the state's education trust fund and federal grants. Students are not charged tuition, and most would be unable to pay it anyway. An exception is made for those serving life without parole, who must pay for an education.

Otherwise, inmates who wish to participate must voluntarily enroll; be within nine years of projected release; learn only one vocational trade; and be cleared to participate by the Department of Corrections.

"The only problem with volunteering is that many of our inmates come from situations where education is not valued," Dasinger said. "We need to make sure students and inmates understand the connection between education and success on the outside."

[Listen to Tutwiler inmates in a life skills class in this radio documentary from WBHM education reporter Dan Carsen.]

### Reducing recidivism through education

The inmate population exploded years ago but has remained relatively stagnant in the past five years. A long-term solution to address Alabama's high incarceration rates, Dasinger says, is not building more prisons but having fewer people go to prison or re-offend.

"We need to make sure... inmates understand the connection between education and success on the outside." - J.F. Ingram President Hank Dasinger

"We have to ask ourselves 'How do we get our prison population smaller, and what do we know about recidivism?'" he said. "The prison population isn't exploding but shouldn't it be decreasing?"

Nationally, the recidivism rate has hovered around 40 percent for several decades, according to a report from the Pew Center on the States. Between 2004 and 2007, Alabama's recidivism rate was slightly more than 35 percent.

With more than three in every 10 offenders in Alabama returning to the system within three years, state leaders and prison officials must address which strategies are working and which are failing.

It costs about \$17,000 to house an inmate each year in Alabama. Education is less expensive and more effective, Dasinger said.

"It's a complex mix of citizen practices, correctional, pardons and parole and what you do with them while they're in (prison)," Dasinger said. "One of those interventions – education and training – has had the most powerful effect on recidivism rates."

### 'Building a bridge' to success outside prison

At Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women, inmates attend classes in a compound adjacent to the prison. Now J.F. Ingram offers five vocational programs for female inmates: welding, automotive repair, office automation, cosmetology and upholstery. Men, who make up a much larger percentage of the state's incarcerated population, have about three times as many available programs.

DOC Commissioner Kim Thomas and Tutwiler Warden Bobby Barrett have requested more programs at the women's prison, Dasinger said.

College officials strive to provide programs that offer inmates viable career options when they are released. The commercial sewing and interior design floral programs were discontinued recently because job prospects were too slim.

One challenge that instructors face is helping inmates to distinguish between skills that are useful inside prison and those that will prove successful outside.

"We build a bridge between where they are and where they need to be," Dasinger said. "Part of that is helping them understand what's important to them."

Adult basic education classes, which focus on basic reading, math, computer skills, English and more, prepare inmates to make the most of their vocational training. Last fall, the college added at Tutwiler a life skills training pilot program that helps women deal with authority and handle stress.

The life skills program was created for the numerous inmates who are incarcerated not because they lack education or job training, but because they couldn't manage their lives well, Dasinger said.

"(Alabamians) think that we're just a bunch of trade schools, and if we give them a good-paying job they won't commit a crime," he said. "Educational training is a secondary problem. Absent life skills training, in my belief, they could go out with a skill and really come back to prison because they still don't know how to manage their lives."

[ Listen to WBHM reporter Dan Carsen speak one-on-one with an inmate named Robin who is taking a life skills class. ]

After completing life skills or basic education classes, many inmates are better situated to earn a GED or complete a vocational course.

Certain factors hamper an inmate's education options –length of sentence, the amount of time before their release date, early parole, or transfers between facilities.

"What we try to do is guess about getting them into program," Dasinger said. "If we get them too soon, then those skills become rusty by the time they get out but if it's too late they won't finish the program."

Several women participating in a life skills class told WBHM reporter Dan Carsen how much they enjoyed the opportunity to get an education.

One woman said she would be dead from drug abuse if she hadn't ended up in prison. The woman read an essay during the class about transitioning her aspirations from Wall Street to welding, "trading stilettos for steel toes."

"I said I regret doing it but I'm glad I did because I would be dead right now," she told Carsen. "I would not have my GED. I would still be in that life doing what I've always done and bringing myself down to where there's no coming back."

## **[North Alabama's only abortion clinic to surrender its license by Monday, close downtown Huntsville facility \(AL.com\)](#)**

North Alabama's only abortion clinic is closing its doors.

Alabama Women's Center for Reproductive Alternatives in Huntsville has notified the state health department that it will surrender its license "before the close of business on Monday, June 30," said Brian Hale, the agency's deputy general counsel.

State inspectors had determined the clinic, located on Madison Street near Huntsville Hospital, would need "moderate to significant alterations" to comply with the new Women's Health and Safety Act that goes into effect July 1, said Hale.

Signed into law by Gov. Robert Bentley in April 2013, the controversial act requires Alabama abortion clinics to meet the same building standards as ambulatory surgical centers. Among other things, that means doors and hallways wide enough to accommodate patient gurneys.

The law says the state health department must revoke the license of any abortion clinic that fails to meet the tougher building standards.

"Voluntarily relinquishing the license is a way to avoid the adverse licensure action," Hale told AL.com Tuesday.

Dalton Johnson, the administrator of Alabama Women's Center, could not immediately be reached Tuesday.

Last month, Johnson notified the state health department that the clinic wanted to relocate from downtown Huntsville to a medical office building at 4831 Sparkman Drive. Hale said he believes the agency is still reviewing blueprints submitted by the clinic.

If the Sparkman Drive location is found to be in compliance with the Women's Health and Safety Act and the clinic still wants to relocate, he said, Johnson would have to apply for a new provider license.

The pending closure of Alabama Women's Center for Reproductive Alternatives leaves the state with just three active, licensed abortion clinics.

Hale said the others are Planned Parenthood in Mobile, West Alabama Women's Center in Tuscaloosa and Reproductive Health Services in Montgomery.

Christian Coalition of Alabama Executive Director James Henderson has led regular sidewalk protests outside the Huntsville clinic for the past 10 years. He and other pro-life activists are organizing a different type of gathering for Monday at noon.

"We're going to have a memorial service and remember the lives that should have been," Henderson said Tuesday. "By reasonable estimates, there have been over 30,000 unborn babies killed at the various abortion clinics in Huntsville.

"It's wiped out a city larger than Athens and almost as big as Madison."

## **[Alabama congressman urges Obama to use National Guard to lock down border \(Yellowhammer News\)](#)**

In a letter sent to President Obama today and shared exclusively with Yellowhammer News, Alabama Congressman Mike Rogers (R-Saks) blasted the Administration's immigration policies, which Rogers says have led to a flood of unaccompanied children being sent across the border.

"Because of your Administration's years-long, deliberate failure to enforce our immigration laws, our nation now faces a crisis at our Southwest border that threatens our sovereignty and adherence to the rule of law," Rogers wrote. "According to Department of Homeland Security estimates, over 60,000 children will cross our border this year, and over 127,000 children will cross in 2015. Desperate families in poverty-stricken countries in search of a better life are putting their children in physical danger in order to cross our border. The surge of unaccompanied children at the border is a direct

result of the decision to circumvent Congress and implement the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy. The administrative decision to grant special status to children brought here illegally by their parents encourages and rewards the deliberate breaking of U.S. law and is tantamount to administrative amnesty.”

In an effort to lock down the border in areas that are particularly susceptible to illegal crossings, Rogers urged the president to utilize National Guard troops.

“I strongly urge you to heed the call of Congress and utilize additional National Guard units in the hardest hit areas to allow the Border Patrol to focus on enforcing current immigration laws,” Rogers wrote. “It is within your power and the law to stem the tide of illegal immigration and work with home nations in order to return these children to their families as quickly as possible.”

A full copy of the letter can be found below.

Do you think more National Guard troops should be sent to the border to assist immigration enforcement officials? Let us know in the comment section below or by tweeting @YHPolitics.

Dear Mr. President:

Our great nation has been and always will be a beacon of hope and freedom for the world. However, because of your Administration’s years-long, deliberate failure to enforce our immigration laws, our nation now faces a crisis at our Southwest border that threatens our sovereignty and adherence to the rule of law.

According to the Department of Homeland Security estimates, over 60,000 children will cross our border this year, and over 127,000 children will cross in 2015. Desperate families in poverty-stricken countries in search of a better life are putting their children in physical danger in order to cross our border. The surge of unaccompanied children at the border is a direct result of the decision to circumvent Congress and implement the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy. The administrative decision to grant special status to children brought here illegally by their parents encourages and rewards the deliberate breaking of U.S. law and is tantamount to administrative amnesty.

Unfortunately, this continues a pattern of decisions dating back to the infamous Morton Memos issued in 2011 that drastically limited the enforcement of immigration laws across the country. The use of bogus deportation numbers that do not reflect reality cannot hide the fact that the number of illegal immigrants is increasing under your Administration’s watch. Not only does this threaten our



sovereignty as a nation by demonstrating we have no operational control over our borders, it broadly projects an image of a weak America with respect to the rule of law.

I strongly urge you to heed the call of Congress and utilize additional National Guard units in the hardest hit areas to allow the Border Patrol to focus on enforcing current immigration laws. It is within your power and the law to stem the tide of illegal immigration and work with home nations in order to return these children to their families as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

Mike D. Rogers  
Member of Congress  
Alabama's 3rd District

## **[Did falsifying 1,200 records endanger VA patients in Montgomery? Rep. Martha Roby says 'yes' \(Montgomery Advertiser\)](#)**

Rep. Martha Roby said reports that a physician with the Department of Veterans Affairs in Montgomery altered patient records to reflect tests that never occurred is just another example of mismanagement at the healthcare facility.

A recent investigation into whistleblower complaints by Carolyn Lerner of the U.S. Office of Special Counsel included reports that a pulmonologist with the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System copied old notes onto new charts for more than 1,200 patients at the Montgomery VA facility.

The prior provider notes were copied into new patient records, resulting in what Lerner described as "inaccurate patient health information being recorded."

An investigation by the VA Office of Medical Inspector "could not substantiate whether this activity endangered patient health," Lerner noted.

Roby, R-Montgomery, is questioning the findings of the VA inspection.

"How can anyone think that falsifying more than 1,200 pulmonary records does not endanger patient health," Rep. Roby asked. "What good is a 'watchdog' if they are just going to downplay such obviously egregious behavior?"

VA officials said the pulmonologist is still employed by the Montgomery facility.

The special counsel report comes after a nationwide audit released earlier this month shows employees at the facility falsified records to hide actual times veterans waited to receive healthcare. The audit showed CAVHCS patients also faced some of the longest wait times in the country.

No employees have lost their jobs in connection to those findings.

Roby recently announced she was sending her chief of staff and military legislative counsel to Montgomery to meet with VA employees or others who have concerns about the health clinics.

"My office continues to look into numerous specific issues raised by constituents, and what we are learning is alarming," she said. "The Special Counsel's report is entirely consistent with what we have been hearing in terms of both phony medical practices and the VA's own inspectors' apparent inability to act aggressively on complaints.

"I am pleased that the Office of Special Counsel seems to be doing what the VA and its inspectors have thus far failed to accomplish: provide a simple, straightforward, and commonsense assessment of some of the serious problems at the VA. Too often, information from the VA has been clouded in confusing doublespeak. This I know from personal experience."

## **[U.S. Senate debates new voting rights law Wednesday \(Montgomery Advertiser\)](#)**

WASHINGTON – Since the Supreme Court ended close federal oversight of elections in Alabama and some other states one year ago, discrimination against minority voters has crept back into place, voting rights advocates say.

"The result of that decision is that minority voters have been left without critically needed voting protections for an entire year," said Sherrilyn Ifill, president and director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

The Senate Judiciary Committee will hear testimony today that, because the Justice Department is no longer looking over their shoulder, several local and state governments around the country have restricted some people's access to the ballot box.

Last year's Supreme Court case said the formula used to determine which states needed extra supervision in conducting elections was outdated and no longer constitutional.

That decision, in a case filed by Shelby County, Alabama, effectively nullified the Voting Rights Act's "pre-clearance" provision, which had required that all or parts of 14 states get advance permission from the Justice Department before making any changes in voting procedures.

"It is clear that political entities previously covered ... have begun to use the Shelby County decision as a license to enact discriminatory measures," said Ifill, who will testify at today's Senate hearing.

Senators are debating a proposal from Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vermont, that would update the Voting Rights Act's anti-discrimination formula and restore pre-clearance in states with the most recent and persistent problems.

As currently drafted, the proposal would require Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas to get their election procedures pre-approved because they've violated the Voting Rights Act at least five times in the past 15 years, including one statewide infraction.

"One year ago, five justices on the Supreme Court issued a disastrous Shelby County decision that removed crucial voter protections. It is time for Congress to act," Leahy said.

In the Senate, Leahy's bill has so far attracted support only from Democrats. A House version has bipartisan support, but GOP leaders there have not scheduled any hearings.

Today's hearing likely will involve a lot of debate about Alabama.

Calera City Councilman Ernest Montgomery, a black Shelby County resident who intervened in the court case to try and preserve the pre-clearance provision, will attend the hearing.

Advocates for updating the voting rights law plan to highlight a recent case out of Evergreen, where black residents sued over city redistricting plans and the city agreed to again submit to pre-clearance for the next six years.

In another case, officials in Decatur revived a plan to change procedures in city council elections, which civil rights advocates fear will disenfranchise minority voters. Alabama also implemented a new voter identification law this year that some say made it harder for some minorities to vote.

"The general election in November presents a looming opportunity for those actors who are inclined to discriminate, leaving many more voters of color vulnerable," Ifill said in her prepared testimony.

Not everyone believes that life without pre-clearance has been disastrous for minority voters. Conservatives in Congress — especially from states that for nearly 50 years had to prove in advance that even tiny changes in voting procedures wouldn't be discriminatory — say the past year has shown the country hasn't regressed to the days of rampant racism at the polls.

Witnesses invited by Republicans are expected to testify that the remaining sections of the Voting Rights Act give minority voters plenty of protection, including the ability to sue for discrimination and to restore pre-clearance for those cities or states with repeated problems.

Two members of Alabama's delegation have taken a firm position on the legislation. Rep. Terri Sewell, D-Birmingham, supports the return of pre-clearance but wants the new formula to include Alabama. And Rep. Spencer Bachus, R-Vestavia Hills, is a co-sponsor of the House bill.