



Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh
Press Clips
Sunday, August 03, 2014

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Primary season by the numbers: Big shift to GOP (Montgomery Advertiser)

When campaign season came, Alabama's politicians opened their wallets and shook out tens of millions of dollars, spreading the wealth in the state and around the country.

Driven by high-profile challenges in the Republican primaries, and a major push against GOP incumbents by the Alabama Education Association, politicians and political organizations spent \$34.3

million on direct campaign expenditures between Jan. 1 and July 14, according to campaign finance records. Organizations also reported \$14 million in campaign contributions to candidates and parties.

Combined, that number is more than all but six state agencies get from the state's General Fund budget. In May alone, more than \$20 million was spent on campaigns.

Whether that amount of spending will continue through the fall election remains to be seen. If spending was high for the primaries and runoffs, it was because Democrats will be hard-pressed to mount effective campaigns against Republicans in the fall.

"The Democratic Party is just in bad shape," said Bill Stewart, a professor emeritus at the University of Alabama. "There's no way to get around it. Since their candidates are not strongly contending for the seats they're running for, groups that have money are not interested in throwing their money away on a sure loser."

Officially, though, campaigns say they'll approach the fall election as competitive.

"We can't let our foot off the gas pedal, and we don't intend to do that," said Rebekah Mason, a spokeswoman for Gov. Robert Bentley's campaign, which has outraised Democrat Parker Griffith's campaign nearly 24 to 1. "We're running this campaign like anyone would run a race for the top statewide office, as strong and as hard as ever."

Below are a few illustrative numbers on the process:

- \$20 million — Total amount of money spent on campaign advertising between Jan. 1 and July 14, the largest single expenditure in the campaign.
- \$9.7 million — Total amount of money Alabama campaigns spent on out-of-state firms, chiefly for advertising. The number represents 20 percent of all reported spending by Alabama political campaigns since the beginning of the year, and about 30 percent of all direct spending on advertising, consulting and other campaign-related items.

Some big winners included New York-based McLaughlin and Associates, which received more than \$1 million for advertising and consulting for Republican candidates; Connecticut-based Mail Matters, with over \$1 million from the Alabama Education Association and Florida-based Majority Strategies, which got close to \$900,000 for direct mailings for Republican candidates, most of whom were endorsed by Gov. Bob Riley's Alabama 2014 PAC.

Campaigns were quick to point out that much of the money spent went to Alabama media purchases. Joe Hubbard, the Democratic candidate for attorney general, spent close to \$130,000 on New York-based Thaw and Associates, whose partner, Bennet Ratcliff, worked on the campaigns of Democratic Gov. Jim Folsom Jr.

"For me personally, I went out of state for my consultant because the best consultant for this state was out of state," Hubbard said. "He's proven. He's won these races before. He knows Alabama."

Bentley's campaign spent over \$557,000 on The Wickers Group, a San Francisco-based ad firm. Mason said the firm worked on Bentley's 2010 campaign, and he felt comfortable with them.

"They met early on in 2010 and produced his commercials, which were quite successful," she said. "I don't think anyone would argue that they weren't effective."

- \$7.1 million — Final tally of spending by the Alabama Education Association, which funded Republicans in eight House races and seven Senate races. AEA-backed candidates won nominations for four House seats, but came up short in the Senate, where the AEA spent more than \$900,000 on candidates prior to the June 3 primary. The organization routed millions of dollars through other organizations, many out-of-state (see below), hoping to gather enough votes on both sides of the aisle to end the Republican supermajority.

"Our litmus test never changes," said Amy Marlowe, a spokeswoman for the AEA. "We support candidates who support public education."

- \$2.9 million — Amount of money Gov. Robert Bentley reported on hand on July 2.

\$1.3 million — Amount of money Gov. Robert Bentley has spent this year on his campaign. He may not have to spend much more than that. Democrat Parker Griffith has struggled to find financial support: Through the start of July, the Democratic gubernatorial nominee, who did not return a message seeking comment, had raised just \$69,000 and spent \$57,000.

In the past, incumbents with large war chests and easy roads to election — such as House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, and Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, in 2010 or House Speaker Seth Hammett, D-Andalusia, in 2006 — have used their cash to help out legislative candidates. Mason said Bentley still plans to campaign for his own re-election.

"At this point, we're still actively fundraising," she said. "The governor has no plans to coast."

- \$1.7 million — Amount of money Atlanta-based Murphy-Stella Productions received from AEA during the campaign to handle advertising. According to campaign finance records, this LLC may have received the single biggest amount of cash during the campaign.

The amount was all the more remarkable as Murphy-Stella came into existence on April 29, according to the Georgia secretary of state's office. Two days later, AEA cut the company a check for \$380,000. The group's registration lists an Atlanta address but no phone number or points of contact. The company has no website and does not appear to have done work elsewhere. Marlowe said she could not address AEA's reasons for using the company.

The company wasn't the only mysterious entity employed by AEA during the campaign. A group dubbed National Research Services, based out of a P.O. Box in Brentwood, Tenn., received more than \$1.6 million from AEA, used mainly for in-kind services for AEA-backed candidates. A firm with the name of National Research Services, incorporated in Delaware in late February, a few days before the AEA sent a \$350,000 check to its Tennessee headquarters.

- 13 to 1 — The ratio by which PSC Commission challenger Chip Beeker outspent PSC incumbent Terry Dunn in the six weeks before the July 15 runoff. Beeker, whose campaign received enormous support from coal and energy interests, spent nearly \$232,000 in the six weeks before the runoff. Dunn spent \$17,918 in that period.

Beeker defeated Dunn on Tuesday with nearly 58 percent of the vote.

- 17 to 1 — The ratio by which PSC member Jeremy Oden outspent challenger Kathy Peterson during the Republican primary. Oden, considered a safe vote for the utilities on the PSC, received strong support from coal and energy-related PACs and spent \$406,256 to Peterson's \$23,892. Despite the overwhelming financial advantage, Oden's margin of victory was only 4 percentage points.

- 2.5 to 1 — Republicans' year-to-date advantage in contributions over Democrats in statewide races. Through July 14, Republican nominees for seven statewide offices had raised \$3.2 million; Democrats had raised \$1.2 million. However, almost \$1.1 million of the Democrats' haul came from contributions made to Joe Hubbard's campaign by the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, which has feuded with Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange over bingo machines at its casinos.

- 4.5 to 1 — Republicans' cash-on-hand advantage in statewide races over Democrats. The party's nominees had \$4.2 million on hand in their last campaign finance reports. Democrats had \$943,000 — \$915,000 held by Joe Hubbard.

Democrats were competitive with Republicans in 2010 races, but with AEA playing in the Republican primary, and trial lawyers increasingly supportive of the Alabama Republican Party, the party's two main sources have been seemingly diverted.

"I don't think it comes as a surprise to anyone that traditional special interests do what they do, and that's align themselves with power," Hubbard said. "Power in the last four years has laid almost exclusively in the hands of Republicans."

- 107 — Days left until the Nov. 4 election as of Sunday. The mantra from all corners is steady as she goes, but a number of candidates and organizations will need time to regenerate their coffers. AEA took out a \$500,000 loan last week, having about \$54,000 on hand after the primary season. Republican state auditor nominee Jim Zeigler had just \$191 in his campaign account last week.

The AEA's Marlowe said she expects the group to spend about as much on the general election as they did in the primary. "We're still making progress toward our goal of breaking that supermajority with one more round to go," she said.

But at the statewide level, it seems, voters have had their say.

"I remember four years ago when Bentley won the runoff against (Bradley) Byrne, you said, 'This is the election,' and that's what they used to say about the primary," Stewart said. "As soon as the Democratic nominees were selected in primary, we would know they would be the people who would take office in January. And that's the way it is now (with Republicans)."

[How Greg Albritton won runoff despite losing big in Alabama Senate district's most populous county \(AL.com\)](#)

Greg Albritton's 1,342-margin of defeat in Baldwin County in last week's Republican Party runoff for a state Senate seat was greater than the total number of votes cast in all but one of the district's other seven counties.

Yet, the Conecuh County lawyer and former state representative was still able to capture the GOP nomination for the District 22 seat over Bay Minette lawyer Harry D'Olive by running up massive margins in the many smaller precincts that dot the largely rural territory.

Outside of D'Olive's native Baldwin County, Albritton took almost 84 percent of the vote on Tuesday.

"I attribute that to the team I have working for me to win this election," he said.

D'Olive, who did not respond to phone calls for this story, did not win a single precinct outside his native Baldwin or neighboring Mobile County.

He won his home county big, garnering about 70 percent of the vote. But Baldwin voters made up a little less than half of the electorate. And only 104 residents of Mobile County cast ballots in the runoff.

Overall, turnout declined from 11,383 voters in the June 3 primary to 6,894 on Tuesday.

Some of the individual precinct results were mind-boggling. Albritton won 353-44 at the Brewton Civic Center polling place in Escambia County, for example. He shut out D'Olive 34-0 at his home precinct in Range. In at least 36 precincts – and possibly more, since Monroe County officials did not provide precinct-level results – D'Olive failed to win a single vote.

In the November general election, Albritton will face Democrat Susan Smith, who released a statement last week congratulating him and expressing her eagerness to debate him this fall.

"I believe I was ZIP code-challenged there," Albritton said. "But I do have some work to do there." -- Greg Albritton, on his Baldwin returns

"My record speaks for itself – more than two decades as a nurse, active involvement in my community and church, and two years as a city councilwoman," she stated. "As a city councilwoman, I've helped improve workforce development, attracted industry and well-paying jobs, and made Atmore more tourist-friendly. I'll take that same level of hard work and dedication to Montgomery."

On paper, District 22 – now represented by retiring Democratic Sen. Marc Keahey – is ripe for a GOP pickup. The Republican-led Legislature redrew the boundaries after the 2010 census to include many more Republican-leaning voters. The key to that advantage, though, is Baldwin County.

"I believe I was ZIP code-challenged there," Albritton said. "But I do have some work to do there."

Albritton he looks forward to a general election campaign that figures to highlight a sharper contrast on the issues than the primary, where he and D'Olive shared similar views.

"I believe there will be more distinction," he said. "It's a completely difference philosophy between the Ds and the Rs."

Albritton also joked that he hopes to improve his performance in Choctaw County. Although he only received one vote, there, it was enough to win the county because it was the only vote cast.

"I'm going meet him and shake his hand, or hers," he said.

If Albritton does go on to win the election, Baldwin could be an issue for him in future Republican primaries. The county is growing much faster than the rest of the district, meaning that in four years, it will make up a larger share of the electorate than it did Tuesday. After redistricting following the 2020 census, it could account for two-thirds of the vote, which would severely disadvantage any candidate who does not perform well there.

For Albritton, though, that is a concern for another day.

"I've got to focus on November," he said.

[Speaker Mike Hubbard says Republicans will keep super-majority; Rep. Craig Ford says Democrats can break it \(AL.com\)](#)

House Speaker Mike Hubbard of Auburn said he's pleased with results in the 2014 Republican primary, even though six Republican incumbents lost.

Hubbard, who led the effort in 2010 for Republicans to take control of the Legislature for the first time in 136 years, said he's confident the Republicans can hold onto their filibuster-proof super-majority.

Republicans hold 66 seats in the House to the Democrats' 37. (There is one independent and one vacant seat.)

Democrats would need to pick up six seats to break the super-majority.

"I'm very confident about it. We've just got to make sure our conservative and Republican voters around the state don't get complacent," Hubbard said. "I don't believe that's going to happen."

House Minority Leader Craig Ford of Gadsden said the Democrats are targeting nine seats they think are winnable and about a half-dozen more they think are in play.

"Absolutely, that is our goal, to break the supermajority in 2014," Ford said.

Ford says the super-majority, a three-fifths majority, is dangerous because one side has too much power. The main example of that he said is the Alabama Accountability Act, the controversial school choice bill that passed in 2013 with no public hearings and almost no debate.

"There's danger in a super-majority, especially in both houses and the governor's office," Ford said.

Ford said a special grand jury's investigation in Lee County concerning Hubbard and others will hurt the Republicans in the same way as he said a 2010 investigation into alleged vote-buying in connection with a bingo bill hurt Democrats.

Hubbard, who has called the investigation political, said he did not think voters would be swayed by it, saying they were smart enough to see through it.

He noted that he beat his primary challenger by getting 60 percent of the vote, and Rep. Barry Moore of Enterprise, who has pleaded not guilty to perjury in connection with the investigation, won with 55 percent.

Republicans have far more candidates on the ballot in House races in November than the Democrats.

Democrats have no candidate for 46 of the 105 seats. Republicans have candidates for all but 19 seats.

Democrats have 31 incumbents on the ballot. Republicans have 50.

Ten of the 66 Republicans chose not to seek re-election, and four of those ran for other offices. Twelve Republicans won primary challenges, while six lost.

Those who lost were Reps. Richard Baughn of Lynn; Mac Buttram of Cullman; Wayne Johnson of Ryland; Charles Newton of Greenville; Bill Roberts of Jasper and Kurt Wallace of Maplesville.

Hubbard and former Gov. Bob Riley campaigned for Buttram last weekend, but he still came up short in a runoff against Corey Harbison.

Even though at least 16 members of the Republican House Caucus won't return, Hubbard said he's confident it will stay cohesive.

"I'm not concerned at all," Hubbard said. "We've got some talented people joining our ranks."

THE NEXT STORM (Anniston Star)

More than three years after Alabama's deadly tornado outbreak, nearly half the items on the state's must-do list for severe weather preparedness remain unfinished — and there's no timetable for completing the work.

After the April 2011 storms killed 244 people across the state, Gov. Robert Bentley announced the creation of the Tornado Recovery Action Council. The now-disbanded panel proposed 20 recommendations for improving the state's emergency response tactics in January 2012. According to Bentley's office, only 13 of them have been completed so far.

Lawmakers, including Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh of Anniston, said they were unaware of the proposals, but would be willing to work with the governor to get the remaining initiatives passed.

"Every recommendation that the governor had the authority to do at the state level has been done," said Art Faulkner, director of the state Emergency Management Agency.

Some of the unfulfilled items on the list would require action from the Legislature. They include tax incentives that would encourage businesses to own electrical generators and install storm-proof safe rooms, tougher structural requirements for new buildings and new rules to require shelters at apartment complexes and mobile home parks.

Some storm victims say they'd like to see more being done.

"Just having recommendations out there is not enough," said Shirley Walden, whose northern Calhoun County house in Webster's Chapel sustained damage during a 2011 tornado. "They should follow through."

Marsh said the undone items simply haven't been brought to lawmakers for action.

"If it is in the works, then I will work with the governor to make sure it gets passed," he said.

Marsh said he knew of no opposition to the measures still on the list. He said it's typical for the governor to seek lawmakers to pass the items on his own agenda — and unusual for a legislator to pursue an item independently if the governor has already announced he's pursuing it.

In an emailed statement sent by the Bentley's press office, the governor was quoted as saying he's pleased with the progress made so far.

"The recommendations in the TRAC report were carefully researched and we plan to implement as many of the recommendations as possible," the statement read.

Repeated attempts to reach Blaine Galliher, the Bentley aide who served as legislative director from mid-2012 until last month, were unsuccessful.

Richard Fording, professor and chair in the University of Alabama's department of political science, said the recommendations are competing with many other proposals that crowd the legislative agenda each year.

"I don't know if Gov. Bentley has made a significant effort to push these proposals in the Legislature," Fording said in an email. "He may be choosing to use his limited political capital for other priorities." Fording said that other unfulfilled recommendations would impose significant costs on one party or another — for example, a change to construction codes leads to increased costs for builders. "Mandates from state government are generally not welcomed by local governments, especially when they do not come with funding," Fording added.

'Take their advice'

In the months after the storm, the 19-member recovery council studied what the state could do to better prepare for the next major storm outbreaks. On the panel were executives from major Alabama businesses such as Regions Bank and Protective Life Insurance Co., officials from cities hit by the storm, hospital administrators and representatives of nonprofits.

In four and half months of consultation and seven public forums, the panel sought insight from researchers, weather experts, government officials, response coordinators, experienced builders and other leaders. It produced a report that recounted the April 27 outbreak hour by hour, twister by twister and community by community — all building up to the 20 recommendations the panel made for future storm readiness.

When the report was released, Bentley said he would put the plans into motion, starting with the building of public safe rooms and encouragement for more cities to adopt emergency disaster plans. "I do not believe that we should ask people to do a job, like we have this council, and not take their advice," Bentley said.

More than two years after the report's release, state officials point to some concrete progress. State money has paid for new public shelters in buildings across Alabama — enough, EMA director Faulkner said, to hold at least 50,000 people in an emergency.

So far, 4,000 individual safe rooms and about 250 community safe rooms have been installed, and an additional 200 community safe rooms should be implemented by the end of the year, Faulkner said. The council's recommendations called simply for more shelters, but didn't specify a numerical goal. "I am very happy that the recommendations that have been completed and that we continue to work on them," Faulkner said.

State agencies have also upgraded weather alert systems to include the ability for residents to receive text, email and telephone warnings, state officials say. The construction of a new \$7 million weather research facility at the University of Alabama in Huntsville completed the council's resolution to promote the study of tornado formation and atmospheric conditions, the governor's office said.

"This will help take us to another level in terms of our research," said Ray Garner, UAH spokesman. "Hopefully, what we do will save lives."

Perhaps the most visible of the 13 completed recommendations is a statewide sales tax holiday on storm supplies. Modeled on the annual August sales tax holiday for school supplies, the tax holiday sets aside one weekend in February to allow people to buy storm-prep items such as batteries and generators without paying sales tax.

A work in progress

Still, other recommended tax incentives for storm preparation — including a proposed tax credit for businesses to buy backup generators — remain on the drawing board.

Denise Rucker, a volunteer management coordinator with Calhoun County's Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, said that acquiring generators businesses could use during power outages should be at the top of legislators' to-do list.

It is particularly important for grocery stores to continue operating for 72 hours after a tornado, she said. Emergency responders often encounter fallen trees and other roadblocks that initially impede the delivery of supplies.

She said that grocery stores that lose power during these times lose a significant amount of stock, meaning that merchandise won't be available to nearby residents who also have power outages.

The state's emergency management director agrees.

"Some people, their homes are destroyed," Faulkner said "It can be days before we can get people in a situation where they do have access to food."

Talking codes

The governor's panel did, in fact, recommend that the state set up statewide building codes intended to make newly constructed buildings more storm-worthy than the state's current housing stock.

"Some of the damage suffered on April 27 was preventable with design techniques that are relatively inexpensive," the panel's report stated, adding that it "is imperative that the state use this event as a springboard to save lives in the future with better-fortified housing."

Alabama's first statewide set of minimum fortification standards went into effect in 2012 — but those standards were approved in 2009, and brought Alabama up to a nationwide minimum seen in states that aren't hurricane- and tornado-prone. No new, higher standards have been approved since the 2011 storms or the panel's report. Jason Reid, regulatory affairs director with the Alabama Home Builders Association, said the Alabama Energy and Residential Codes Board is in the process of developing additional fortification requirements.

State Rep. Christopher England, a Democrat from storm-ravaged Tuscaloosa, said there are basic steps — such as tie-downs and new ways of attaching shingles to roofs — that can help houses withstand high winds.

"After the tornado, we discovered that some homes were destroyed, not because they were directly hit, but that debris of older homes with older construction flew off and caused damage in other places," England said.

Anne Williamson, a political science professor at the University of Alabama who specializes in housing policy, said that enforcing codes outside cities is often problematic because of a lack of government workers in rural areas.

Williamson said similarly storm-prone states such as Florida, have statewide building codes that cover more than baseline standards. She said the construction codes introduced in Florida after 1992's Hurricane Andrew led to big improvements in buildings being able to withstand high winds and other harsh conditions, including the now-required hurricane shutters in some areas along the state's coastline.

Given that Alabama experiences both tornadoes and hurricanes, the state needs to step up its standards, she said.

"It seems to me we actually should be in a leadership position in terms of disaster preparedness, not lagging behind," Williamson said.

The timetable

Ron Gray, a member of the recovery council, said the panel proposed a mix of simple and complex resolutions, some that could be implemented reasonably quickly and some that would require more time.

"I think, given the complexity of the subject and the massive nature of it, it's actually a nice number of completed topics," Max Michael, another council member, said. "I think it's moving well."

He added that legislation for the seven unfinished recommendations will be a long process.

"Unless somebody takes it on and champions it, it's not going to go anywhere," Michael said. "So making sure that the recommendations remain in the public eye is going to be important."

IN BRIEF: What's been done

Sales tax holiday: In 2012, the state established the last weekend in February as a tax holiday for storm supplies. A list of tax-exempt items is available at

<http://www.revenue.alabama.gov/salestax/WPSalesTaxHol.cfm>.

Storm shelters: Officials say 250 community safe rooms have been built since the storm.

Disaster response group for utilities: An executive order from the governor created the Alabama Utility Workgroup for Disaster Response, which hosts an annual conference on disaster readiness.

Awareness campaign: In 2012, the state launched the Ready Alabama (www.readyalabama.gov) campaign to increase storm preparedness.

Alert system: Less than a year after the storm, the state set up SAF-T-Net (www.alabamasafnet.com), a system that uses e-mail, texts and phone calls to alert people of storms approaching their area.

Serve Alabama: Before the storms, the governor was planning to reorganize the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives into a broader agency to coordinate volunteer organizations. It's now operating as Serve Alabama: www.servealabama.gov.

Tornado research: The state provided \$7 million for the creation of the Severe Weather Institute and Radar and Lightning Laboratories in Huntsville: swirl1.uah.edu.

[The three pieces of Luther Strange's argument against the Poarch Creek gambling machines \(AL.com\)](#)

Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange advanced the state's challenge to the remove electronic bingo machines from casinos owned by the Poarch Band of Creek Indians in the 11th U.S. Court of Appeals.

In a legal brief filed on July 7, Strange outlined three questions concerning the tribe's electronic bingo machines and why they should be prohibited under state or federal law.

"At three casinos in Alabama, the Poarch Band's officers operate thousands of slot machines through a commercial entity," the attorney general wrote in a brief. "The State seeks to enjoin this activity or, at the very least, test its legality in court."

A friend of the court brief also was filed in support of Strange's case by Michigan Assistant Attorney General Margaret Bettenhausen.

The attorney general's arguments challenge:

I. Whether the Poarch Creeks' casinos in Wetumpka, Montgomery and Atmore are in fact operating on federal trust land.

The Poarch Creeks are the only Native American tribe in the state recognized by the federal government, a distinction that allows them to operate casinos on land owned by the federal government. (Class III gaming requires a compact with the state.)

Under a previous court case -- *Carcieri v. Salazar* -- the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the U.S. interior secretary does not have the authority to take land and hold it into trust for American Indian tribes outside of those recognized by a June 1934 law.

The state contends that since the Poarch Creeks were not recognized until the 1980s, there is room to challenge their right to game in Alabama.

II. The state asks the court to interpret whether a section of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act applies to the Poarch Creeks, which would effectively bring their gaming activities under the state's jurisdiction.

Under IGRA, gaming is regulated in three classes:

The first allows "social games solely for prizes of minimal value" or traditional gaming at tribal ceremonies; the second class refers to bingo -- electronic or traditional; and the third class authorizes "all forms of gaming that are not class I gaming or class II gaming."

The state claims the machines operated by the tribe falls under the class three description.

"IGRA provides that a State must consent before a tribe offers "class III" games, which include "slot machines of any kind," " the state wrote.

"Section 1166 of IGRA provides that, for class III games, "for the purposes of Federal law, all State laws pertaining to the . . . prohibition of gambling . . . shall apply in Indian country in the same manner and to the same extent as such laws apply elsewhere in the State."

Currently there is no compact on gambling between the state and the Poarch Creeks.

III. The final part part seeks clarification on whether tribal immunity would hinder the state's ability to enforce the law, but that's only if the judges find the state's interpretation of the law to be correct.

Meanwhile, attorneys for the tribe have filed a motion for more time before they file a brief of their own. The court has not ruled on the request, but the date petitioned for by the tribe is September 10.

A spokesperson for the tribe released a statement saying the tribe does not comment on pending litigation.

[As Democratic National Convention Birmingham visit starts, officials ready to showcase all Magic City has to offer \(AL.com\)](#)

Supporters working to bring the 2016 Democratic National Convention to Birmingham want to make sure visiting evaluation committee members know they are serious.

Giant banners on display downtown with the declaration "DNC Birmingham 2016" offer more than a subtle clue.

City, civic and business officials have met to plan the best possible experience for 14 committee members whose impressions could make or break Birmingham's chance to grab the major convention.

"The city always tries to be attractive for tourists, for potential employers, and this is no different," said Chuck Faush, Mayor William Bell's chief of staff. "We have stepped up in terms of preparing

venues, places that people might stay, eat and certainly work and play while they are here. We're getting ready."

'Southern hospitality'

Faush cited a non-disclosure agreement when pressed to name a specific itinerary or provisions to clinch Birmingham's bid. Still, some activities have been publicized including a Monday evening "Pitch Party" at Iron City downtown.

The free event will feature musical performances inside one of the city's newest entertainment venues.

Another likely stop for committee members and their guides is the Barber Motorsports Museum and Park.

The facility is the first among 43 Birmingham attractions on tripadvisor.com. Mayor William Bell has frequently referenced the museum when describing the best of Birmingham.

Barber is a regular stop when area leaders court perspective businesses and host conferences.

"It has worked out that way," said Don Erwin, vice president of corporate development for Barber Companies. "We are a nonprofit and that's one of our main missions, to pull in people from elsewhere to come and see Birmingham."

The museum in April also announced its status as having the world's largest collection of motorcycles according to Guinness World Records.

Other cities, some significantly larger with more amenities, are also working to land the Democrat's marquee event. Birmingham is in competition with Columbus, Ohio; New York, Philadelphia and Phoenix. The competition had included Cleveland, which was selected July 8 as the host city for the Republican National Convention.

Still, Faush said Birmingham can offer both the required amenities and something extra.

"Southern hospitality," he said. "There's nowhere else and nobody else that can give southern hospitality like we can. Certainly no one else has a 50-year track record of turning hurt into healing like Birmingham. Where else can you find a place that is not only embracing its past but embracing its future?"

On the national stage

As they continue to highlight the city's history, the tour could also include the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, which documents the history of civil and human rights struggles, tragedies and triumphs.

Birmingham leaders express optimism, but the weight of other cities in contention dim the city's realistic chances, said longtime political science professor D'Linell Finley retired.

"It is highly unlikely for a number of reasons when you think of the other cities," Finley said.

"Birmingham is a nice place to meet, but you don't have the large venues that you would expect to see with a huge crowd attending."

Still, Finley called it a smart strategic move for Birmingham to compete on the national stage. The value comes in presenting Birmingham to a larger audience that might otherwise not be available.

"It is never a loss for city leaders to try to get a convention to pay attention to their city," Finley said.

"City leaders made a play that is very large and not likely to come to Birmingham, but smaller conventions will and will find Birmingham very attractive."

[Alabama Workforce Council begins work at State Capitol next week \(AL.com\)](#)

MONTGOMERY – The new Alabama Workforce Council, with more than 30 members recently appointed by Gov. Robert Bentley, will meet for the first time on Monday.

The council's mission is to advise and support members of the State Board of Education, the Chancellor of the Alabama Community College System, college and university presidents of Alabama's four-year institutions and the Superintendent of the Department of Education.

It will work to more make education programs better fit workforce needs for business and industry, according to the governor's office.

[Related: Alabama official unemployment rate nears 7 percent; state loses 3,500 jobs]

Zeke Smith, Executive Vice President of External Affairs at Alabama Power, was appointed chairman by the governor.

The Governor's College and Career Ready Task Force recommended creation of the council, and legislation passed this year authorized it.

The meeting will be at 2 p.m. in the State Capitol Archives Room.

Feds may pay for All Kids (Montgomery Advertiser)

Alabama's All Kids health insurance program, which covers about 84,000 lower-income children, would be paid for entirely by the federal government under a little-known provision of the Affordable Care Act.

The 2010 health care law ordered a 23-percentage point increase in the federal matching rate for children's health insurance programs, or CHIP, in each state. So if Congress renews CHIP funding — which expires in the fall of 2015 — Alabama could save more than \$45 million a year.

Alabama now pays for about 22 percent of the program, which is for children in families that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but not enough to afford private insurance. In Alabama, about 84,000 children are enrolled in the program, although about 23,000 were moved to Medicaid earlier this year under a different provision of the Affordable Care Act.

Cathy Caldwell, director of All Kids, said Congress should act before federal funding for CHIP expires at the end of fiscal 2015.

"We need a timely extension of CHIP funding," she said. The looming expiration "is already causing anxiety in states and families."

The Alabama Legislature has allotted \$47.6 million for the children's health insurance program in next year's state budget.

State Sen. Cam Ward, R-Alabaster, said All Kids is worthwhile, even with the state match.

"So if it costs my state no money, I'm all for that. That's a no-brainer," Ward said Tuesday. "There is a gap there that All Kids filled. And the overall expense, even when we pay our share, wasn't that great."

Nationally, 5.7 million children are enrolled in CHIP programs, which are widely credited with helping lower the uninsured rate among children from 14 percent in 1997 to 7 percent in 2012.

In Alabama, where All Kids was once a national leader in finding and enrolling eligible children, the number of children without health insurance dropped from more than 20 percent to 7 percent over the same period, Caldwell said. But Alabama's rate increased slightly, by less than one percent, since the state tightened its budget and stopped paying for aggressive enrollment outreach two years ago, Caldwell said.

"We have lost a little bit of ground, and I hate to say that," she said.

In order for children under 19 to qualify for All Kids, their families must earn less than 300 percent of the federal poverty level — about \$75,000 for a family of four.

Renewing federal funding for CHIP likely will be controversial on Capitol Hill, in part because the health insurance landscape has changed so dramatically since it was last renewed in 2009. But even with the new online marketplaces created by the Affordable Care Act, which allow people to qualify for federal subsidies and comparison shop for private insurance, CHIP advocates say there is still a role for a separate government program for lower-income children.

A preliminary analysis by the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families says many children now on CHIP would become uninsured — including about 1.8 million in Texas, New York and Florida — if Congress doesn't renew funding.

Caldwell said the insurance plans offered on the marketplaces are designed for adults, not kids, and not all plans guarantee that children's hospitals and pediatric providers are included in the coverage. She also said the out-of-pocket costs to parents who buy plans through the marketplaces are greater than under All Kids.

The marketplaces may be a good option for children in the future, "but not now," she said.