



Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh
Press Clips
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[Could law prohibiting dues payments by payroll deduction be the end of AEA? Today in Alabama politics \(AL.com\)](#)

A newly enforced law will bring greater scrutiny to the activities of the Alabama Education Association and could be the beginning of the end for one of the most active players in state politics.

At least, that's what state GOP leaders are hoping.

Alabama Republican Party chief Bill Armistead said in a recent blog post the law will prohibit organizations like AEA from receiving dues through payroll deductions unless they certify the money is not being used for political purposes, including lobbying or campaign donations.

"The state should have never been in the business of helping a political organization collect dues that would be used for political purposes," Armistead said.

Republicans pushed through a measure mandating the change in 2010. AEA challenged the law but a federal court stay on enforcement of the act was lifted earlier this year and the law went into effect recently. The change means AEA can no longer use payroll deduction to collect dues from its 95,000 members, who will instead have to sign up for a bank-draft to cover dues.

AEA's presence in state elections is huge. In recent primary races, AEA pumped about \$7 million into various campaigns.

Armistead said the switch to bank drafts will hurt AEA's membership.

"The dues will now be right in front of them, instead of automatically taken out before they received their paychecks," he said. "For an organization... with the goal of electing candidates who would be blindly loyal to the AEA, this could mean rough waters ahead."

"Rank and file members of the AEA are hardworking teachers and support personnel who want what is best for the children," Armistead said. "The teachers' union has historically held little accountability to its members, instead relying on scare tactics to force their cooperation."

Armistead then reiterated a theme Republicans have employed before to stress the philosophical differences they said exists between AEA and its rank-and-file members.

"The special interest group is far more interested in attempting to regain power than they are in protecting the students, teachers and school administrators of our state. The dues of our hard-working educators should not be a fundraiser for politicians who promote values far off from their own," he said.

Here's what else is making headlines in Alabama politics today:

Independent poll puts Palmer 30 points ahead of DeMarco, with caveats, a week from the runoff

Congressman Byrne seeks input on illegal immigration through online survey

Albritton, D'Olive debate taxes, economy in GOP runoff for Senate District 22

Fitzgerald Washington of Buffalo Rock named labor commissioner by Gov. Robert Bentley

More than 20 mayors in the 6th District endorse Paul DeMarco in runoff

[Here's one reason why Alabama might soon be spending a lot more on prisons \(AL.com\)](#)

Beyond capacity and staffing issues, there's another reason why Alabama might soon be forced to spend even more money on its corrections system.

The cost of health care in Alabama prisons is rising, especially when compared with other states.

For now, health care spending per inmate in Alabama remains low, according to calculations done by the Pew Charitable Trusts. From 2007 to 2011, Alabama's rank among states moved little, between 43rd- and 45th-lowest.

In 2011, Alabama spent \$3,769 per prisoner on health care, according to Pew's calculations. In that same year, 29 other states spent at least \$5,000 per prisoner, while California spent \$14,495.

But while Alabama has managed to keep costs low, future increases may be in the works. From 2007 to 2011, per-inmate health care costs grew 22 percent -- four times faster than the average growth of the 10 cheapest states put together. Overall, Alabama had the eighth-fastest growth in health care costs per inmate from 2007 to 2011, Pew found.

Could Medicaid help?

In addition to charting trends in spending, the Pew report offers recommendations for how states might contain future cost growth pressures. One strategy they highlight is accepting the federal government's proposed expansion of Medicaid, a contentious issue in Alabama.

"States expanding their Medicaid eligibility under the Affordable Care Act may reap the largest savings," the report says. "Most inmates, as nondisabled adults without dependent children, will only become eligible for coverage of inpatient costs under this expansion."

Medicaid enrollment in Alabama recently exceeded 1 million residents, despite the state's decision to reject the federal government's expansion proposal. While spending growth has been relatively tame compared with other states, Medicaid consumes well over a third of Alabama's General Fund.

Anniston payday lending restrictions could spur state legislative action (Anniston Star)

Anniston's recent plans to restrict the practices of payday lenders could help push stronger statewide regulations, some policy advocacy groups and legislators say.

Anniston officials announced on Monday efforts to curb the growth of payday loan lenders through a new ordinance based on population and location. Some advocacy groups for the poor and Alabama legislators say such restrictions are part of a trend among cities that, if it continues, could encourage lawmakers to pass stronger statewide regulations on the payday lending industry. Meanwhile, payday lender advocates say increased regulations are anti-business and will hurt consumers who need the industry's services.

During its Monday work session, the Anniston City Council asked City Manager Brian Johnson to create an ordinance to regulate new payday lenders based on the population of the city. Members also said they want a plan to keep payday lenders from opening in certain areas, such as near residential properties, Quintard Avenue or other areas used for retail. There are up to 19 such businesses in the city, mainly on Quintard Avenue.

Johnson said he could have an ordinance ready for the council to review in a couple of weeks. He added that current payday lenders would be exempt from any new regulations.

Shay Farley, legal director at Alabama Appleseed, said if Anniston approves its ordinance, it will be the 22nd city in the state to pass such restrictions on payday lenders. Alabama Appleseed is a nonprofit, non-partisan public interest legal advocacy group that promotes policy reforms that help the poor. "As cities across the state pass these ordinances, it sends a clear message to the state Legislature that it's time to take a stand," Farley said. "These are not the types of businesses that foster local development."

Critics of payday lenders like Alabama Appleseed contend that such businesses keep borrowers in a constant state of debt and hurt local economies.

"If you're spending all your hard-earned cash on paydays, you don't have the money to go to local hardware stores, or go to movies," Farley said. "And when potential developers drive down the street and see these stores practically stacked on top of one another, they do not see that area as a viable community to do business in."

Payday loan stores offer money based on a person's income. In Alabama, payday lenders are allowed to charge 400 percent annual interest rates on their loans, which equates to about \$17.50 per \$100

loaned. State law limits the loan amounts to \$500 per customer. However, there is no statewide database to track who is taking out the loans.

"The lack of a database allows people to go from store to store and exceed the legal loan limit," said Stephen Stetson, policy analyst for Alabama Arise, a nonpartisan group that advocates for low-income residents.

Stetson said he agreed that more cities passing restrictions could push the Legislature into action.

"It acknowledges the harm of the lending and the practices of these lenders and says that this is something needs to be legislated," Stetson said. "The more cities that regulate, the more it justifies the push for legislation in Montgomery."

Alabama Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, said if more cities like Anniston pass similar regulations, that could spur the Legislature to pass more stringent regulations of payday lenders. Several bills to do just that have been introduced in the Legislature in recent years, but they have gained little traction.

Marsh said he sponsored a bill two years ago to better regulate payday lenders, including creating a central database of borrowers. He said efforts now are focusing on just creating the database, and then seeing if more regulation is needed.

"We want to make sure citizens aren't being victimized through the process," Marsh said. "My main concern is consumer protection issues."

Max Wood, president of Borrow Smart Alabama, a volunteer organization of 400 lenders in the state that works to educate consumers about payday businesses, said increased regulations on the payday industry are unfair.

"Why would they select us for screening and zoning assignments when they don't do that to businesses like drug stores, restaurants or automobile dealers," Wood asked. "That's anti-competitive, anti-business and anti-consumer."

Wood said limiting the payday lending industry will hurt consumers who need short-term loans.

"These people need to be able to fulfill their needs — they need the funds," Wood said. "Many of these people wouldn't qualify for any amount at banks ... we don't use any credit checks, we just use their paychecks as collateral."

Amy Cantu, spokeswoman for the Community Financial Services Association of America, a national lobbying organization for payday loan businesses, also said attempts to limit the growth and services of payday lenders hurts consumers.

"Similar to other restrictions, you are eliminating an option for consumers and not eliminating the need," Cantu said.

Cantu said payday lenders offer many services that banks do not, such as longer hours of operation and check cashing.

"What policy makers are doing is eliminating financial solutions and in the absence of options, consumers have to go to inferior options," Cantu said. "Many have to rely on bank overdrafts, which can be more expensive than the interest for payday loans."

Gov. Bentley faces reality (Montgomery Advertiser)

Fiscal realities have to drive decisions. No matter what a governor might want to do and no matter how worthy an objective it might be, the cost has to be covered. It is encouraging to hear Gov. Robert Bentley acknowledging hard fiscal truths and saying that a special session of the Legislature to address a pay raise for education employees is looking less likely.

Bentley was not happy with the education budget the Legislature passed in this year's regular session. He wanted a 2 percent pay raise included, but legislators argued that the state could not provide that raise and also cover a looming shortfall in the insurance program that would have increased out-of-pocket costs for teachers and other education employees. The Legislature chose to fund the insurance program.

Bentley talked of vetoing the budget, but grudgingly signed it a week after the session ended. He then said he would consider calling a special session to propose the pay raise.

The issue is not whether education employees deserve a pay raise. Paying for it is the issue and that simply does not appear to be an affordable option. Revenue for the Education Trust Fund had been projected to grow by about 2 percent. It hasn't. Instead, the growth rate has been only about a third of that, 0.7 percent.

Barring a scarcely plausible surge in revenue with just three months left in the fiscal year, the raise is not realistic.

It's also important to note that a pay raise carries an ongoing impact on the state's finances. It becomes a permanent part of future budgets and also affects pension costs.

To push a pay raise that isn't supported by the revenue growth figures would be irresponsible, so Bentley is right to move away from the idea in light of the tax collection numbers the state is seeing.

As we have noted here many times before, this is another example of the boom-and-bust nature of state budgeting under a taxation system that relies heavily on consumer and income taxes and thus is highly susceptible to peaks and valleys in the economy. Alabama has seen a lot more valleys than peaks in recent years.

We do not oppose a pay raise for teachers and other education employees; indeed, we'd love to see it. But we are opposed to a raise the state appears unable to afford. In this case, the Legislature's decision in the regular session looks like the right call.

[Melson, Seibert in runoff Tuesday for Republican nomination for state Senate District 1 seat \(AL.com\)](#)

Two candidates – Tim Melson of Florence and Chris Seibert of Athens – will be in a runoff Tuesday, July 15 for the Republican nomination for the Alabama Senate District 1 seat. The winner will face Democratic nominee Mike Curtis in the Nov. 2 general election.

Democratic incumbent Tammy Irons of Florence did not run for re-election. District 1 was newly drawn for this election cycle and covers from western Lauderdale County, through portions of Limestone and into Madison County.

Here's a look at the run-off candidates and the comments on issues from previous AL.com interviews, an introduction and a Q&A:

TIM MELSON

Age: 54

City of Residence: Florence

Education: Bachelor's degree from University of North Alabama, MD from University of Alabama at Birmingham

Family: Wife of 33 years, Lynn. Three adult children and three grandchildren.

Occupation: Retired anesthesiologist, business owner, farmer

On jobs: "I'm running to grow our economy and create jobs in north Alabama. We have seen with the recent announcements from Remington and Verizon that companies want to relocate or expand in our area. I will work to keep our taxes low and reduce burdensome government regulation so the private sector can create jobs and strengthen our economy."

On values: "I'm also running to protect our conservative values in Montgomery. I will defend our Second Amendment rights, continue to ensure that our education system is controlled at the local level and will fight to protect the rights of the unborn."

On biggest issue facing the district: "What I hear mainly in Lauderdale County is jobs. We did lose HON, IP (International Paper) and now Hillshire Farms, as well. They're not all closed but they will be closing soon. If that's 2,400 or 2,500 people with a family of four, with insurance benefits and all that together, that's a big concern. What I'm hearing in Limestone, mainly, is they're worried about representation from people outside the area, which is understandable. We have to worry about the whole district. The other issue has been health care. I guess because I'm a physician, it gets me a few more questions about that. I hear it from both sides, physicians and patients. People are worried about keeping their insurance, keeping their doctor, all the things they were promised that have not happened."

CHRIS SEIBERT

Age: 38

City of Residence: Athens

Education: Bachelor of arts degree in history from the University of Alabama, where he played football for Coach Gene Stallings as a linebacker and was a 1996 letterman. Received a master's of business administration from the University of South Alabama while on active duty in the Air Force.

Family: I am married to my high school sweetheart, Tiffany, for 15 years and am the proud father of 10-year-old Brock and 6-year-old Ben.

Occupation: Former captain in the Air Force. Small businessman and sales director for Stereotaxis, which manufactures robotically guided heart-catherization equipment.

On jobs: "Job creation is certainly one of the things I'll focus on. We've got a good model that's worked in both Limestone and Madison counties. In my tenure on the Council, we've created about 3,000 jobs amongst the two counties. That's what we can carry to the region in Lauderdale, as well. They've got natural resources, they've got talented employees. They've got infrastructure in place. They've got the things necessary to create jobs. I think it's really just a strategy and alignment with governor's office and alignment with the economic development office in Montgomery. I think also education, as well. We really need to focus on putting our resources where it matters and that's with teachers and students. That'll be one of my major focuses, coming from an education family."

On values: "I am a proud member of the NRA and was honored to receive an A rating. I will protect our Second Amendment rights and our conservative values. I am a pro-life Christian and the father of two young sons that attend public school. I know what is at stake and we must invest and improve our schools and make our schools the best in Alabama."

On biggest issue facing the district: "It's different depending on what county you're in. The No. 1 concern is about job losses. They hit the Lauderdale County area a lot harder. People have concerns about their future opportunity for employment. They've lost roughly 4,000 jobs in that area since I've been running for office. Also, you hear some about Obamacare, which is a federal issue but we get asked about it a lot. There are some things we can do (in the state)."

Carly's Law father asks: Is potato salad more important than saving a child's life? (AL.com)

It's not the rare neurological disorder causing a barrage of seizures and other health issues in his 3-year-old daughter, Carly, that's generating the sick feeling in Dustin Chandler's stomach.

It's potato salad. More than \$56,000 worth at last count.

The Birmingham-area father who helped create the state legislation approved this year known as Carly's Law that authorizes a study of a marijuana-derived medicine for treating seizures has been hard at work on projects to help children and their families.

The Pelham police officer has been stirring support for development of an all-inclusive playground in Pelham for children with practically any disability. He's been trying to raise \$50,000 with Birmingham-area radio personality Matt Murphy to help find a cure for CDKL5, which affects Carly and about 600 or 700 other children with documented cases worldwide.

Their fundraising campaign to benefit the International Foundation for CDKL5 Research has raised about \$1,805 on their YouCaring.com webpage over the last month or so.

Meanwhile, a page on Kickstarter.com to raise money for "making potato salad" has generated nearly \$57,000 as of Tuesday night after just a few days from more than 4,500 donors.

"I've got a 3-year-old daughter that cannot talk. She is lying on the floor and she can't sit up. She can't walk and say mommy or daddy. And she has seizures all day. And potato salad?" Chandler said in an interview Tuesday night.

"It's a kick-in-the-gut kind of day," he said about learning that so many people will donate for someone to make potato salad. "It's a kick in the gut for my daughter. It's a kick in the gut for children fighting for their lives."

Chandler doesn't want to believe that people will throw away money to some guy from Columbus, Ohio, who states on Kickstarter.com: "Basically I'm just making potato salad. I haven't decided what kind yet."

But he can't deny the dollars generated for making potato salad over another cause such as trying to save children's lives.

"This is the reality. It's a kick-in-the-gut kind of day because I know the reality my daughter is faced with and her reality is not good. It is so hard for people to understand that," he said. "You fight so hard for every single inch that you get and you find out a story like this, it makes me want to fight harder. I am determined to get the \$50,000."

Chandler along with Murphy, Pelham Mayor Gary Waters and Pelham City Councilman Ron Scott, with possibly others, are planning on skydiving Sept. 27 to raise money for CDKL5 research.

Every single dollar raised for the cause will support CDKL5 research that could lead to a cure, Chandler said.

"Obviously CDKL5 is what I want to raise money for, but there are thousands of rare disorders that children are dying from out there. It's not about potato salad," Chandler said. "We're fighting for a human being, a soul that God gave us that's our responsibility. It blows my mind that potato salad could take off like that."

Like spinach for Popeye, potato salad is giving Chandler strength.

"It's mental anguish for a lot of these parents fighting every day for your kid and we're doing our best to bring awareness to it," he said. "It's a kick in the gut but it makes me more determined. It makes the fire in my belly even hotter to fight for these kids."

Anyone who wants to donate to the CDKL5 fundraiser can access the YouCaring.com campaign by following this link.

How a century-old steam plant may play a huge role in downtown Birmingham's resurgence (Yellowhammer News)

The two chimneys atop the Powell Avenue Steam Plant have been fixtures of the Birmingham skyline for over a century. Originally constructed only 25 years after the City of Birmingham's founding, the 60,000 square-foot facility was built to power a "new south" city rising out of the mineral-rich soil of central Alabama.

"It was like a boomtown," explained Alabama historian Dr. Leah Atkins. "People were flooding into the city to take advantage of real estate booms. The mines and mills opened up, more railroads came, and of course, an important thing was that the city had to have electricity. In 1896, Powell Avenue Steam Plant was built — and it was a state-of-the-art facility at that time — to provide the electricity for a 'new south' city."

The plant powered Birmingham's ascension into an industrial powerhouse.

"The growth of Birmingham grew up around this plant," said Alabama Power Archivist Bill Tharpe. "It saw the coming of the airplane, the coming of the automobile, the civil rights movement of the 1960s. It's sort of the grandam of Birmingham."

But in 2013, Alabama Power finally shut it down.

"That's continuous operation for approximately 117 years," said Dale Dambach, who managed the plant for over three decades.

Powell Avenue Steam Plant

As the Powell Avenue Steam Plant aged, so too did Birmingham's once-vibrant downtown. The city's population shrank 12.6 percent from 2000 to 2010. Thousands of buildings sat dormant as businesses and residents moved to suburban areas surrounding the city's center. Jefferson County's \$4.2 billion bankruptcy filing in 2011 only made matters worse.

But over the last several years, Birmingham's beleaguered downtown has experienced a remarkable resurgence. Even the New York Times took note in a piece titled "A Return to Downtown Birmingham."

And today, Alabama Power CEO Mark Crosswhite announced that the Powell Avenue Steam Plant will now power the next phase of Birmingham's comeback story — not with electricity, but by adding a spark to the cultural renaissance taking place downtown thanks to development projects like Regions Field and Railroad Park.

In a video presentation titled "A New Venue for a New Era," Crosswhite's team laid out a massive renovation concept that would turn the old steam plant into a modern venue that could include outdoor green areas, restaurants, retail space, a theater, an entertainment venue, museums and other attractions that they believe will "create an economic generator for the future of Birmingham. A place that lures our children and our children's children home for the next century with opportunity."

Mark Crosswhite, CEO of Alabama Power Co.

Mark Crosswhite, CEO of Alabama Power Co.

"This is a concept," Crosswhite said during a speech to the Birmingham Rotary Club. "This is our vision for what Powell Avenue could be."

Crosswhite's speech was also notable because it was the first major public event he has keynoted since taking over the helm of the Power Company on March 1st. He made it clear to the packed room at The Harbert Center that economic development will continue being a major priority for the company under his leadership.

"There are many questions about what Powell Avenue will evolve into, who will develop it, what might be located there," Crosswhite said. "Will there be costs to develop Powell Avenue? Absolutely. But there would be costs if we did nothing more than leave Powell Avenue empty. There'd be costs if we tore down Powell Avenue. But what would be the cost of losing another historic landmark in Birmingham? We've got a different vision for Powell Avenue. We believe it can be a catalyst for further development in the city's center. We believe that if we revitalize Powell Avenue in the very heart of Birmingham, it will bring more people downtown and be a driver for economic growth in the city and the entire region."

Want to see what Crosswhite has in mind? Check out the video below, followed by a handful of artist renderings.

[Fitzgerald Washington of Buffalo Rock named labor commissioner by Gov. Robert Bentley \(AL.com\)](#)

Fitzgerald Washington, general sales manager for The Buffalo Rock Company, will join Gov. Robert Bentley's cabinet as Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Labor.

Bentley's office announced the appointment today. It is effective Aug. 4.

Washington will replace Tom Surtees, who announced his retirement in June.

"Fitzgerald will play a fundamental role as we work to provide employment opportunities for Alabamians looking for a job," Bentley said in a statement. "I appreciate his willingness to serve in my administration, and I know he will be an honest and dedicated labor commissioner."

Washington has worked for Buffalo Rock for 15 years. He was corporate marketing and sales director before being promoted to general sales manager in 2002.

Washington served as chairman of the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama in 2013. He helped create the Minority Business Council to help minority-owned businesses in west Alabama.

"My mission as director is to continue the department's efforts to help unemployed Alabamians find a job and ensure certain unemployment compensation benefits are available to them," Washington said in a statement. "The governor's overall mission is job creation, and the Department of Labor will work hand-in-hand to help the governor with that mission."