



Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh
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EDITORIAL: Judge's ruling on school act not a surprise (Tuscaloosa News)

Published: Saturday, May 31, 2014 at 1:00 p.m.

Word came down late Wednesday afternoon that Montgomery County Circuit Judge Gene Reese had declared the Alabama Accountability Act unconstitutional. Those familiar with Reese were in about as much suspense about how he would rule as they are about how an "I Love Lucy" rerun will turn out.

Reese is nothing if not predictable — and dependable when it comes to carrying water for allies like the Alabama Education Association. Back in the early 1990s, he was the judge in the equity funding lawsuit, in which he ruled that Alabama's method of funding public schools was unconstitutional.

Reese proceeded to give the state's "progressives" exactly what they wanted: the unilateral right to increase property taxes in Alabama, despite the fact that the state constitution allows property tax increases only when a legislative act calls for a referendum of those to be taxed. Eventually, the appellate court looked at his ruling and declared that he basically made it up out of thin air.

But it didn't matter that Reese's ruling was eventually consigned to the trash heap. He'd gotten what he wanted: adulation for his "bold" action and a springboard for a campaign for state office (which he lost). That's the way politics works.

And it's working again. While Reese's ruling last week was as predictable as its eventual overturning will be, its timing is a bit different. The fact that it comes a week before the election smells like a week-old mackerel.

The Alabama Accountability Act is the AEA's No. 1 target. The teachers union is pulling out all the stops and going after all of the act's legislative supporters.

That's too bad, because no matter how much the AEA and its minions howl and exaggerate the facts about its impact on public education, we believe it's worth giving a try. The AAA provides tax credits to families of children in schools labeled "failing" who want to transfer to a public school that isn't failing or go to a private school. It also gives tax credits to people and corporations who want to donate money to scholarship funds that will pay the tuition of those who want to attend private schools.

AEA has attacked the concept of "failing" schools, as if public schools can't fail or do so only because of a shortage of funding. It's painted the AAA as a sinister ploy to divert money from public to private schools. We see greater choice for people trying to escape an inadequate education.

AEA's supporters might claim that Republican appellate judges overturning a Democratic circuit judge's order would be equally political. They might be right. Legislators were less than forthcoming in the method they used to enact the law.

So it's possible that Reese's ruling could stand. Even a blind hog will find an acorn every once in awhile.

Alabama legislative leaders face opposition in Republican primary (AP)

MONTGOMERY, Alabama — Control of the Alabama Legislature could be up for grabs as voters head to the polls for the party primaries.

The incumbent Republican supermajority faces a slate of challengers from within the GOP. A shakeup in membership could change who is named to legislative leadership positions as well as the policy directions for the next four years.

House Speaker Mike Hubbard of Auburn and Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh of Anniston both face opposition Tuesday. The Alabama Education Association and the Stop Common Core political action committee have funded many of the challengers.

Challengers say the current GOP majority has short-changed tea party voters and failed to live up to 2010 campaign promises to change Montgomery. Marsh said many of the challengers are RINOs, or Republicans in name only.

Alabama candidates focus campaigns on Obama (AP)

Officials preparing for low voter turnout for Tuesday's primary despite presidential issue

By Phillip Rawls

MONTGOMERY | President Barack Obama isn't on Alabama's primary election ballot Tuesday, but the campaigns in both political parties make it seem like he is.

Republicans have built their campaigns around who would fight Obama the hardest, while Democrats have talked about their support of Obama and have called for Alabama to expand its Medicaid program under the president's federal health care law.

"The candidates have brought President Obama into Alabama's primary election by Republicans continuing to display their opposition to his programs and Democrats lining up with their national party," said William Stewart, retired chairman of the political science department at the University of Alabama.

In the GOP primary, Obama is being used as a weapon. In east Alabama, state Sen. Tom Whatley of Auburn is being criticized by his opponent for donating \$4,600 to Obama's campaign in 2008 before winning public office as a Republican in 2010. And in south Alabama, state Sen. Jimmy Holley of Elba is accusing Obama of trying to hijack the Republican primary because Holley's opponent has received support from one of Obama's political allies, the state affiliate of the National Education Association.

"He's so unpopular in Alabama, the attempt is to tie your opponent to the president," Republican political consultant Brent Buchanan said.

Despite the focus on Obama, election officials are preparing for a lower-than-normal turnout. Over the past 20 years, Alabama's gubernatorial primary turnout has ranged from 32 percent in 1998 and 2010 to 41 percent in 1994.

Alabama's chief election official, Secretary of State Jim Bennett, is forecasting 25 percent to 27 percent of Alabama's 2.85 million voters will participate Tuesday. He attributes it in large part to Alabama not having a hotly contested race for governor.

On the Republican side, incumbent Robert Bentley has been endorsed by a who's who of Montgomery lobbying organizations and has raised more than \$1,000 for every \$1 raised by his two largely unknown opponents. On the Democratic side, former minor league baseball player Kevin Bass hasn't been able to catch up to former U.S. Rep. Parker Griffith in name recognition. Griffith has the endorsement of the party's black wing, the Alabama Democratic Conference, which usually ensures success in a primary with low turnout.

Stewart said the governor's race drives turnout in a nonpresidential election year, and there is no suspense in the governor's race. "It's one of the most lackluster elections in my lifetime," the 74-year-old political scientist said.

Former Secretary of State Beth Chapman, now a political consultant for the Alabama Farmers Federation and other groups, said the 2010 and 2012 elections were watersheds, with Republicans

capturing every office elected statewide and taking more than 60 percent of the seats in the Legislature. She said that makes this election different from what has happened in the past.

"It's more Republican versus Republican," she said.

Campaign finance reports show the Republican primary battles for some legislative seats will end up costing \$1 million and will be more expensive than some races for statewide office, such as state auditor.

Republican political consultant Brent Buchanan said the Republican-controlled Legislature drew new legislative districts for this election that are either decidedly Republican or definitely Democratic. "It's no longer Democrats versus Republicans. If you want to win a legislative seat, you have to win it June 3," Buchanan said.

"It's almost a general election now," state Republican Party Chairman Bill Armistead said.

Despite some big-budget legislative races, many incumbents don't have anything to worry about. In the 35-seat Senate, 18 senators — 11 Republicans and seven Democrats — have no opposition in the primary or general election. In the 105-member House, 64 incumbents — 46 Republicans and 18 Democrats — have no opposition. That's nearly three-fifths of the membership guaranteed to return.

One of the results of Republicans taking control of the Legislature in 2010 was the passage of a law requiring citizens to show a photo ID to vote. The law goes into effect with this election.

All eyes on District 1 (TimesDaily)

MONTGOMERY — The five-man fight to claim outgoing state Sen. Tammy Irons' seat has generated some statewide interest going into Tuesday's primaries, largely because the seat will be significant to the party that claims it in November.

Senate District 1, long held by a Democrat, now stretches from Lauderdale County across north Limestone County and into Madison County.

Three Republicans — Jonathan Berryhill, Tim Melson and Chris Seibert — want to be the first in recent history to hold the seat, and GOP leadership have said they will fight hard for the district in November.

Two Florence-area Democrats — Mike Curtis and Earl Gardner — want their party to retain the seat that Irons, D-Florence, is giving up.

"Clearly, if you had to pick a contest that will be both interesting in the primary race and the general election, it will be the race to replace Tammy Irons," said Jess Brown, an Athens State University political science professor.

When the district was redrawn by Republicans in 2012, it became favorable for them, said William Stewart, retired chairman of the department of political science at the University of Alabama.

"It will be one of the more competitive districts since we don't have an incumbent running, and it is a new district," Stewart said.

Democrats need to gain three Senate seats to end Republicans' super majority in the Statehouse.

"If (Republicans can take Irons' seat), it will be a real boost to keeping their super majority," Stewart said.

In another Florence-area race, two Republicans are vying to take on incumbent Rep. Greg Burdine, D-Florence, in the fall.

Phillip Pettus and Sterling "Josh" Statom both said they want to be the conservative voice they say the district needs in Montgomery.

In Senate District 4, which includes most of Lawrence County, incumbent Paul Bussman, R-Cullman, is being challenged by another Cullman Republican, Bruce Whitlock. The winner will face Democrat Angelo Mancuso.

Nothing until November

In the Shoals, most incumbents won't see a challenger until November.

Rep. Lynn Greer, R-Rogersville, will face Democrat Andrew "Andy" Betterton; Rep. Marcel Black, D-Tuscumbia, will face Republican Fred Joly; Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow, D-Red Bay, is being challenged by Republican Gerry Wallace.

In the Senate, incumbent Roger Bedford, D-Russellville, is being challenged by Republican Larry Stutts.

In Lawrence County, Rep. Ken Johnson, R-Moulton, is being challenged by the Democrat he defeated in 2010, Jody Letson.

[High-profile endorsements shine spotlight on Senate District 8 GOP race in north Alabama \(al.com\)](#)

A rural northeast Alabama senate race is getting a political spotlight on the day before the primaries.

State Rep. Todd Greeson of Ider and Steve Livingston of Scottsboro have received high-profile endorsements as they compete for the Senate District 8 Republican Party nod in the November general election.

The primary election is Tuesday.

Senate District 8 includes Jackson County as well as eastern Madison County and a small portion of western DeKalb County.

Greeson announced today he had been endorsed by Gov. Robert Bentley after earlier receiving an endorsement from the NRA.

Livingston has been endorsed by the Business Council of Alabama, received a \$2,500 campaign contribution from the political action committee founded by Alabama House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, and aired radio ads of support from U.S. Rep. Mo Brooks.

Livingston has also received \$35,000 from Alabama 2014 PAC, which is chaired by former Gov. Bob Riley, according to campaign finance records.

The winner of the GOP primary will face the winner of the Democratic primary between Horace Clemmons and Randy Bruce Money in November. The seat's incumbent, Sen. Shadrack McGill, is not seeking re-election.

"Anytime someone has the support of one of the most popular governors in Alabama history, a true conservative and an honest man, it speaks to both their conservative credentials and their standing in the community," Greeson said in a press release today of Bentley's endorsement. "That is why I am proud that our campaign can claim the support of our governor."

"A campaign contribution of \$2,500 from the Speaker of the House reinforces my opponent's inability to work with the Republican Leadership while in office," Livingston said in a May 31 Facebook post.

[Democrats distributing sample ballots for Alabama Republican primary \(Yellowhammer News\)](#)

The Alabama New South Alliance (ALSA), a sister organization of the Alabama New South Coalition, whose stated goal is to promote "progressive" ideals and legislation, has issued a surprise sample ballot encouraging its members to abandon the Democratic primary and instead cast their ballots for Republicans.

In 2012, the ALSA endorsed a straight Democratic ticket, including Barack Obama and Joe Biden for president and vice president, Terri Sewell for Congress, Robert Vance for chief justice and Lucy Baxley for PSC president, among others. They also encouraged a “no” vote on Alabama’s anti-ObamaCare statewide ballot initiative.

This year, the liberal group has effectively thrown in the towel and is encouraging its members to take advantage of Alabama’s open primary system to swing Republican elections.

The group’s sample ballot for Tallapoosa County, which is just northwest of Auburn, can be found below. Most notably, the ALSA is encouraging its members to cast their vote for Andy Carter in Alabama Senate District 27. Carter has received multiple campaign contributions from the Alabama Education Association (AEA) during his push to unseat incumbent Republican Tom Whatley.

Alabama Republican Party Chairman Bill Armistead recently discouraged conservatives from supporting candidates who have taken AEA money, saying the group does not share his party’s conservative values.

“Historically the AEA has been a Democrat organization,” said Armistead. “Their previous leader was even the vice chair of the Alabama Democratic Party. They have long supported Democrats, but they realize the political climate in Alabama has voters more inclined to elect Republicans. They have recruited candidates and are funding candidates in Republican primaries who do not share our values or our views.”

Yellowhammer has documented numerous examples of the AEA working alongside Democrat organizations, including “community organizers” who are former Obama campaign staffers, to influence Alabama’s Republican primary.

In the past, crossover voting efforts have been conducted as more of a “whisper campaign.” But if recent examples are any indication, Alabama’s traditionally Democratic groups have now resorted to publicly steering their members toward GOP primaries.

As Yellowhammer’s latest News in 90 Seconds feature pointed out, whether they are ultimately successful in swinging elections will come down to voter turnout. They’re banking on Republicans sitting at home today thinking their vote won’t matter.

5 races to watch as Alabama's tumultuous primary season reaches its climax (Yellowhammer News)

Alabama Public Service Commission — Place 2

Candidates:

Incumbent — Terry Dunn

Challengers — Jonathan Barbee, Chip Beeker, Philip Brown

Background:

Alabama Public Service Commission races rarely make it into the headlines, but after incumbent Republican Terry Dunn sided with environmental groups on a series of votes at the PSC, conservatives started coming out of the woodwork to challenge him.

Recent polling shows Beeker in the lead, but in a statewide race in which none of the candidates have significant name ID, there is a lot of uncertainty heading into election day. Even the fact that Barbee's name appears first on the ballot plays a role.

Most likely scenario:

Beeker receives the most votes, but doesn't quite get to 50 percent in the crowded field, sending the race to a runoff against Dunn.

PSC Race 1 has also been fairly contentious, but Commissioner Jeremy Oden, who was appointed by Gov. Bentley in late 2012, appears to be well positioned to win a full term.

Alabama House of Representatives — District 79

Candidates:

Incumbent — House Speaker Mike Hubbard

Challenger — Sandy Toomer

Background:

This Auburn-area House District has been ground zero of the Alabama Education Association's (AEA) fight to take down the Republican supermajority in the Legislature. They have spent an unprecedented amount of money to unseat House Speaker Mike Hubbard, who led Republicans' "We Dare Defend Our Rights" legislative agenda. This race has seen everything from constant rumors of grand jury investigations to a tsunami of negative advertising from both sides on radio, TV and mail pieces.

The personal vendetta that AEA head Henry Mabry has against Hubbard is so strong that even if they lose every other race in the state, taking down Hubbard would make the \$7+ million the AEA has spent on Alabama elections this year worth it, at least as far as he's concerned.

Most likely scenario:

Recent polling showed Hubbard with the advantage going into the home stretch, but this one's going to be a real dog fight right to the end.

U.S. House of Representatives — Alabama's 6th Congressional District

Alabama's 6th Congressional District

Alabama's 6th Congressional District

Candidates:

Scott Beason

Will Brooke

Paul DeMarco

Chad Mathis

Gary Palmer

Robert Shattuck

Tom Vigneulle

Background:

DeMarco has been the frontrunner throughout the race, with Beason, Brooke, Mathis and Palmer all fighting for the second spot in the runoff. That's still the case right here at the end, but DeMarco isn't the absolute lock to get into the runoff that he once seemed to be.

Mathis and associated PACs launched an effective assault on the four other candidates near the top of this race. But he's been hit as well by a recent round of ads by Will Brooke. Beason hasn't been able to raise any money, but his hardcore base of support continues to make him a threat. Palmer has managed to stay out of the direct line of fire, which gives him a chance to pull a "Bentley" and squeak into the runoff while the other candidates destroy each other.

Most likely scenario:

DeMarco still probably gets into the runoff, although he's going to have to turn up the intensity once he does. His worst matchup may be with Mathis. Third-party conservative groups have shown they're willing to pump in big money into getting Mathis elected. We may have another classic Tea Party vs. Chamber of Commerce showdown on our hands.

State Auditor

Dale Peterson, candidate for Alabama State Auditor

Dale Peterson, candidate for Alabama State Auditor

Candidates:

Dale Peterson

Hobbie Sealy

Adam Thompson

Jim Zeigler

Background:

Any race that has viral video star Dale Peterson in it is going to be fun, but this one is especially interesting considering Peterson, a convicted thief, is running for the office of State Auditor, whose sole job is to keep track of what the state owns. Zeigler is a favorite of the south Alabama Tea Party. He served on the Public Service Commission early in his career, but since then has run and lost so many close races that he's earned the nickname "Mr. 49 Percent." Thompson was a staffer in the Auditor's office under Beth Chapman, then went with her to the Secretary of States office, where he continues to work now.

Most likely scenario:

Recent polling shows that Zeigler has a chance to win this outright without a runoff due to his significant name ID advantage, but Thompson has the support of a lot of the major trade associations. The majority of people who vote in this race probably won't be familiar with any of the candidates, which leaves a lot of uncertainty going into election day.

Alabama Senate — District 30

Candidates:

Clyde Chambliss, Prattville City Councilman

Harris Garner, local businessman

Bill Harris, insurance agent

Suzelle Josey, former spokesperson for Chief Justice Roy Moore

Background:

This Senate district, which after redistricting includes portions of Autauga, Elmore, Coosa, Chilton and Tallapoosa counties, was held by the late Democrat Wendell Mitchell for 36 years before Republican Bryan Taylor beat him in 2010. Taylor opted to not run for re-election, leading to this crowded primary fight. Chambliss and Garner appear to be the frontrunners, but the big question in this race is can Chambliss win it without a runoff?

Most likely scenario:

This race probably goes to a runoff between Chambliss and Garner. Most of the major trade associations are supporting Chambliss, so they would probably come in with a lot of resources to push him over the finish line.

Hottest races aren't at top of Alabama ballot (AP)

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Some of the hottest races in Alabama's primary election are happening down the ballot.

The lack of an incumbent for secretary of state has drawn three Republican hopefuls. State Rep. John Merrill of Tuscaloosa, Crenshaw County Probate Judge Jim Perdue and former Montgomery County Probate Judge Reese McKinney are competing for the GOP nomination.

Republican Public Service Commissioner Terry Dunn has multiple challengers. Dunn was viewed as a potentially vulnerable incumbent after unsuccessfully pushing for formal hearings on utility rates.

Media company owner Jonathan Barbee, former Greene County Commission Chairman Chip Beeker and Alabama Minority GOP Chairman Phillip Brown are challenging Dunn.

Primary voters will also cast ballots for party nominations for lieutenant governor, state auditor, another seat on the PSC and seats on the state school board.

Orr's plan: Phase out ABC stores to save cash (TimesDaily)

Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, has talked for several years about the cost of the state operating more than 170 Alcohol Beverage Control Board stores.

Late in this year's legislative session, Orr introduced a bill to phase out the retail stores, but he didn't push to get it passed. Last week, he called the legislation a starting point for work in the 2015 session.

The state could save millions, he said. But that's not the main reason he said he would file a bill next year.

"The fundamental question we need to answer is, should the state be in the liquor business in the 21st century and competing against private business?" he said. "Is that a function of state government? I don't think it is."

Orr has said eliminating rent on ABC stores, wages for about 600 employees and other overhead could save the state up to \$45 million that could go toward the general fund, which supports non-education agencies.

In budget year 2011, alcohol sales generated about \$200 million for the general fund, Education Trust Fund and the state human resources and mental health departments. ABC officials said that number would be significantly lower if private industry ran liquor sales.

Orr said that under his proposal, the ABC Board would still be in charge of wholesale distribution and law enforcement.

Orr said he's looking ahead to the next budget year, which he expects to be a difficult one.

"When you look at the state budget at 2016, there are hard questions that need to be asked and dealt with," Orr said last week. "I'm offering a proposal, I have no doubt that there will be amendments ... but we need to answer these questions."

Corrections contract a moneymaker

The cash-strapped Alabama Department of Corrections plans to pay a Luverne company \$30.2 million to provide commissary supplies to be sold to inmates at its multiple facilities. The contract with W.L. Petrey Wholesale Co. is for two years. Proceeds from the commissaries will cover the two-year contract, pay the 28 state employees who operate the stores and generate about \$57 million in gross revenue for the department, officials said.

The contract is on the Legislative Contract Review Committee's Thursday agenda.

House to get \$1m voting system

Another contract on the agenda is the \$1 million purchase and installation of a new voting system for the Alabama House of Representatives.

The current voting system was installed 28 years ago, Clerk of the House Jeff Woodard said. It has been upgraded, but that's no longer an option. Recently, it has begun faltering during votes.

"We're concerned about its ability to function during the session," Woodard said.

Supreme Court to Hear Ala. Redistricting Challenge (AP)

The Supreme Court said Monday it will consider whether Republican leaders in Alabama drew a new legislative map that illegally packed black voters into too few voting districts to limit minority political power.

The justices agreed to hear a pair of appeals from the Alabama Legislative Black Caucus and another group of Democratic lawmakers who contend the new map created in 2012 dilutes black voting

strength and makes it harder to elect white Democrats outside the overwhelmingly majority-black districts.

Republican-led legislatures across the South have sought to increase the concentration of black voters in a few districts, which has led to the election of fewer white Democrats and more Republicans in other districts. Similar challenges are pending in Virginia and North Carolina. Overall, the National Conference of State Legislatures says there are currently 26 active redistricting lawsuits in eight states.

The Supreme Court allows the drawing of legislative districts for partisan purposes, but not on the basis of race. The outcome of this case could come down to whether the justices believe partisan or racial interests predominate.

A panel of three federal judges had ruled 2-1 last year that the new districts were not discriminatory and did not violate the Voting Rights Act or the Constitution.

Like other states, the Alabama Legislature had to redraw political boundaries to reflect population shifts in the 2010 Census. The process can often lead to gerrymandering — the manipulation of district boundaries to gain a partisan advantage.

Joe Reed, chairman of the Alabama Democratic Conference, said the Republican-designed districts were contrived to reduce minority influence in surrounding, mostly white districts.

"They were doing their level best to wipe out white Democrats," he said. "They were trying their best to have a Legislature of white Republicans and black Democrats, and then they could ignore the black Democrats."

Alabama Republican Attorney General Luther Strange says in court filings that the new legislative districts are consistent with federal law.

Republican Alabama state Sen. Gerald Dial, co-chairman of the Legislature's Redistricting Committee, said the plan cleared the Justice Department and a three-judge panel without any problems, and he was surprised by the Supreme Court agreeing to review it.

"It's a total shock to me because we met all the guidelines that were in place at the time. But this is part of the process," he said.

Alabama Democrats contend that despite population shifts, the new map contains the same number of districts with majority black populations that were in a legislative redistricting plan produced a decade

ago, when Democrats still controlled the Legislature. The plan has eight of the 35 Senate districts and 28 of the 105 House districts with a majority of black residents.

"Things can change in a way that a super-packed district comes to represent less power even if it keeps the same lines," said Justin Levitt, a law professor and redistricting expert at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. He said the high court could use the case to offer more guidance about the appropriate use of race in redistricting.

The three-judge panel rejected the claim about diluting black voter strength. In the majority decision, U.S. Circuit Judge Bill Pryor wrote that "the overwhelming evidence in the record suggests that black voters will have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process the same as everyone else." He was joined by U.S. District Judge Keith Watkins. Both are Republican appointees

The lone black judge on the panel, U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson, dissented. He is a Democratic appointee.

Tuesday's primary election will be the first to use the new districts. The Supreme Court will not hear arguments in the redistricting challenge until the court's new term begins in October, making it unlikely the case will be resolved before the general election on Nov. 4.

Reed, the state's Democratic Conference chairman, said he hopes the Supreme Court will order the Legislature to draw new districts and then Alabama will hold another legislative election. That occurred in 1983 when the plan drawn by the Legislature using the 1980 Census got struck down in court.

Alabama Republicans had similarly challenged the districts drawn by the Legislature's then-Democratic majority after the 2000 Census, but they also lost. Republicans gained control of the Legislature in the 2010 election.

Reed also said he's concerned the Supreme Court's review could go the other way, based on the court's ruling last year that wiped out a major provision of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. "I don't want the court to use this case to further undermine black representation," he said.

The cases are Alabama Legislative Black Caucus v. State of Alabama, 13-895, and Alabama Democratic Conference v. Alabama, 13-1138.

Governor's campaign could highlight jobs, Medicaid (Montgomery Advertiser)

Gov. Robert Bentley has spent the past four years setting up his re-election campaign as a referendum on the state of employment in Alabama. His likely Democratic opponent will try to make it a referendum on Bentley's opposition to Medicaid expansion.

But first, both men will have to make it out of their primaries.

Bentley will square off against Stacy George, a correctional officer from Limestone County seeking the GOP nomination. Former U.S. Rep. Parker Griffith of Huntsville, like Bentley, will have a challenger — Robert Bass, a Fayette resident and former minor-league ballplayer, on the Democratic side of the ballot.

Incumbency has proven beneficial to Bentley's campaign chest. On Thursday, Bentley reported \$2.7 million on hand, by far the largest single amount of any statewide candidate in the campaign.

Griffith reported just over \$28,000 on hand, but said he'll focus more on fundraising after the primary.

Employment

The governor, a dermatologist by training, based his 2010 election campaign on bringing jobs to Alabama, and is doing the same with his re-election campaign, touting an unemployment rate that has fallen from 8.9 percent when he first took office to 6.9 percent in April, the last month for which figures are available.

According to one measure used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the state's nonfarm employment numbers rose from 1,864,200 in January, 2011, when Bentley took office, to 1,911,100 last January, a net increase of just under 47,000 jobs.

The governor Friday said the job situation was not exactly where he wanted it to be, but felt the state was moving in the right direction, citing work he has done putting in workforce training programs in place.

"I think even though the numbers aren't what we want them to be, they're better than they were when I came into office," Bentley said. "They're not going the wrong way, they're going the right way."

Still, the overall picture is mixed. While the unemployment rate in the state has fallen, the state's labor force has also contracted by more than 53,000 people since Bentley became governor. The job growth the state has experienced has been uneven. While manufacturing has added roughly 17,000 jobs since the start of 2011, the only other sector in the state to add more than 10,000 jobs in the previous three years has been the relatively low-paying leisure and hospitality sector. Other sectors, most notably construction, have struggled to create jobs.

In part, the state is struggling with demographics: Alabama's median age is higher than the nation's as a whole, particularly among the white population, and both manufacturing groups and labor unions have warned that state manufacturing will lose a number of skilled workers to retirement in the coming years.

"We are putting things in place that five years from now will reap benefits in this state," Bentley said. "We are already seeing a difference. It will really pick up when economy picks up some. The main thing is having the workforce available."

Griffith, like many other Democrats before him, said he wants to create tax credits for those who invest in small businesses in the state.

But his major job program is expansion of Medicaid offered under the Affordable Care Act. A 2012 University of Alabama at Birmingham study has suggested Medicaid expansion would create roughly 30,000 new jobs in the state and add \$1.7 billion to tax revenues. A Troy University study, which deliberately factored out direct impacts such as increased hospital and physician revenues, suggested a cost to the state from the expansion.

"If we're not willing to make an effort to change that, what kind of reputation will we have on the national or international level?" Griffith said.

Medicaid

Alabama's Medicaid program has extremely high eligibility requirements, and rarely covers single adults. Adults with children may qualify, but would have to make just 16 percent of the poverty line — \$3,166 a year — to earn benefits.

Griffith's Medicaid expansion proposal would follow a model pioneered in Arkansas, where Alabama would take money targeted for Medicaid expansion and use it to purchase private insurance for those earning 138 percent of the federal poverty line or less — about \$16,104 for an individual, and \$32,913 for a family of four. The federal government would pay 100 percent of the costs through 2017; after that, the federal share would slowly decline to 90 percent of total costs by 2022.

"We think it gives us more flexibility to tailor the plan for Alabama," he said.

The former congressman, who voted against the Affordable Care Act while serving his term, said any savings would be used to retool Medicaid.

Griffith, whose background is in oncology, cited public health and financial benefits in expanding Medicaid. Treating breast cancer, he noted, costs about \$25,000 when detected at stage 1; at stage 3, it can cost \$300,000 to \$400,000.

"We've left several billion dollars on the table," he said. "We've denied (people) the diagnosis of diseases."

Bentley has repeatedly — and sometimes wearily — insisted he has no plans to expand Medicaid. The governor has cited multiple reasons for his stance, ranging from a fear the state's troubled General Fund could not swallow even 10 percent of the costs of the program to a desire to force changes in the Affordable Care Act.

"I opposed Medicaid expansion because it's Obamacare," he said. "I am opposed to Obamacare. I do not think it can ever be successfully implemented."

Prisons

The state's overcrowded prisons are the subject of at least one federal investigation, and a number of lawmakers have expressed concerns that the system may fall into receivership, which could force Alabama to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to make improvements. Bentley said that it is a problem that has to be solved; committees are meeting this year to study overcrowding and propose solutions, possibly in the form of legislation in the 2015 regular session.

Griffith said he would look to expand drug courts as a way of diverting nonviolent offenders from the system, as well as education programs for those in prison and on probation.

General Fund

The General Fund budget will lose a major source of funds in fiscal year 2016, which begins on Oct. 1 of next year, and could plunge the entire budget into crisis, particularly with Medicaid and Corrections consuming an ever-larger slice of the budget. Bentley said Friday he was beginning to form committees to look at the problem and offer ideas, but declined to discuss further specifics. Griffith said he believed extra taxes generated by Medicaid expansion could assist the budget.

Other candidates

But before Bentley can worry about the general election, he has to make it through the primary, and George believes that many not happen. George, who has said he will be a “gun-toting governor,” said in an interview last week that he favors a statewide lottery, with the proceeds to be split between the state General Fund, municipal improvement projects, emergency services and education programs. George also said he would favor Medicaid expansion, though with some limits on household eligibility.

A correctional officer, George said he would try to bring the state’s prisons under control by repealing the Habitual Offender Act and imposing stricter guidelines on sentencing.

George said he hoped to bring a middle-class perspective to the governor’s mansion.

“We’ve got too many doctors, lawyers and filthy rich businessmen running the state of Alabama, and they do not live like normal people live,” he said. “Gov. Bentley made \$380,000 last year and didn’t take a pay check. I made \$38,000 last year, and I took a pay check.”

Attempts to reach Bass last week were unsuccessful.

Staff writer Kala Kachmar contributed to this report

Alabama governor

Gov. Robert Bentley

Age: 71

Residence: Tuscaloosa

Party: Republican

Education: B.S. University of Alabama; M.D., University of Alabama Birmingham School of Medicine

Career: Dermatologist

Family: Wife Dianne; four children; seven grandchildren

Previous political offices: Alabama House of Representatives, 2002-2010

Parker Griffith

Age: 71

Residence: Huntsville

Party: Democratic

Education: B.S., Louisiana State University; M.D., Louisiana State University

Career: Radiation oncology physician

Family: Wife Virginia; five children; 12 grandchildren

Previous political offices: U.S. House of Representatives, 2009-11; Alabama Senate, 2006-2008

[Study: ObamaCare costs Alabama \\$2 billion in wages, 150 million paid work hours \(Yellowhammer News\)](#)

As the provisions of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) continue to be implemented, there are now more signs that the Administration's labyrinthine healthcare program has the potential to cripple the vulnerable populations it had originally promised to help.

Earlier this year, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) issued a report estimating the effects of implementing the ACA on the national labor market. According to their findings, once the major provisions of the ACA are fully enacted in 2017, employers will reduce the number of hours worked by their employees by between 1.5% and 2%, "almost entirely" in the CBO's own words, "because workers will choose to supply less labor—given the new taxes and other incentives they will face and the financial benefits some will receive." The CBO predicts the corresponding reduction in wages will be less severe — about 1% of all wages by 2024 — but only because the largest reductions in labor hours are expected to be among low-wage workers, one of the groups the ACA was originally touted as helping the most.

When the CBO's estimates are applied to Alabama's labor market, the growth in hours worked and total wages paid in the state will not stop, but it will slow. Prior to the release of the CBO's report, the

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimated the number of paid hours worked by Alabamians will grow from 3.65 billion hours in 2012 to almost 4 billion hours in 2022, and that the salaries paid for this work would increase by almost \$8 billion over the same period.

By hobbling both the economy and human potential, the ACA is yet another form of government assistance that perpetuates lifelong government dependence.

Once most of the ACA is implemented, the upward trajectories of both paid hours worked and salaries will be blunted. Specifically, Alabamians are projected to work between 155 million and 207 million fewer paid hours between 2017 and 2022. At the same time, more than \$2 billion in wages will be lost that would have been realized had the ACA not been passed.

Another way the CBO calculated the effects of the ACA on the national labor market was by converting the number of lost paid hours into the equivalent of full-time jobs. Using the same calculations for Alabama's labor force, the reduction of more than 150 million paid work hours would be the equivalent of losing between 22,700 and 30,300 jobs between 2017 and 2022. To put this number in perspective, the BLS estimates about 20,000 new jobs per year will be created in Alabama between 2012 and 2022. With the implementation of the ACA, the equivalent of more than a year's worth of new jobs will be lost between 2017 and 2022.

One of the most tragic findings of the CBO report was that the largest declines in labor supply would be among lower-wage workers. In an economy that already cannot supply adequate employment opportunities to the unemployed and the underemployed, the ACA will only make this problem worse.

In a perverse twist, the ACA creates a disincentive to work because as income increases, government benefits decrease. Even if an individual manages to hold more than one part-time job with fewer hours to earn what they might have made several years ago with only one job, the taxes and fees associated with employers providing healthcare coverage under the ACA likely means none of them will offer insurance, making the choice to remain underemployed but still insured a tempting option. By hobbling both the economy and human potential, the ACA is yet another form of government assistance that perpetuates lifelong government dependence.

[Gov. Bentley says Alabama could lure new tire manufacturing plant \(Tuscaloosa News\)](#)

By Patrick Rupinski

Alabama is in the running for a new tire manufacturing plant.

"We are one of four or five states where they are looking," Gov. Robert Bentley said Monday.

Bentley did not name the tire company, but he said the proposed plant has the potential of creating up to 2,000 new jobs.

The governor told a gathering of people who run small businesses in Tuscaloosa that he spoke with officials with the tire company last week. He said the company is interested in two sites in Alabama. He did not identify where those sites are.

Bentley's comments came during a question and answer session with the businesspeople at the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama office.

The meeting was part of Bentley's "Road to Economic Recovery Tour," in which he has toured the state, usually for two days each week during the last few months, to discuss economic development and the state's economic recovery.

Much of his discussion Monday centered on small-business development, but he was asked if any major manufacturing plants might come to Alabama, resulting in his comments about the tire plant.

Bentley, who is seeking the Republican nomination for a second term in today's primary, said the two biggest manufacturers to announce plans to build plants in the state during his current term were Airbus, which is building a plant near Mobile to make planes, and Remington, which announced plans this year to build a firearms factory, that could employ 2,100 people, in Huntsville.

He said, however, that he was most proud of getting two smaller manufacturers.

He cited Wrangler's decision to rebuild its distribution center in Hackleburg after the center was destroyed by an April 27, 2011, tornado. He said that community's survival depended on the plant's return.

And he said he was equally proud of last week's grand opening of the Golden Dragon Precise Copper Tube Group Inc. plant in Wilcox County. The plant initially will employ about 150 people, but is expected to eventually have about 300 workers.

Wilcox County is one of the state's poorest counties and has the one of the highest unemployment rates in Alabama. Bentley said he worked on recruiting the Chinese company for the county shortly

after taking office. He said it was the first new manufacturer to locate in the county since 1969, the year that men first landed on the moon.

[Report: Japan's Dai-ichi Life could buy Birmingham-based Protective Life \(al.com\)](#)

A Japanese insurance company is poised to buy Birmingham-based Protective Life Corp., according to reports.

On Monday, the English-language Asian business magazine, Nikkei, reported that the Japanese insurer, Dai-ichi Life Insurance Co., could soon offer to buy Protective Life in a \$4.87 billion deal.

Dai-ichi has been looking to expand into the United States, as the insurance market in Japan has become saturated. The company told the Tokyo market that it intended to acquire an American insurer, but it did not disclose which one, the Bloomberg news service reported.

A spokesperson for Protective Life declined to comment to Bloomberg about the report.

If Protective Life's board approves the deal, its management would likely remain in place, according to Nikkei.

[United Auto Workers' outgoing chief anticipates gains in the South, but Alabama's pro-union Mercedes employees disagree \(al.com\)](#)

The retiring president of the United Auto Workers union said he believes the groundwork has been laid for gains at foreign automakers' operations in the U.S. South, including Alabama's Mercedes-Benz plant.

But pro-union workers at the Tuscaloosa County operation, who once worked closely with the UAW on the current campaign to organize the factory, are now asking that union to leave.

Read the story.

Bob King, who steps down from his post as UAW president at the organization's convention in Detroit this week, has said its long-term future depends on success in the South.

"I think you'll see representation at Volkswagen and at Mercedes and at BMW," King told Reuters in an interview last week. "I think that within the next term, you will see the UAW get across the goal line on more than one."

Read the full report from Reuters.

However, longtime Mercedes employees Kirk Garner and Jim Spitzley say they and fellow union supporters have grown frustrated with the UAW's failure to file for an election, after several campaigns over the years.

They also cite mistakes in the current campaign.

The men say they still want a union at the plant. But they are blocked from working with another one because the UAW has exclusive jurisdiction over the Mercedes operation.

"We're dedicated to the cause of furthering workers' rights," Garner said. "We just don't want to do it with the UAW."

[Obama defends decision to trade 5 Guantanamo detainees for Bergdahl \(Washington Post\)](#)

WARSAW — President Obama on Tuesday strongly defended his administration's decision to return five detainees held at Guantanamo Bay to the Taliban in exchange for the release of Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl after five years of captivity, though he acknowledged that some of the released detainees could once again try to harm the United States.

"We have consulted with Congress for quite some time about the possibility that we might need to execute a prisoner exchange in order to recover Bergdahl," Obama said on a trip to Poland to discuss Eastern European security. "We saw an opportunity, and we were concerned about Bergdahl's health. We had the cooperation of the Qataris to execute an exchange and we seized that opportunity." He added that "the process was truncated because we wanted to make sure we would not miss that window."

Amid mounting congressional criticism about the operation, Obama said both the United States and authorities in the Persian Gulf emirate of Qatar, who helped organize the trade, would closely monitor the released Guantanamo detainees.

"Is there the possibility of some of them trying to return to activities that are detrimental to us? Absolutely," Obama said in a news conference with Poland's president. "There's a certain recidivism rate that takes place."

But Obama added that he would not have authorized the trade if he "thought it was contrary to U.S. national security."

Obama also refused to rule out that Bergdahl could face punishment for, as some allege, abandoning his unit in Afghanistan. But he said that question is not the priority as Bergdahl recovers from captivity.

"We obviously have not been interrogating Sergeant Bergdahl," Obama said. "He's going to have to undergo a significant transition back into life. He has not even met with his family yet."

Obama added that regardless of the circumstances of his capture, "we still get back an American soldier if he's held in captivity. Period. Full stop."

Obama framed the war decisions he faced as the natural sorts of choices that come with the end of the war.

"It's what happened to George Washington. It's what happened to Lincoln. It's what happened to FDR," he said.

In his own response to inquiries about the swap, Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in a statement posted on his Facebook page that "the questions about this particular soldier's conduct are separate from our effort to recover ANY U.S. service member in enemy captivity."

Dempsey added: "This was likely the last, best opportunity to free him. As for the circumstances of his capture, when he is able to provide them, we'll learn the facts. Like any American, he is innocent until proven guilty. Our Army's leaders will not look away from misconduct if it occurred. In the meantime, we will continue to care for him and his family."

Dempsey offered tanks to “those who for almost five years worked to find him, prepared to rescue him, and ultimately put themselves at risk to recover him.”

Bergdahl, 28, is believed to have slipped away from his platoon’s small outpost in Af-ghanistan’s Paktika province on June 30, 2009, after growing disillusioned with the U.S. military’s war effort. He was captured shortly afterward by enemy -forces and held captive in Pakistan by insurgents affiliated with the Taliban. Some U.S. troops resented risking their lives in the weeks that followed to search for someone they considered a deserter.