



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

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[Pursuing new paths after prison in Alabama, former inmates enroll in college, become entrepreneurs \(AL.com\)](#)

Inmates who are released from Alabama prisons – and, according to most reports, that's more than 90 percent of them – face serious obstacles finding a job.

It's difficult to get hired with little, if any, training or education, not to mention checking the box on a job application indicating that you have been convicted of a felony.

Some ex-offenders sink into their previous lives – drugs, prostitution, theft. Others turn to organizations like Aid to Inmate Mothers, which seeks to ease the re-entry process for women.

Others, like Melinda Ricketts, prove themselves resourceful in a tough job market. Ricketts, who served 2 ½ years at Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women on a drug charge, was fed up with her criminal record preventing her from getting hired, Les Lovoy reported for WBHM.

So Ricketts and Juanida Pitts, who also served time at Tutwiler, started their own business, A Cut Above the Rest Lawn Service and Landscaping, in Huntsville. They often hire fellow ex-offenders.

"Those are the ones that seem to work and stay working" Ricketts told Lovoy. "It's because they have a mark against them. So they have something to prove."

[Read Les Lovoy's full report about finding a job with a felony record [here](#).]

Jamie Faust spent a decade in a cycle of prostitution, drug abuse, jail time and, in 2012, a prison sentence.

"I really want to counsel women with substance abuse issues who are HIV positive because I had somebody to help me decide to turn my life around."

"I'd lived a very self-destructive lifestyle," Faust told WBHM reporter Sarah Delia.

Faust was held in a segregated dorm at Tutwiler because she was HIV-positive. She found it difficult to connect with inmates in the general population, to make friends and just interact. Since Faust was released, the Department of Corrections has changed its policy of segregating inmates with HIV.

[Listen to WBHM reporter Sarah Delia's report [here](#).]

Because of the isolation she felt, coupled with the realization that things were out of control, Faust told Delia she is determined to help other women in similar circumstances.

Faust is in a program that offers housing, health care and substance abuse treatment. She has reconnected with her family and started college in hopes of becoming a social worker.

"I really want to counsel women with substance abuse issues who are HIV positive because I had somebody to help me decide to turn my life around," she told Delia. "I want to be able to help someone else do the same."

House Speaker Mike Hubbard willing to look at all options to end crossover voting in runoffs (AL.com)

Alabama and Mississippi have a habit of keeping an eye on each others politics and tribulations, which are often the same thing.

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Speaker Mike Hubbard

That was true Wednesday when some leading Alabama Republicans reacted to Tuesday's Mississippi senate primary won by Sen. Thad Cochran in large measure thanks to Democrats who invaded the GOP primary to vote for him.

Not many hours after Cochran had won I sent a text message to Speaker of the Alabama House of Representatives Mike Hubbard asking for his reaction and whether or not he now might support an effort to close the state's open primary system where anyone is free to vote in either party primary.

It didn't take Hubbard long to respond and add his voice to calls to stop or at least curtail Democrats voting in the GOP primary.:

"Given the fact that AEA-backed RINOs infiltrated our Republican primaries this election cycle and will likely continue to do so, there is obviously a need to look at the system and make needed adjustments," Hubbard said in a statement.

AEA is the Alabama Education Association and RINOs refers to "Republicans in name only," a term usually reserved for Democrats masquerading as Republicans.

"I believe we should lay out all available options, including closing our GOP run-offs to crossover voting, and study what works best in other Republican red states like Alabama." Hubbard continued. "The next legislative session does not convene until next March, so we have plenty of time to take a measured approach and decide upon the steps necessary to protect our party nominating process."

Cochran defeated challenger Chris McDaniel, a state legislator with strong Tea Party backing Tuesday.

Cochran, 76, courted African-Americans in the primary in an effort to offset McDaniel's strong support among the most conservative elements of Mississippi Republicans. The plea for help worked as results showed Cochran enjoyed significant support in precincts that are mostly black and which vote overwhelmingly Democratic.

I called Alabama GOP Chairman Bill Armistead, who has called on the Republican-controlled state Legislature to require voters to register as either Democrats, Republicans or independents – an act that would close the state's open primary system. – for reaction. He criticized Cochran's appeal to Democrats to support him.

Bill Armistead

GOP state Chairman Bill Armistead

Phillip Rawls

"I think it's disgraceful for any Republican to seek out support from Democrats in a Republican primary," said Armistead. "A party primary is just that, a party primary and I do not believe it is right for Democrats to be able to vote in our primary or Republicans to vote in the Democrat primary. What happened in Mississippi is a wakeup call for Republicans to act and I think you will see some effort approved in the session next year to do so."

Armistead said GOP legislators have been slow to act to close both party primaries out of concern for how independent voters might react.

"I think there has frankly been an overreaction on the part of some who worry about independents becoming upset," said Armistead. "But these are party primaries aimed at deciding who will represent Republicans and who will represent Democrats in the fall election. If someone wants to register as an independent, fine. But I don't think they should have a say in who the parties decide should represent them."

[Tea party groups tell Gov. Robert Bentley that Alabama should not become refuge for illegals \(AL.com\)](#)

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Tea party groups have written a letter to Gov. Robert Bentley asking him to tell federal authorities not to use Alabama as a refuge for the surge of unaccompanied minors from Central America who have entered the country since last year.

The letter urges Bentley and other state officials to contact the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the secretary of Health and Human Services to say that Alabama does not plan to house any of the illegal immigrants.

"We must tell them that Alabama cannot support lawlessness, nor do we have resources available to house illegal aliens in our communities," reads the letter from Suzanne Green, founder of the Rainy Day Patriots in Birmingham.

Green said the letter, sent to the governor Monday, was an effort to be proactive.

"We know they're planning to spread them out throughout the United States and just wanted to make our voices known," she said.

"I think they should be treated as humanely as possible and sent back where they came from," Green said.

Jennifer Ardis, spokeswoman for Bentley, said the governor's office has not yet received the letter and that it would be premature to comment.

Green acknowledged some people might consider the position hard-hearted, since there are children involved.

"I'm sure there are plenty of people that are going to call me every name in the book," she said.

But she said the children are not America's responsibility.

"Where the hell were their parents?" she said.

The letter says, "While everyone has sympathy for the plight of any child, we are first charged to defend Alabama's children. Alabama has its own issues to contend with which include unemployment, fighting the EPA, the overcrowded prison system, and the disagreement over how to educate our children, just to mention a few."

Green said those who have come over illegally as part of the recent surge are not all children and said she believes some are gang members.

The letter is signed by leaders of about a dozen tea party groups, the John Birch Society and the Eagle Forum.

[Read the tea party letter.pdf](#)

About 50,000 minors, including many from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have come across the border since October.

The surge has caused a humanitarian crisis that has strained social services, legal services and charities. Authorities might arrange to house the children temporarily at some military installations.

Many Republicans blame President Obama's immigration policies for the onslaught of border crossings.

Green said she blamed Congress, as well as the president.

"He happens to be in charge of national security, so the buck stops with him," she said.

Jefferson State Community College President Judy Merritt to retire after 35 years (AL.com)

Judy Merritt, who has served as president of Jefferson State Community College for 35 years, will retire at the end of this month, according to the school.

Merritt was appointed president in 1979 by Gov. Fob James, and was the first woman to be president of a community college in the state. She was with the college since it was founded in 1965, except for four years at Florida International University in Miami.

"Judy has always believed education is an individual's pathway to achieving one's goals and dreams," Keith Brown, the dean of campus development and campus/legal services, said in a news release.

"She has worked tirelessly to make education more accessible and ensure the pathway to education is clear for all."

Since Merritt became president, the college has grown from one campus to serving more than 15,000 students a year at campuses in four counties.

Merritt has also served on several boards, including those of the United Way of Central Alabama, the American Heart Association, Bruno's Inc., Energen Corporation, and was chairwoman of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce in 1993.

"Throughout her 50-year career, Judy Merritt has been an incredible leader who has touched countless lives," Brown said. "She has devoted her life to making a difference in our community and improving the lives of others."

Alabama Launchpad nabs \$91,000 in federal grants to boost high-tech entrepreneurial activity (AL.com)

Alabama's entrepreneurial community received a \$91,000 boost Thursday when the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama Foundation was one of 22 entities nationwide tapped to receive federal grant funding.

The Birmingham-based foundation, which created the Alabama Launchpad Start-up Competition, will use the U.S. Small Business Administration dollars to help Alabama entrepreneurs statewide gain federal funding to turn their innovative ideas into commercial products. The pre-seed funding competition has distributed more than \$1.3 million to more than 30 companies since its founding in 2006.

In all, the SBA selected 22 state and local economic development agencies, business development centers, colleges and universities to receive Federal and State Technology, or FAST, partnership program grants totaling \$2 million. The FAST Program is designed to stimulate economic development among small, high-technology businesses through federally-funded innovation and research development programs such as the Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer programs.

Ahead of the curve

Earlier this year, Alabama Launchpad rolled out the Alabama SBIR/STTR Assistance Program in March to increase the number of Alabama companies that receive a share of \$2 billion in SBIR/STTR grants awarded annually by federal agencies.

EDPA Vice President Angela Wier said the FAST funding will be used to bolster the program which provides training workshops and grant-writing assistance to high-risk early-stage projects during a time when it is much too early for angel investment.

It also bridges a gap between traditional grant funding for research and equity investment from a business or investment fund, she said, and more than 300 people have taken advantage of Alabama SBIR/STTR Assistance Program training to date.

"This validation of need made it an easy decision to submit a proposal for the highly competitive SBA FAST grant funding," Wier said. "With a team of local partners already in place and committed to assist with outreach, we are confident the SBA funds will augment our current efforts to help Alabama

companies increase their success rate winning SBIR/STTR funds. Our work will be measured by the success rate of these companies we help."

Ready and waiting

Specifically, Alabama Launchpad will use the FAST grant funding to:

Conduct seven additional SBIR training workshops to extend across the state

Host innovation day meetings and programs on the campuses of Alabama State, Alabama A&M and Tuskegee universities

Highlight more innovation and commercialization successes at the annual Alabama Launchpad Innovation and Entrepreneurship Conference

Offer two new types of funds to assist technology-based small businesses pursuing grants

Expand marketing of the SBIR program through partnerships with the Small Business Development Center, the Women's Council of North Alabama and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

Strengthening 'America's competitiveness'

Joanne Randolph, president and chief executive officer of the WBCNA, said the organization is excited to be on the EDPA team in the execution of the Alabama SBIR/STTR Assistance Program.

"The WBCNA has served over 13,000 individuals in North Alabama since our inception and will be able to promote FAST programs to these clients and other stakeholders, as well as provide technical and management assistance to innovative, technology-driven small businesses in our region," Randolph said.

Meanwhile, SBA Administrator Maria Contreras-Sweet called the FAST program an important tool of the SBIR/STTR program.

"SBIR and STTR are a win-win," Sweet said. "Federal agencies are able to meet their (research and development) needs. Small businesses get the support they need to turn innovative new ideas into job-creating new businesses, and these programs strengthen America's competitiveness and global economic leadership," Contreras-Sweet said.

[The newly insured under ACA filing claims for serious illnesses at twice rate of those who kept old policies \(AL.com\)](#)

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama – People who bought health insurance under the umbrella of the Affordable Care Act are filing claims related to serious illnesses at a rate two times that of people who kept their old insurance, and that could mean higher premiums across the board next year, the Wall Street Journal reports.

In an appearance on the Journal's Internet show "The News Hub" reporter Christopher Weaver reports that in the first three months of ACA plan coverage 27 percent of claims filed were for conditions that are considered to be predictors of "ongoing health expenses." That includes conditions such as diabetes, asthma, heart problems and mental health problems.

One of the goals of the ACA was enrollment of people who are healthier than the population as a whole, so as to offset the cost of older, sicker enrollees.

"Apparently, it might have the opposite effect," host and columnist Simon Constable said.

Insurers will set next year's premiums in the late summer and fall, and they likely will rise if the pattern continues, Weaver said.