



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

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[House Speaker Mike Hubbard calls AEA's effort in GOP primary 'horrible failure' \(AL.com\)](#)

House Speaker Mike Hubbard calls the Alabama Education Association's foray into the Republican primary this year an expensive failure, although it did help take out a few GOP incumbents.

Campaign finance reports from AEA's political action committee, Alabama Voice of Teachers for Education, AVOTE, show that the PAC tried to unseat 13 Republican incumbents in legislative races in the primary and won three of those battles, all in the House of Representatives.

That third win came in the July 15 runoff, when Corey Harbison beat Rep. Mac Buttram of Cullman in House District 12.

Hubbard and former Gov. Bob Riley campaigned for Buttram, but he lost by 10 percentage points.

The other wins came in the June 3 primary, when Connie Rowe defeated Rep. Bill Roberts of Jasper in District 13, and Tim Wadsworth edged Rep. Richard Baughn of Lynn in a close race in District 14.

AVOTE's campaign finance reports show that it spent a total of about \$150,000 on behalf of Harbison, Rowe and Wadsworth.

AVOTE spent about \$170,000 on behalf of five other Republican candidates who challenged GOP incumbents in the House, according to the campaign finance reports. But those incumbents prevailed.

They were Reps. Dan Williams of Athens, Kerry Rich of Albertville, Ed Henry of Hartselle, Alan Harper of Northport and Mack Butler of Rainbow City.

Another AEA-backed candidate, Isaac Whorton of Valley, won the GOP primary in House District 38, an open seat because of the retirement of Rep. Duwayne Bridges. Whorton has no Democratic opposition.

AVOTE spent much more helping the opponents of Republican incumbents in the Senate but came up empty.

Reports show that the PAC spent a total of about \$730,000 for the opponents of Sens. Jimmy Holley of Elba, Del Marsh of Anniston, Tom Whatley of Auburn, Gerald Dial of Lineville and Paul Bussman of Cullman.

AVOTE also spent more than \$300,000 on two Republican candidates for open Senate seats -- Rep. Todd Greeson and Gayle Gear. Both lost.

Overall, Hubbard said the AEA got little for their money.

"From a 20,000-foot level, it was just a horrible failure for them," Hubbard said.

AEA Executive Secretary Henry Mabry was not available for comment.

Rep. Craig Ford, the House Minority Leader, a Democrat from Gadsden, said the AEA's efforts in the Republican primary were to protect public education, which he said the GOP-led Legislature has "abandoned."

"I think the AEA doesn't care if they're Democrats or Republicans, they just want people to support public education," Ford said.

Ford and other Democrats have sided with the AEA in numerous battles with the Republican majority, including over the Alabama Accountability Act in 2013, employee pay raises, and requirements that education employees pay more for their pensions.

Ford said he thought Buttram's loss, in spite of help from Hubbard and Riley, was an indicator that voters in local races don't care about endorsements from statewide party leaders.

Hubbard said the AEA has been a detriment to education by opposing reforms such as the Accountability Act and tenure reform.

"Every time you want to do anything progressive, they're the ones standing in the way," Hubbard said.

Hubbard said he's not concerned that several new members will join the House Republican Caucus thanks, in part, to campaign support from the AEA.

"Just because they supported them doesn't mean they're going to be AEA lackeys. I know for a fact that won't be the case," Hubbard said.

[Alabama ranked 47th in job growth for June compared to last year \(AL.com\)](#)

Alabama ranks near the bottom among the 50 states in job growth, according to the latest available data.

From June 2013 to June 2014, the total number of jobs supported by Alabama's economy grew by less than 0.3 percent, from 1.915 million to 1.920 million. Only three states -- New Jersey, Vermont, Alaska -- suffered slower growth.

Most states -- 38 of them -- enjoyed job growth of at least 1 percent over the past year. Alabama would need to quadruple its rate of job growth to meet that criterion.

Seven states grew jobs by 3 percent or more, or about 12 times Alabama's growth rate.

Alabama was the only state in the nation to see its unemployment rate increase from June 2013 to June 2014.

[Alabama 8th-graders rank 50th in math; see how we compare with other states in reading, science \(AL.com\)](#)

The largest and longest running assessment of U.S. education performance shows Alabama lagging behind the rest of the nation in all subjects.

The latest available data from the National Assessment of Education Progress or NAEP shows Alabama fourth and eighth graders garnering average scores below the national average in all subjects.

Most notably, the state's eighth graders ranked 50th of 52 states and non-state school jurisdictions in math, and Alabama's fourth graders ranked 47th in math.

Just 25 percent of eighth graders and 30 percent of fourth graders garnered scores of proficient or better in mathematics.

Asked about the scores, officials with the Alabama State Department of Education said the state's previous standards were too low and could be to blame for the scores.

The new Alabama College and Career Ready Standards better engage students and offer more critical thinking, leading school officials to believe scores will improve with continued implementation of the higher standards, said spokeswoman Malissa Valdes-Hubert.

"The Alabama College and Career Ready Standards are aligned to the type of questions found on the NAEP test," she said. "Students will be more prepared to meet the challenge of assessments like NAEP. They'll be on an even playing field with the ACCRS."

Those standards include the controversial national standards for math and English known as the Common Core State Standards.

The NAEP, which randomly samples schools across all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense school jurisdiction, is scheduled to be administered again in 2015.

See a listing of the latest scores below:

Subject	Grade	Year	Alabama score	National score	National rank
Math	Fourth	2013	233	241	47
Math	Eighth	2013	269	284	50
Reading	Fourth	2013	219	221	30
Reading	Eighth	2013	257	266	45
Science	Fourth	2009	143	149*	38*
Science	Eighth	2011	140	151	46

*Five states or jurisdictions did not participate.

All data from the National Center for Education Statistics.

The NCES notes that 57.4 percent of Alabama's 744,621 students at the time were eligible for free or reduced lunch, meaning they live in a state of poverty.

Additionally, 60.8 percent of the state's 1,619 schools qualified as Title I schools, meaning at least 40 percent of the school's population qualified for free or reduced lunch.

While 10.7 percent of the students were enrolled in special education with individual education plans or IEPs, just 2.4 percent were enrolled in limited English proficiency programs.

The NCES listed per-pupil education expenditures statewide at \$8,803 and a total of 47,723 full-time-equivalent teachers.

Not represented are eighth-grade writing scores from 2007 and fourth grade writing scores from 2002, the latest scores available for those subjects and grades. In both cases, Alabama's average scores were below the national average.

With the NAEP to be re-administered in 2015, Alabama schools have chance to elevate their scores and demonstrate whether the new standards are effective.

Alabama Workforce Council aims to match education programs with business needs (AL.com)

State leaders in business, industry, education and government gathered today in the State Capitol for the first meeting of the Alabama Workforce Council.

The group, chaired by Zeke Smith, executive vice president of external affairs at Alabama Power, will try to improve collaboration between educators and employers so that more students can identify and take courses that fit the jobs available in business and industry.

Smith said there are shortages of people to work in skilled crafts. He said that gap will widen because more people are retiring than entering those skilled trades.

Smith said welding and pipefitting are examples of skills where there is more demand than supply. He also mentioned robotics.

Gov. Robert Bentley, who appointed the council members, said part of the challenge is to convince more students that skilled crafts lead to good career jobs that pay well.

Bentley said the council's work will benefit the state years from now.

Today's meeting was the latest part of a process Bentley started in January 2013 when he issued an executive order to create the College and Career Ready Task Force. One of the task force's recommendations was to create the Workforce Council.

The Legislature then passed a bill this year to set up the council, which has 31 members, most from the private sector.

Bentley said dual enrollment is an example of the kind of innovation that can help match students with courses that can lead to good jobs. It allows high school students to earn college credits.

The Legislature passed a bill this year to set up a \$10 million scholarship program to help more students take part in dual enrollment.

Members of the Workforce Council.

On Birmingham's DNC bid, ALGOP Chair says 'bring their radical, leftist show here' (AL.com)

The chairman of the Alabama Republican Party, Bill Armistead, has thrown his support behind Birmingham's bid to bring the 2016 Democratic National Convention to the Magic City, but the tone of Armistead's endorsement is decidedly tongue-in-cheek.

"I can think of no better way for the citizens of our state to see the vast differences between the parties than to have the Democrats bring their radical leftist show here," Armistead wrote in a letter published Monday at ALGOP.org. "Their staunch support of homosexual rights, gay marriage and abortion are in stark contrast to the conservative beliefs that dominate in our great state."

The letter appears adjacent to a less-than-flattering photo of President Barack Obama.

Birmingham Mayor William Bell is hosting a delegation from the DNC this week to evaluate the city's fitness for the convention. In preparation, banners with the words "DNC Birmingham 2016" have been hung around the city, and even Vulcan has been lit up in blue for the occasion.

"There is a reason that Republicans have had the success we have had in the last few years," Armistead wrote. "The people of Alabama simply do not support the liberal platform of the Alabama Democrat [sic] Party or the National Democrat Party [sic] because they are one and the same. The visit by the DNC selection delegation will only serve to solidify this fact."

Armistead also took a shot at Alabama state Sen. Roger Bedford, D-Russellville, who, with Sen. Rodger Smitherman, D-Birmingham, he believes "will be part of the escort committee."

"Bedford's activism with the DNC goes back decades, and he was one of the few Democrats in Alabama to work hard to defeat President Reagan when he ran for President," Armistead said.

Armistead also says that the DNC visit to Birmingham is "sure to be a spectacle," and then says Obama has "condoned, no encouraged" illegal immigration.

"So, yes, I do hope the Democrats choose Birmingham for their National Convention and explain to Alabamians and Americans why the Democrat [sic] Party, under the leadership of Barack Obama, has felt it was necessary to radically transform America rather than restoring it to the greatness we once knew," he concludes.

They beat the UA 'Machine,' now they're on the verge of being elected to statewide office (Yellowhammer News)

The Machine.

For over a century it has held almost total sway over Greek life and the Student Government Association at the University of Alabama.

The so called "secret society" has been the topic of a cover story in Esquire magazine. It's been featured in the New York Times. It's been accused of election-rigging, voter fraud and intimidation. It was even blamed by some for the SGA being shut down for several years in the wake of harassment and assault allegations.

But it's also been responsible for electing UA SGA Presidents who have gone on to become some of the most well-known and successful leaders in Alabama history.

Here's a partial list:

1915-16 Lister Hill, the first UA SGA President, became a United States Senator

1920-21 Joseph W. Sewell played for the New York Yankees with Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig

1923-24 John J. Sparkman became a United States Senator

1928-29 Albert Boutwell, Sr. became the Mayor of Birmingham

1935-36 Hugh Davis Merrill, Jr. became Speaker of the Alabama House of Representatives

1951-52 Robert Smith Vance became a Federal Judge

1952-53 William J. Edwards III became a U.S. Congressman

1955-56 Walter W. Flowers became a U.S. Congressman and was a key democrat on the Watergate Panel. When Nixon lost his vote on the panel, he knew he had to resign.

1967-68 Don E. Siegelman became Alabama Secretary of State, Attorney General, Lt. Governor and Governor

1974-75 William Bell Blount became the Chairman of the Alabama Democratic Party

There have also been dozens of Alabama students who rose through the SGA system with the backing of The Machine and went on to be pillars of their communities across the state as business and civic leaders.

1905: The founding members of the Theta Nu Epsilon fraternity at the University of Alabama (The Machine)

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But in the past 100 years, there have only been seven Alabama students who conquered The Machine to become SGA President without their blessing.

1936-37 Carl A. Elliot became a U.S. Congressman.

1963-64 Donald Wilbur Stewart became an Alabama State Senate and United States Senator

1970-71 James W. Zeigler served on the Alabama Public Service commission before earning the nickname "Mr. 49 percent" for always coming up just shy of getting elected

1976-77 Cleophus Thomas, Jr. became the first black SGA President, went on to Harvard Law and served on the UA Board of Trustees

1978-79 A. Jerry DeVaney, after whose election The Machine added sororities to their ranks to bolster the size of their voting bloc

1983-84 John N. Bolus

1986-87 John Merrill, who currently serves in the Alabama House of Representatives

Two of those seven, Jim Zeigler and John Merrill, now find themselves on the verge of being elected to statewide office in Alabama, decades after being introduced to the rough and tumble world of politics while taking on The Machine.

Zeigler won the Republican primary runoff for State Auditor last week and faces no Democratic opposition in the fall. Merrill squeaked out a close victory in the Republican primary runoff and should easily beat his Democratic opponent in November.

"When I enrolled at Alabama and started looking at the history of the SGA Presidents, those people were the ones who were in key positions in leaderships in our state — senators and congressmen, even a governor," Merrill recalled. "Before I became SGA President, The Crimson White (student newspaper) asked me, 'What is the Machine?' And I told them, 'The Machine is select coalition of fraternities and sororities that is specifically designed to influence and dominate campus politics.' They still use that description to this day."

John Merrill as UA SGA President (left) and as a candidate for Alabama Secretary of State (right)

John Merrill as UA SGA President (left) and as a candidate for Alabama Secretary of State (right)

Although the office he is currently seeking involves a much higher level of responsibility, Merrill says that his experience in student politics at Alabama undoubtedly prepared him for what he's doing now.

"At least two times during my campaign people wrote on my Facebook wall, 'well there's another 'Machine' or 'Greek' candidate just going on to his next step.' I told them that they better do their homework because I beat The Machine. And let me tell you, I didn't run my campaign for Secretary of State any different than how I ran my campaign for SGA President. I went to see people where they were. I met with key leaders. I raised money. We had billboards, ads, brochures and t-shirts. We got statewide news coverage. So the opportunity to participate in the SGA thoroughly prepared me to know how to participate in the electoral process and how to be successful at it.

"It is a good training ground," Merrill said in conclusion. "The main thing I learned very early on after getting elected SGA President was that it's about getting things done, not getting credit for getting things done. I've carried that with me ever since."

Jim Ziegler could not be reached for comment.