



Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh
Press Clips
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[Turnout for runoff exceeds expectations, but expectations were mighty low \(AL.com\)](#)

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Turnout in Tuesday's primary runoff exceeded expectations but those expectations were mighty low.

Alabama Secretary of State Jim Bennett said about 8 percent of the state's 2.9 million voters participated.

Bennett had predicted only 5 percent would take part.

Turnout was stronger in areas with hot races, such as the 6th Congressional District and state Senate District 30.

"While we would have preferred turnout to be higher, it was about as predicted," Bennett said. "We look forward to a higher voter turnout in November."

Bennett said there were no issues reported with photo voter ID.

Coal matters and demands our support: guest opinion (AL.com)

It's a pretty good rule of thumb that if President Barack Obama is for something, I will be against it. Despite our growing need for energy, the president has declared a "War on Coal."

I, for one, will not allow Obama and his liberal Environmental Protection Agency to harm one of the biggest industries in this part of the state, which includes the senate district I represent. That is why I have worked with other legislators, including ones across the aisle like Senator Roger Bedford, to do everything we can in Alabama to thwart the president's job-killing agenda and his "War on Coal."

Did you know that Alabama's coal mining industry directly employs 4,000 coal miners who bring home a total annual payroll of more than \$300 million? The industry supports 16,000 Alabama jobs and has a \$1.3 billion dollar economic impact on our state.

That's huge!

Like many of the people in this area, my roots run deep into the coal bed. Our family earned its livelihood because of the coal industry. My father-in-law worked in the mines. Both my grandfathers were coal miners. To me, this unfounded assault on our coal and the jobs it supports is personal.

Just this past legislative session, I sponsored a resolution signed by 28 other senators urging the EPA to issue guidelines regarding power production that would allow Alabama to regulate its existing power plants. We believe oversight of Alabama's power plants should be a responsibility of the state, not some overreaching federal bureaucracy. We understand the need to protect the coal industry and coal power plants in our state.

During the 2012 legislative session, I passed legislation that extended tax incentives to mining companies that make large, job-creating investments in the state. That legislation was instrumental in convincing Walter Energy to invest \$1.2 billion dollars in the Blue Creek mine project that will create 500 jobs that pay an average salary over \$100,000.

As you can see, coal has a huge impact on our part of the state, whether or not you or someone in your family works directly for the industry. If President Obama has his way, over 16,000 Alabama families will lose their primary source of income, and we will all suffer.

For this reason, I will do everything within my power to protect coal. The radical environmentalists will tell you lies about coal and power generation, but don't believe them. They are shipped in from the West Coast and other left-wing areas to pretend that the sky is falling. Job-killing special interests are funding them to the tune of millions of dollars. And I'm sick of their agenda that does nothing but hurt Alabama families and Alabama jobs.

You have my continued commitment that I will defend and protect our coal industry and the people who make their living in it. Please stand with me so the anti-job forces at play in Alabama will see that we don't take kindly to being told what to do, especially by a bunch of out-of-touch liberals.

[Medicaid rejection will cost Alabama billions of dollars, thousands of jobs, White House study says \(AL.com\)](#)

Alabama and other states that have refused to expand Medicaid under Obamacare are depriving their poor citizens of medical care and costing their economies hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars, according to a White House study.

Released this month by the White House Council of Economic Advisers, the report draws on past research and reaches the same general conclusions of a pair of university studies that examined the issue in Alabama after passage of the Affordable Care Act.

"The Administration hopes that more States will decide to take advantage of these opportunities in the months and years ahead and stands ready to work with States to make these opportunities a reality," the report states.

The analysis has become fodder in Alabama's gubernatorial campaign. Gov. Robert Bentley has not seen the study but remains opposed to expanding Medicaid in the state, according to spokeswoman Jennifer Ardis.

"The Alabama system is a broken, unworkable system," she said. "It doesn't make sense to expand such a broken system."

Bentley's Democratic opponent, Parker Griffith, said the decision is "beyond reason." He said the study backs up what numerous others have found.

As a member of Congress in 2010, Griffith voted against the Affordable Care Act because he believed it was too complicated and too confusing.

"But there were several things in it that were good, and one of those was expansion of Medicaid – particularly in a state like Alabama, which has such a high number of poor people," he said. "We need an economic boost."

As part of the Affordable Care Act, the federal government will pay 100 percent of the beneficiary costs through 2016 for new enrollees who earn up to 135 percent of the poverty line. That comes to \$16,105 for a single adult or \$32,913 for a family of four in 2014. The federal share gradually declines after 2016 to 90 percent in 2020.

But the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the federal government cannot threaten to withhold existing Medicaid money to coerce states to accept the expansion. So far, 26 states and the District of Columbia have taken the deal.

The White House study cites an Urban Institute report that estimates Alabama would enroll 235,000 additional people in Medicaid by expanding. That is slightly less than a 2012 study by the University of Alabama at Birmingham estimated.

The White House study concludes that the 24 non-expanding states have missed a chance to improve the health of their citizens and create jobs. The report maintains that expanding Medicaid would:

Increase the number of Alabamians rating their health as excellent or good by 31,000 people. Among all states that have not expanded Medicaid, the figure is 757,000 people.

Increase the number of people in Alabama with a usual source of clinical care by 56,000. The increase would be an additional 1.4 million people if every state expanded.

Increase the number of people in Alabama receiving all the care they feel they need in a typical year by 27,000. The total increase would be 651,000 if all states expanded.

Increase the number of people able to visit a doctor's office in a typical year by 635,000 in Alabama and 15.4 million in all states that have not expanded.

Decrease the number of people experiencing depression by 19,000 in Alabama and 458,000 in all states that have not expanded.

The report also projects that expanding Medicaid would allow for an increase in cholesterol screenings (34,200 a year in Alabama and 829,000 nationwide), mammograms (9,300 women between the ages of 50 and 64 each year in Alabama and 214,000 nationwide) and pap smears (14,200 in Alabama and 345,000 nationwide).

The study argues that expanding Medicaid would bring a number of financial benefits, as well, both for recipients and governments. It estimates a reduction in the number of Alabamians facing "catastrophic," out-of-pocket health costs of 10,500. The total reduction among all holdout states would be 255,000. Also, 33,400 fewer Alabamians and 810,000 fewer Americans overall would have trouble paying other bills because of medical costs if the other states expanded, the study argues.

For states, the report states, declining federal expansion funds will cost states \$88 billion through 2016. Alabama will lose \$3.63 billion in federal funds and will miss out on 15,100 additional jobs and \$2.65 billion in increased economic activity through 2017, according to the study.

Nationwide, the holdout states could boost employment by 379,000 jobs through 2017 and increase economic activity by \$66 billion if they all expanded Medicaid, according to the report.

The UAB study, commissioned by the Alabama Hospital Association, projected the state would gain some \$6.8 billion in federal funds through 2017, with an indirect economic impact of 4.7 billion.

A study by the University of Alabama last year estimated an even greater employment impact – some 30,000 new jobs.

Not every academic study has forecast a boon for Alabama by expanding Medicaid. A study by Troy University's Manuel H. Johnson Center for the Political Economy concluded that expansion would cost state government more than it gained.

[BCBS of Alabama could face greater competition in second year of exchanges \(Birmingham Business Journal\)](#)

Alabama residents looking for health insurance will have more options during the second year of the health exchange marketplace.

UnitedHealthcare, the state's second largest insurer, has filed plans to expand its coverage to all 67 counties.

"We have filed a QHP (quality health plan) exchange application and look forward to continuing our conversations throughout the approval process and expect to have a competitive product available for Alabama consumers," said UnitedHealthcare spokesperson Elizabeth Calzadilla-Fiallo.

UnitedHealthcare's decision will provide more competition for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, which has the dominant market share in the state. Experts said last year that the dominance of Blue Cross could have been a deterrent to insurance providers offering plans on the Alabama exchange. Blue Cross has about 90 percent of the marketplace, followed by United with 5 percent.

[ACA case could have major impact on Alabama \(Anniston Star\)](#)

A federal appeals court for the District of Columbia Circuit could potentially strike a huge blow to the Affordable Care Act.

The court will rule on *Halbig vs. Burwell* any day now, a case that could see potentially 100,000 Alabamians and 5 million people nationwide lose access to Affordable Care Act subsidies.

Section 1311 of the act states that only people who apply for health insurance plans through state-run health marketplaces are eligible for subsidies. However, only 17 states have created their own markets, with seven running marketplaces in partnership with the federal government, and 26 relying on federally run marketplaces.

Plaintiffs in the case argue that the subsidies are legal only for people who bought health insurance plans through state-run health exchanges, which could potentially leave everyone who applied through federally funded health insurance markets uninsured.

Mary Jones, a resident of Hobson City who is enrolled through the act, has been enrolled on the act since Jan. 1. Jones said she needs the insurance to be able to afford major treatments, many of which she needed years ago.

"I had major tests that I needed done when I was 50, and I'm 64," Jones said. "It's great for people to be the recipient of health care.

"I hope that the lawmakers will treat people justifiably," Jones continued. "But I hope the Lord don't allow this to happen. I don't think it's fair. It's nothing for them to just make a law to hold other people back."

The ruling could also have significant ramifications for the act's individual mandate, which requires that all eligible Americans have health insurance.

Todd Boozer, the state president for the Alabama Health Underwriters Association, said he doesn't believe the state or the country has the money to subsidize the health plans the way the act intends. "We really don't have money to subsidize the way we're doing now," Boozer said. "I know our country doesn't have the money. I'm very uncomfortable with that."

Gene Ramsay, vice president of media for the Birmingham Association of Health Underwriters, said the case could be bad for the act in Alabama, which had 98,870 people enroll for the act from Oct. 1, 2013 through March 31.

Still, Ramsay said he believes it will be a long time before any of the ramifications are felt if the courts rule against the act.

"Probably because it's a federal case, and it could take years to get something figured out from this," Ramsay said. "Also, this whole thing has got the president's signature on it. So, I would probably have to veer toward the camp saying it wouldn't have an immediate impact."

Still, Ramsay said the case could open the door for future opponents of the act to continue to attack it. Ramsay said that many people who have followed the act suggest that if it is repealed, it will be from the inside-out.

"The prognostication is, it's going to implode," Ramsay said. "Now that the law is in effect, people are going to start digging into this hole, looking for loopholes, bringing them up."

Jim Carnes, policy director at Arise Alabama, shares Ramsay's sentiments on the potential ramifications of the court case. Arise Alabama is a statewide nonprofit organization to promote policies to benefit low-income Alabamians.

"It's clear that Congress intended for subsidies to be available through marketplaces. Period," Carnes said. "The plaintiffs are just exploiting a poorly worded passage to deny health care coverage to 100,000 Alabamians."

[Alabama defense contractors, Redstone Arsenal play key roles in \\$11 billion foreign military sales deal \(AL.com\)](#)

Huntsville's Redstone Arsenal – as well as several major North Alabama defense contractors – played key roles in the largest foreign military sale so far this year.

The Pentagon has agreed to sell Apache helicopters and Patriot and Javelin defense systems to the nation of Qatar. The sale is worth about \$11 billion.

Qatar is home to the largest U.S. military base in the Middle East.

"Today's signing ceremony underscores the strong partnership between the United States and Qatar in the area of security and defense and will help improve our bilateral cooperation across a range of military operations," Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said in a statement.

The sale is being overseen by through the U.S. Army Security Assistance Command, or USASAC, the Redstone Arsenal-based organization that handles Foreign Military Sales for the Army.

USASAC's Commanding General Major Gen. Mark McDonald, who attended the signing ceremony, said the sale was the result of years of working with Qatar "to ensure they have the capabilities they need, particularly in missile defense, and helps us shape the environment.

"Their choice of systems is also a huge compliment to Redstone Arsenal, Huntsville, and its defense industries as all the systems selected by Qatar have ties to this area," he said.

Included in the sale will be about 10 batteries for Patriot systems, as well as 24 Apache helicopters and 500 Javelin anti-tank missiles. The Patriot systems and Javelin missiles are manufactured by Raytheon and Lockheed, while Boeing produces the AH-64 Apache. All of the companies have a heavy presence in North Alabama.

[Alabama congressman says regs created after financial crisis may be crushing smaller companies \(Yellowhammer News\)](#)

ep. Spencer Bachus (R-AL6) on Wednesday expressed concerns that the regulatory reach of the U.S. Federal Reserve has been extended too far and may be crushing smaller insurance companies and asset managers.

During a hearing in the the House Financial Services Committee, Bachus pushed Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen to implement more transparency into their regulatory decision-making process.

The Financial Stability Oversight Council, of which The Fed is a member, has the power to label companies as "systemically important financial institutions (SIFIs)," which is a designation intended for large financial institutions whose failure could pose threats to the U.S. economy. The label carries with it a higher regulatory burden and raises operating costs that are ultimately passed on to consumers.

Unfortunately, Bachus says the label is now being placed on smaller companies, which was not the original intent. On Wednesday, Bachus urged Yellen to provide companies with specific reasons why they are receiving the label, and to give them steps they could take to shed it.

“My experience is that there is often greater resistance to a designation or ruling when parties feel they have not been consulted or when the process is not transparent enough,” said Bachus. “One of the approaches attracting interest is to require that companies being considered for such a designation be provided with specific reasons why and also a description of steps they could take so they might not be named a SIFI.”

Bachus said this “reasonable approach” would lead to more certainty and confidence in the decision-making of the Financial Stability Oversight Council. The Federal Reserve is a key member of the powerful panel, which was created in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis to monitor major potential risks to the economy.

Today’s hearing marked the final time that Bachus will participate in the twice-annual appearance of the Federal Reserve Chair before the committee. Bachus announced last year that he would not seek an eleventh term in the U.S. House.

During more than two decades on the committee, including a six-year leadership term, Bachus has heard testimony from and questioned Fed Chairs Alan Greenspan, Ben Bernanke, and Dr. Yellen, the most recent presidential appointee.