



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

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[Carly's Law: Bentley, supporters gather in Pelham to praise bill's passage \(AL.com\)](#)

Almost a year ago, Dustin Chandler was talking at work about an idea to legalize medicinal marijuana in Alabama to treat seizures in his child and others.

"We just kind of laughed about 'what an uphill battle you're going to face,'" Chandler recalled about the conversation with a fellow Pelham police officer.

During a special gathering today at Pelham City Hall attended by Gov. Robert Bentley and various state lawmakers concerning the legislation involving a marijuana-derived medicine for treating seizures, Chandler has seen his idea come full circle.

"It's a symbolic thing for me," Chandler said. "That's kind of where it was hatched."

Holding his 3-year-old daughter who was the motivation behind the Carly's Law legislation that authorizes a UAB study of cannabidiol oil, also known as CBD, Chandler gathered with Bentley, lawmakers and about a half-dozen families with children who may benefit from the medication.

"These kids that you see, Governor, are why we fought so hard for Carly's Law," he said. "What they did in the state House was nothing short of a miracle. ... Carly can't speak and a lot of these kids can't, but we gave them a voice."

The potential opportunity to use CBD oil -- a medicine that does not contain the intoxicating properties associated with marijuana -- has provided a sense of relief for families across Alabama with children who are using prescription medications that leave the kids sedated and sometimes worse.

"Her medicine that we have right now, it's not the best," said Thomas Woods, whose 2-and-a-half-year-old sister, Leni Young, has been diagnosed with epilepsy and cerebral palsy. "It has a lot of side effects."

Woods, a University of Montevallo student, remembered his mother, Amy Young of Wetumpka, talking last year about CBD oil used in Colorado with positive results. "I'm really hopeful this can be replicated here," he said. "Every time she has a seizure, she takes two steps back" in terms of progress.

Carrie Akins of Foley had her 8-year-old daughter, Avery, back in Pelham for today's gathering after attending a pro-Carly's Law rally at the Pelham Civic Complex and Ice Arena on March 1.

"Empowered," Akins said about how she felt with the passage of Carly's Law. "She's part of history, not only for the state of Alabama, but for other kids across other states."

Avery has suffered from Rett Syndrome since she was born and has six to 10 seizures a day. Akins said her daughter is on the waiting list to participate in the UAB study.

The mother has the goal of removing her daughter from the heavy prescription medications she's using. "As of now they're not asking anybody to come off anything prior to the study. Ultimately, yes, I would like her to be pharmaceutical-free except for CBD oil," she said.

Robin Pass came from Prattville with her family including Gabriel, who sometimes suffers 30 to 40 severe seizures daily. "It's something you don't want to have to be involved in, but you're glad to be a part of it," she said about supporting Carly's Law.

She was thankful for the opportunity to meet the legislators behind Carly's Law. "It's a big opportunity to say thank you to those who had a part in this," Pass said.

Bentley addressed the few dozen people gathered inside the Pelham City Council chambers. "Y'all were the best lobbyists -- and I'm not a lobbyist fan," the governor said. "You came and you touched the hearts of all of us."

With state Reps. Mike Ball of Madison and Allen Farley of McCalla and state Sen. Paul Sanford of Huntsville in attendance, Bentley thanked them and the Legislature for approving Carly's Law.

"Now that we have things in place, hopefully the study will show this will be a benefit to these sweet children," Bentley said.

Sanford, an early supporter of the effort, said when he first heard about CBD oil, he asked himself what he would do if the situation involved his own child. "This has been one thing I consider the best effort of anything I've done in Montgomery since 2009" when he was elected, he said.

[State superintendent explains low test scores, says more rigorous standards will help \(AL.com\)](#)

AL.com reported Monday that the largest and longest running assessment of U.S. education performance shows Alabama lagging behind the rest of the nation in all subjects.

The 2013 scores from the National Assessment of Education Progress or NAEP included a ranking of 50th in the nation for eighth grade math in Alabama public schools.

Now, State Superintendent Tommy Bice is speaking out on the issue, blaming the low test scores on the state's old standards, which were aligned with substandard assessments.

"Our previous assessments -- the ARMT and Alabama High School Graduation Exam -- were totally unaligned with the level of rigor and text complexity and critical thinking required on NAEP," Bice said.

ARMT refers to the Alabama Reading and Math Test, which has been discontinued in favor of a new ACT Inc. suite of assessments.

Bice predicted significant progress under the state's new College and Career Ready Standards, which include the controversial Common Core State Standards for English and math.

"Our new standards and assessments are far more aligned with the rigor, text complexity and critical thinking required to be successful -- not just on an assessment but in the real world.," he said. "We expect to see significant progress as we shift from AYP to College and Career Readiness."

AYP refers to Adequate Yearly Progress, the key measure under No Child Left Behind, which Alabama quit last year.

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.

In movie theater, a call against Common Core (Montgomery Advertiser)

It wasn't a revival so much as a commissioning of the faithful to spread the message.

The embarkation point Tuesday evening was the AMC movie theater on Vaughn Road; the gospel was the need to get Common Core standards out of public schools, and the exhorter was conservative commentator Glenn Beck.

A group of about 70 people came to the movie theater for "We Will Not Conform," an anti-Common Core presentation hosted by Beck and featuring Wetumpka Tea Party president Becky Gerritson. The program was less about outlining the attendees' issues with Common Core and more about organizing those converted to the cause.

Most of those who came out Tuesday evening fit in that camp.

"It's like everything's going downhill, and it's not coming up again," said Karen Newton, a retired Retirement Systems of Alabama worker from Wetumpka. Newton and her husband, Lonnie Carden, who works in outdoor retail, said they are concerned that the standards are harming children and that there is a need to "decelerate" them.

The Common Core standards are the basis of the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards, and were developed by the National Governors Association in 2007 as part of a broad effort to better measure student achievement around the country.

The standards have come under criticism from numerous conservatives for reasons ranging from concerns about standardized testing to accusations that the standards, as implemented in school curricula, represent a federal takeover of education.

"I hear that all the time," said Elmore County Schools superintendent Jeff Langham, a proponent of Common Core. "I'm begging for some of these folks to visit our classroom. No one ever takes me up on my invitation to show me where this federal takeover is taking place."

Speakers during the event occasionally touched on concerns with standardized testing.

"Instead of encouraging teachers to take risks, they are told to be common, to conform, to just take the test and give the test, that's it," Beck said during the program.

The Alabama Department of Education has staunchly defended the College and Career Ready Standards during legislative attempts to repeal the standards, saying they were developed in Alabama with input from teachers in the state and that they are aimed at making people College and Career Ready.

"Teachers create their own curricula and classwork," a Department of Education statement said Tuesday. "The standards are what students should know and be able to do at each grade level."

However, most of Beck's event focused less on criticisms of Common Core and more on organizing anti-Common Core movements. Speakers during the broadcast encouraged the distribution of literature and networking to bring people into the cause. Audience members were also encouraged to find alternatives to public schools, such as charter schools and home schooling.

Those in attendance were also encouraged not to allow those with backgrounds in the field to discourage them from expressing their concerns, as conservative commentator Michelle Malkin derisively referred to the "PhD in education policy."

Eric Gerritson, Becky Gerritson's husband, said he had concerns about the testing involved, as well as money that might be made by testing companies, another theme that ran through the evening. However, he could find something positive to say about Common Core.

"It gets people talking about education, and I think that's good," he said.

[Gov. Robert Bentley says he's 'proud of progress' Alabama making in employment \(AL.com\)](#)

Gov. Robert Bentley said Monday that Alabama's economy is moving in the right direction even though the most recent unemployment statistics don't show that, as pointed out by his Democratic opponent, Parker Griffith.

June's unemployment rate of 6.8 percent exceeded the rate of the previous June, making Alabama the only state to see an increase during that time period.

"You can look at statistics any way you wish but we have 50,000 more people working today than when I took office," Bentley said Monday when asked about the unemployment rate during a break at the first meeting of the Alabama Workforce Council.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in June 2014 Alabama employers had about 1.92 million employees, up from about 1.88 million in June 2011, the year Bentley took office. That would be an increase of about 40,000 jobs. The number includes part-time jobs. Agricultural jobs and self-employed workers are not included.

"I'm very proud of the progress we're making," Bentley said. "Now, are we where we want to be? Absolutely not. But that's why we are creating this task force today. That's why we are continuing to train students. And what we're putting in place today will reap benefits for this state years to come."

[Related: Farnborough proves fruitful: Alabama unveils 3 aerospace projects totaling \$136M]

[Related: Alabama ranked 47th in job growth for June compared to last year.]

[State job growth lagging behind the nation \(Anniston Star\)](#)

Pamela Gay needed work for the first time in 28 years after she closed her Cleburne County poultry farm in December.

She still needs a job.

"I seem to be having a pretty hard go at it myself," Gay said. "The job market is really tight."

Gay, who said she has applied for as many jobs as she possibly can, from jobs in greenhouses to work at chicken processing plants, is one of many Alabamians having difficulty finding employment.

Alabama has seen its jobless rate grow this past year, reaching a level in June that was higher than during the same month last year, labor statistics show. Meanwhile, many other states and the U.S. on average have enjoyed decreases in unemployment this year as they recover from 2008's Great Recession.

While economists agree the slow job growth is an issue, they argue as to the causes and solutions to the problem. Some say more education funding is needed to offer more employable workers to businesses. However, others say that fluctuations in the economy are making companies wary of hiring and that it's mainly up to the private sector to turn the state job market around.

According to Alabama Department of Labor statistics released Friday, Alabama's unemployment rate was 6.8 percent in June — higher than the 6.5 percent rate during the same month last year and part of a continuing trend in state jobless growth since the beginning of the year.

Calhoun County has faced similar growth in unemployment this year. The statistics show the county's unemployment rate in June was 7.9 percent, slightly higher than the 7.8 percent rate it had during the same month last year.

Conversely, the U.S. unemployment rate decreased to 6.1 percent in June from 6.3 percent in May. It also had a lower unemployment rate than the 7.5 percent rate it had in June last year. The statistics also show that Alabama is the only state to experience growth in its unemployment rate in the last 13 months.

Skills needed

Keivan Deravi, economist at Auburn University at Montgomery, said unevenness in the Alabama's job market has contributed to the state's slow recovery. For instance, the state has strong auto manufacturing and service and hospitality sectors, which did not suffer much during the height of the recession, meaning they did not lay off many workers that now need replacement, Deravi said.

In the meantime, the state is struggling to grow jobs in professional services and the construction trade, Deravi said. While some housing markets, such as Birmingham's, have recovered since the recession, many others, including Calhoun County's, are still stagnant, meaning fewer construction jobs.

"Commercial construction has really not added and come back online," Deravi said.

Deravi said to ensure long-term steady growth, better education and workforce development in the state are needed to train workers for the jobs that are available. Doing that will also make the state more enticing for new companies, he said.

"The economy is being driven by skill sets and requires major investment in education," Deravi said, adding that raising taxes to fund such investments should be considered. "Cutting taxes and having smaller government can be correct to some extent, but if you cut too much, it can be counter-productive."

Yasamie August, spokeswoman for Gov. Robert Bentley's office, wrote in a Tuesday email that Bentley still does not favor raising taxes. August wrote that Bentley is looking at other ways to improve workforce training in the state, noting the governor attended the first Alabama Workforce Council meeting Monday — a group comprised of business leaders and educators from across the state.

"One of the recommendations from the Alabama Workforce Council is proposed funding opportunities to increase established industry-funded and Education Budget allocations to be used as scholarship programs for college technical education and dual enrollment programming," August wrote. "Having a properly trained workforce is how we secure and retain jobs."

August also wrote that the governor's office wants to expand the number of career coaches in high schools to help students be more aware of job opportunities.

To train or not to train

Robert Robicheaux, an economist at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, said there are many employers in the state that cannot fill job openings because they can't find enough properly trained workers.

"It's not just a matter of the governor going out and attracting new business to the state," Robicheaux said. "There's a disconnect to what the workplace needs ... there's a great need in our state for skilled craftsmen."

However, Robicheaux said he did not see pumping more money into education as the answer.

Robicheaux said it appears more younger workers entering the job market out of college are either not obtaining the skills they should or are unwilling to start off with lower-paying jobs.

"Certainly, our community colleges and governor and mayors are doing their best to encourage economic development," he said. "It's more of a cultural issue — people not willing to work themselves up the ladder."

Robicheaux said the state, like many other parts of the country, is struggling to lower unemployment because companies became more efficient during the height of the recession.

"Jobs that went away in 2010 are just not coming back," Robicheaux said. "Companies are using technology to replace those workers."

Ahmad Ijaz, director of economic forecasting for the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Alabama, said more education funding isn't needed because the claims of lack of skilled labor in the state are overblown.

"Companies have really never been able to find people who have the exact skill set they want," Ijaz said. "The state has already done a real good job and has excellent workforce training ... Alabama has one of the best workforce development programs in the nation."

Instead, it is the private sector holding off on hiring until it sees more stability in the economy, Ijaz said. Economic growth has been uneven across the country in the past year, which makes employers cautious, he said.

"If they're not sure what the economy will do six months from now, they'll be reluctant to hire just to lay them off later," Ijaz said. "A lot of it is up to private employers too, to do their part in hiring."

[Alabama State University president responds Gov. Bentley's request that two trustees step down \(AL.com\)](#)

Alabama State University President Gwendolyn Boyd has issued a statement in response to Gov. Robert Bentley's request today that two top board members step down.

"I have read all of the material from all of the concerned parties, which includes the Alabama State University Student Government Association president, our alumni, friends, supporters of the University

and Governor Robert Bentley; and we will respectfully continue to move forward as these issues are being resolved,"she said in a statement that gave no other information.

In letters issued today, Bentley, who serves as president of the ASU board by virtue of his elected office, asked board members Elton Dean and Marvin Wiggins to step down due to conflicts of interest.

[Download copies of the letters here.]

In both documents, he said he was "disappointed" to learn that proposed amendments to ASU's bylaws had been circulated to members of ASU's board "excluding me as president and a member of the board."

According to Bentley's letter, the amendments would have done the following in an apparent attempt to grab power from Boyd:

Establish an attorney-client privileges between the university's general counsel and the board, replacing that between the university and its president,

Provide for the hire of the general counsel by the board of trustees,

Allow removal of trustees only for criminal acts by a majority of the members of the board of trustees rather than a majority present at the time of the vote,

Install a board liaison with the same powers as those designated to the university president,

Prohibit trustees from disclosing confidential information, and

Allow a committee chair to direct the actions of the president.

The requests comes as ASU remains under a six-month warning from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools for conflicts of interest and other leadership problems that predated Boyd's selection as president of ASU.

According to The Associated Press, ASU's student government association called upon the same two trustees to step down.

[Surge in use of food stamps levels off, now on a slight decline \(AL.com\)](#)

A surge in Americans using food stamps has leveled off, a trend that is also apparent in Alabama.

The Washington Post reported the trend today.

The number of Alabamians receiving food stamps, now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, almost doubled after the start of the recession in late 2007.

In January 2008, there were roughly 228,000 households, 564,000 people, receiving SNAP, according to the Alabama Department of Human Resources. They received \$54 million in benefits, about \$96 per person.

The numbers climbed steadily for about five years.

In January 2013, there were about 421,000 households, about 917,000 people, enrolled in SNAP. The total benefit that month was \$118 million.

The numbers stayed essentially flat throughout 2013, and there has been a slight tick downward this year. Still, almost one-fifth of the state's population uses the program.

The most recent statistics, from May, show 418,000 households, or 898,000 people enrolled in SNAP. The total benefit was \$109.4 million, \$122 per recipient.

Hall of Heroes: RICHARD ALLEN (Montgomery Advertiser)

Retired Brig. Gen. Richard F. Allen of Montgomery has been a civil servant in Alabama for decades, serving his country, his community and even the incarcerated. He believes the United States Army prepared him for each of the careers he pursued.

"As an Army officer, you are encouraged to seek positions of greater responsibility, and you prepare yourself for those positions by doing your job. ... Being an Army officer, the experience in leadership and management was really valuable."

Currently serving as counsel for Capell & Howard P.C. in Montgomery, Allen also is the parliamentary adviser to Lt. Gov. Kay Ivey. He has served as the commissioner of the Alabama Department of Corrections and as a senator's aide. He was assigned to an ordnance company during the Vietnam War.

Allen recently shared some of his military experiences.

When did you join the military?

"I was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army upon graduation from Florence State College on May 31, 1963. ... I realized I was really in the Army when my battalion commander sat me down in front of a map and said, 'We are here, there are about a hundred Russian divisions over here, and our mission if a war starts is to use our nuclear weapons to slow them down as they attack through the Fulda Gap. Welcome to Germany.' "

What were the reasons you joined?

"I had an uncle who was a career officer in the Army, and he was somebody the whole family looked up to, respected and liked. And of course growing up, I just knew in my childhood years I wanted to join as well. ... Later, as a college sophomore, I was majoring in chemistry and math, and I volunteered for advanced ROTC. Luckily (I) was accepted."

What have been one or two of your career highlights?

"Of course, the time serving in Vietnam was definitely a highlight of my career. There is no higher honor than to command American soldiers in a combat zone during wartime."

"... A second highlight was to serve for 18 months in a field artillery battalion in Germany at the height of the Cold War. At the time, there was no better place for a young officer to learn the tools of the trade. The work was hard; we spent about a third of the time, mostly in the winter, in the field, much of it conducting live fire exercises. ... I became the battalion's forward observer."

What do you cherish most from your time in the service?

"Doing my duty to the best of my ability, whether it was cleaning the latrine as a cadet, supplying ammunition in Vietnam, or commanding a brigade as a general officer, is what I take the most pride in remembering."

Richard F. Allen

AGE: 73

RANK: Retired brigadier general

MILITARY BRANCH: U.S. Army

JOB TITLE/CURRENT WORK: Counsel at Capell & Howard P.C.; parliamentary adviser to Lt. Gov. Kay Ivey

YEARS IN SERVICE: Active duty for seven years; U.S. Army Reserve for 14 years