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FULL TEXT

Ala lawmakers hope to debate revolving door bill

The Associated Press

February 4, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama legislators are returning to Montgomery after last week's meeting schedule got interrupted by the winter storm.

Both the Senate and the House get back to work Tuesday afternoon.

Alabama Senate leaders hope to vote on a proposal to ban legislators from becoming lobbyists for two years after they leave office. A loophole in current law allows lawmakers to resign and immediately lobby the chamber opposite where they served.

Some Republicans are pushing the bill after several GOP lawmakers resigned last year.

House Republicans will hold a noon press conference on an effort to allow high school students to enroll in job-training classes at two-year colleges.

Outside the Statehouse, a coalition of groups will hold a noon rally to call for new regulations on payday loans.

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Week ahead: Put up or shut up time for candidates, closing the State House revolving door

Al.com

February 3, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Decision time for candidates, three special elections and a catch-up week for legislators are political stories to watch this week.

Friday is the deadline for Democrats and Republicans to qualify with their parties to run in the June 3 primary. Governor, lieutenant governor, 140 legislative seats and many other races will be on the ballot.

On Tuesday, special elections will fill three seats in the Alabama House of Representatives vacated by resignations last year. The elections are in District 31 (Elmore and Coosa counties), District 53 (Jefferson County) and District 104 (Mobile County). Gov. Robert Bentley postponed the elections for a week because of the winter storm.

As for legislative business, the House returns at 1 p.m. Tuesday and the Senate at 2 p.m. The House met just one day last week because of the snow and ice storm. The Senate mustered quorums for two meeting days. But the usually busy committee day on Wednesday was scrapped.

This week, the Senate is expected to take up sunset bills, which are measures to review state agencies and are usually noncontroversial.

Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, said other priorities for the Senate would be his bill to close the revolving door on ex-legislators lobbying in the State House, SB 36, and the "Taxpayers' Bill of Rights," HB 105. That bill, by Rep. Paul DeMarco, R-Homewood, would create the Alabama Tax Appeals Commission to hear taxpayers' disputes with the state Department of Revenue. The House already passed it.

Last week, the Senate discussed briefly but delayed action on several bills, including SB 168 by Sen. Vivian Figures, D-Mobile, which would ban smoking in public places and workplaces. That bill could return to the Senate floor this week.

The House returns at 1 p.m. Tuesday. House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, said priorities this week would include Marsh's revolving door bill if it clears the Senate and a bill to expand the use of dual enrollment, which allows high school students to take classes at community colleges.

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Voting set in 3 special Alabama House elections

The Associated Press

February 4, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Voters in four Alabama counties are going to the polls to fill three vacancies in the Alabama House of Representatives.

House District 31 in Elmore and Coosa counties is having a Republican runoff between Mike Holmes and Jimmy Collier. The winner has no Democratic opposition.

Voters in part of Jefferson County are choosing between Anthony "Alan" Johnson and Arthur Shores Lee in the Democratic runoff for House District 53. The winner faces Republican Willie "W.A." Casey in March.

Voters in part of Mobile County are deciding whether Republican Margie Wilcox or Democrat Stephen Carr will represent District 104.

The polls are open from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. Tuesday.

The special elections were originally scheduled Jan. 28, but Gov. Robert Bentley delayed them one week due to the ice storm.

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Jimmy Collier, Mike Holmes square off in special election in Alabama House District 31

Al.com

February 4, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Two Republicans square off in a special election runoff for District 31 in the Alabama House of Representatives on Tuesday.

Wetumpka car dealer Jimmy Collier faces retiree and timber farmer Mike Holmes. The race was scheduled for Jan. 28, but Gov. Robert Bentley postponed it because of the winter storm.

The winner will complete the term of Rep. Barry Mask, R-Wetumpka, who resigned last year to become executive director of the Alabama Association of Realtors.

This is the last year of Mask's term, so the seat will be up for election again in the June 3 primary.

Holmes ran first and Collier finished second in a four-candidate field Dec. 3.

No Democrats ran for the seat.

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4 things to know about Alabama House District 104 race as voting starts

Al.com

February 4, 2014

Brendan Kirby

MOBILE, Alabama – Here are four things to keep in mind about today's special election to fill a vacant seat in a state House of Representatives district that runs from the western portion of Mobile to the Mississippi line.

1. It is unclear when the winner takes office. Unlike a normal election, which would occur when the Legislature is out of session, this special election between Republican Margie Wilcox and Democrat Stephen Carr is taking place while the Legislature is meeting.

Both candidates are anxious to take office as soon as possible, because every delay represents more votes taken without the voice of residents of District 104. And the election already has been pushed back a week because of Winter Storm Leon last week.

But the state constitution and election laws are in conflict. The constitution says that the term of a representative begins the day following the election, and that is the basis of Deputy Secretary of State Emily Thompson's determination that Tuesday's winner will take office Wednesday.

But Mobile County Probate Judge Don Davis said state law requires a delay in order to count provisional ballots and certify the election.

"There's a lag of one week for provisional ballots," he said. "There always is."

The Mobile County Board of Registrars and the canvassing board will meet one week from today. The registrars must review provisional ballots cast by voters who do not have identification or do not appear on the rolls. Every ballot deemed valid by the Board of Registrars gets added to the total, which the canvassing board then certifies.

Davis said that is exactly how the process worked last year after Adline Clarke won a special election in House District 97 following the death of state Rep. Yvonne Kennedy, D-Mobile.

But Davis said it is not his decision when today's winner starts work. If a judge or House Speaker Mike Hubbard swears in the winner, that's their call, he said.

"I wouldn't do it as a judge," he said.

2. The district is heavily Republican.

The GOP has controlled the seat for 20 years.

But Carr, who recently finished a stint in the Governor's Office of Faith-Based & Volunteer Services, argued that the district is not as rock-solid Republican as that history would indicate. He noted that only two Republicans have held the seat during all those years – Mike Dean, who defeated incumbent Democrat Lois Rockhold in 1994, and Jim Barton, whose resignation in August sparked today's special election.

Carr said he believes his views on economic matters are a better fit for a district with a large number of households with modest income.

Part of the reason District 104 has developed the reputation as solid GOP territory, he said, is that incumbents have faced sparse competition and Democratic voters have not had many options.

"The unique thing about this is we're an actual opponent," he said.

3. Turnout is likely to be low. The voting comes after a hotly contested if lightly attended GOP primary between Wilcox and Susan Hightower.

One indication of voter interest is the number of people who cast votes via absentee ballot. Mobile County elections coordinator Kim Tillman said only 13 of 41 people who requested absentee ballots returned completed ballots. One of those returned was a provisional ballot that may or may not count.

That is fewer than the 29 people who voted absentee during the runoff.

4. The winner will get little time to celebrate. The victor today will have plenty of work to do to catch up on legislative issues mid-session. Plus, the winner will have to begin thinking about the 2014 regular election cycle.

Qualifying for the party primaries ends Friday.

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Folsom not running again for Alabama lieutenant governor

The Associated Press

February 4, 2014

Phillip Rawls

Former Lt. Gov. Jim Folsom Jr. said Monday that he's not planning to run for lieutenant governor even though he filed paperwork creating a campaign committee for this year's race.

Folsom's longtime campaign chairman, Montgomery attorney Peck Fox, filed the paperwork with the secretary of state Friday. Folsom and Fox said the filing was required by Alabama's new campaign finance law because Folsom has \$2,002 left in his campaign account from the 2010 election.

"I don't have any plans to run. That was strictly a compliance measure," Folsom said in a phone interview.

Folsom said friends and supporters have been encouraging him to run again this year, and filing the paperwork prompted more calls. But a return to politics is not in his plans for now, he said.

Folsom lives in Cullman and operates an investment business in Birmingham. He was elected twice as lieutenant governor before moving up to governor in 1993 when Gov. Guy Hunt was convicted of an ethics violation and removed from office. Folsom lost a bid for a full term in 1994 and left politics for several years before returning in 2006 to win the lieutenant governor's office again. He lost his re-election bid in 2010 to Republican Kay Ivey.

The deadline for Democratic and Republican candidates to sign up for this year's race for lieutenant governor is Friday.

Ivey is running again and is opposed in the Republican primary June 3 by Jefferson County minister Stan Cooke.

Former state Rep. James Fields of Cullman is seeking the Democratic nomination. Like Folsom, he was one of many Democrats defeated in 2010 when Republican candidates swept all three branches of state government.

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Sources: Parker Griffith Likely To Run For Governor

WHNT

February 3, 2014

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (WHNT) -A one-time Democrat turned Republican turned Independent now appears to be plotting a run for governor...as a Democrat.

Multiple sources tell WHNT News 19 that former Congressman Parker Griffith is on the verge of announcing his candidacy for governor of Alabama, and as a member of the party he famously abandoned just four years ago. WHNT News 19 has confirmed that the Alabama Democratic Party recently voted to reinstate Griffith, clearing the way for a gubernatorial run that we're told will likely be announced before Friday's qualifying deadline.

Dr. Parker Griffith has run as a member of the Republican and Democratic parties in Alabama, serving in the Alabama Senate and also in the U.S. Congress from 2009-2011. Griffith was elected to Congress as a Democrat, but switched over to the Republican party halfway through his first term in office in 2010. Current Congressman Mo Brooks soundly defeated Griffith in the GOP primaries of 2010 and 2012, with Griffith eventually deciding to quit the GOP last year. Griffith also said in an interview with WHNT News 19 last fall he was finished with both parties. He's also run for mayor of Huntsville.

Local Democratic sources said Griffith met with state Democratic party leaders in Montgomery this past weekend to discuss his candidacy. Griffith did not respond to our messages, and has yet to file any formal paperwork.

Madison County Democratic Party Chair Clete Wetli said Griffith has been welcomed back.

"If he's going to support the party platform then he's a Democrat as far as I'm concerned," said Wetli. "He's got some damage control to do. He's going to have to reach out and talk to people and explain why he's the best candidate for the job."

Griffith appears on the website AlabamaStrong.com, which states its mission is 'One Voice United for all Alabamians.' The website states Alabama Strong is a grass-roots movement that brings together the resilient people of Alabama.

"Alabama Strong is an effort to be another voice, in Alabama and nationally, of what we can do as an optimistic people," Griffith says in a video on the website.

"Not only is Alabama strong, but America is strong. We are the strongest country in the world... All of that craziness that we've heard for the last two or three years – we're going to ignore that. We're going to tell the real story of Alabama being strong and America being strong. Optimism is contagious."

The website doesn't state Griffith's role with Alabama Strong, nor does it say if he is seeking a particular office.

WHNT News 19 contacted Bronwen Murray, who interviews Griffith in the video. Murray said Griffith is contemplating an announcement later in the week.

The website states Alabama Strong seeks to focus on tough issues including education reform, healthcare reform, immigration reform and prison reform.

Qualifying Deadline Nears

This Friday, February 7, is the last day for candidates to qualify with the parties for local and state office in Alabama.

One other Democrat has declared he will run for governor, Kevin Bass. Bass, a businessman, lives in Fayette and is a former minor league baseball player.

Two candidates have qualified to run as Republicans – Robert Bentley, the incumbent, and Stacey Lee George, a former Morgan County Commissioner.

The Alabama primaries are June 3.

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Federal judge says he'll rule quickly on whether to dismiss Alabama Accountability Act lawsuit

The Associated Press

February 3, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Alabama — A federal judge says he will rule quickly on whether to throw out a lawsuit challenging Alabama's new tax credits for families that move their children from failing public schools.

U.S. District Judge Keith Watkins heard about an hour of arguments Monday on a request from state officials to dismiss the lawsuit filed by the Montgomery-based Southern Poverty Law Center on behalf of eight low-income children living in four counties in central and south Alabama.

Southern Poverty Law Center attorney Jerri Katzerman said some rural students don't have the income or transportation to move to non-failing schools because they live too far away or the schools won't accept new students. "The statute operates to deny them access to a non-failing education," she said.

Assistant Attorney General Will Parker told the judge that the state officials sued by the law center aren't denying anyone the right to transfer. "The act is an even-handed measure with respect to children in failing schools," he said.

The judge said he will rule "pretty quickly" on whether to dismiss the suit or let it proceed to trial.

The state teachers' organization, the Alabama Education Association, has filed a separate suit in state court challenging the law. A Montgomery judge will hear arguments Thursday on a request by state officials to dismiss that suit.

The private-school tax credits are part of the Alabama Accountability Act passed by the Legislature last February. The law allows parents with children in public schools rated as failing by the state Department of Education to move them to a non-failing public school in the same district or another district.

They can also move them to a private school that is participating in the program. The parents can qualify for a tax credit of about \$3,500 annually to help pay the costs of the move.

In the fall, 78 public schools were rated as failing. Alabama had 719 students transfer to non-failing public schools within their school system, 18 move to public schools in other school systems, and 52 move to private schools.

Katzerman told the judge that city and county school systems can refuse to accept any students from a nearby school system with failing schools. She argued the law provides an incentive for them to do that because they don't want to accept students who might pull down a school's academic achievement and then get it on the failing schools list.

The judge said he has questions about that part of the law, as well as a part of the law that always classifies 6 percent of public schools as failing. He said Alabama could still have failing schools even if every school in Alabama performed above the national average.

The judge also questioned whether the courts should get involved. "Isn't this a policy decision the Legislature is entitled to make? I'm not a superintendent," he said.

He told Katzerman that if he should block the law, he might not be helping her clients get a better education. "That leaves your students exactly where they are now," he said.

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AARP Alabama against bill abolishing PSC's phone complaint process

Montgomery Advertiser

February 4, 2014

Brian Lyman

A bill passed out of a House committee last month has raised alarms for AARP Alabama, which says the legislation could prevent seniors from bringing disputes with their phone company to the Public Service Commission.

The bill's sponsor calls it the last step in the state's ongoing deregulation of the telecommunications industry.

Sponsored by Rep. Mike Hill, R-Columbiana, the legislation would eliminate the PSC's power to hear complaints from customers over inaccurate billing, services not ordered by a customer, or "the establishment or disruption of telecommunications service." The PSC is limited in those situations to enforcing terms and conditions of contracts or enforcing Federal Communications Commission regulations on billing.

The PSC's Consumer Services Section handled 831 complaints against telecommunication companies in 2013; according to the PSC, 417 of those involved AT&T.

Hill said Monday that with telecommunications companies moving into the state since deregulation, AT&T, which once dominated Alabama, had seen its market share fall significantly.

“There’s no longer any advantage to being AT&T,” he said. “They can’t tell every customer that calls, go jump in a lake. They have to answer their calls.”

Hill said that the PSC complaint process was needed when the company was a regulated monopoly in the state. Now, he said, customers unhappy with their service can move to another carrier.

AARP, however, sees it differently. Jamie Harding, the group’s associate director for communications, said that while competition overall has increased, older people in rural areas still rely on landlines offered by AT&T.

“That landline comes from AT&T, and it only comes from AT&T,” she said.

Harding also said the group was concerned that older individuals would be unlikely to adapt to cellphone technology. Without a process in place, she said, AARP was concerned that older individuals could fall victim to the whim of the company.

“The landline is relatively inexpensive at this point,” she said. “Again, without oversight, there’s no consumer protection.”

Harding said AARP planned to contact the PSC with its concerns. The PSC lost most of its regulatory powers over the state’s telecommunications industry in 2005, and members of the PSC and their staff Monday said they would defer to the Legislature on the question.

“We are a legislative entity,” Commissioner Jeremy Oden said. “We have to depend on what the Legislature does.”

Attempts to reach PSC president Twinkle Andress Cavanaugh for comment Monday were unsuccessful. David Rountree, chief of staff for Commissioner Terry Dunn, said Dunn would wait on the lawmakers’ decision, though he hoped to see language that would give customers a strong voice should the complaint process revert back to the company.

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Resort's offer to heroic Birmingham-area teachers sparks debate over ethics

Al.com

February 3, 2014

Michelle Matthews

MOBILE, Alabama -- When David Clark, general manager of The Beach Club in Gulf Shores, offered a total of 50 two-night condo stays to Birmingham-area teachers who spent the night with their students in the schools during last week’s winter storm, he had no idea that the gifts may violate the state’s ethics law.

“If it is, we certainly don’t want to do anything to harm teachers or anyone else,” Clark said Monday morning. “I had no idea this could be a potential problem.”

Clark had contacted state Sen. Trip Pittman, R-Daphne, on Monday morning. Pittman referred him to the Alabama Ethics Commission.

“I don’t want to put any teachers in a compromising position,” Clark said. “I hope to hear from the Ethics Commission very soon.”

Meanwhile, Hugh Evans, general counsel for the Alabama Ethics Commission, told AL.com that he is “comfortable with the way they (The Beach Club) are doing this.”

In a story about The Beach Club’s offer that was published Sunday morning on AL.com, Clark said that the first 25 teachers nominated for the contest had already been selected, but that because of the large number of emails he had received, his company, Spectrum Resorts, had decided to reward 25 additional teachers with two-night stays.

Soon after the story was published, a commenter raised the issue of whether it would be an ethics violation for teachers to accept the offer. In 2012, the Alabama Legislature passed an amendment to the statewide ethics law limiting teacher gifts from an individual to \$25, not to exceed \$50 in a calendar year.

Until Clark saw that comment, he said, he’d never considered that offering the two-night stays could violate any law. “We were just trying to recognize teachers who went way beyond to do great things,” he said.

“My knowledge of the ethics law really only grew yesterday,” he added. “I appreciate someone asking the questions. I hadn’t thought about it, and I certainly wouldn’t want any teachers to lose their jobs.”

Clark, like many others who commented on the story on AL.com, said that his interpretation of the law is that it is intended to prevent parents from influencing students’ grades. “I don’t see how a company 300 miles away can influence a grade,” he said.

One AL.com commenter replied to the initial question about an ethics violation by writing, “There was no reward incentive in staying with their students. Are you one of those people who would have to be given a reward to stay and do the right thing?”

Sen. Cam Ward, R-Alabaster, the chairman of the Alabama Senate Judiciary Committee, told an AL.com reporter on Sunday that he would defer to the Ethics Commission on the matter. But on his Facebook page, he wrote that he and his wife “actually nominated some of our local teachers for this honor.... I do not think the rule should apply to teachers in this case.”

Meanwhile, Clark and the Spectrum Resorts marketing department are tasked with reading some 500 emails telling the stories of teachers around Birmingham who stayed at their schools, feeding, comforting and entertaining the students who were stranded there.

Of those submissions, 25 teachers will receive two-night stays at The Beach Club. "What a wonderful thing to have the opportunity to do," said Clark of reading all the stories.

As of Monday morning, Clark continued to receive emails, even though the deadline was supposed to be 8 p.m. Sunday.

Ashley Cobb Spencer, a teacher from Christ's Kids Preschool in Hoover, wrote on The Beach Club's Facebook page, "A handful of teachers stayed to love on and care for the kids who remained, and the same teachers comforted moms as best they could who were heartbroken they wouldn't get to snuggle their babies at bedtime that night..."

"Elementary kids may have been easier to handle than breast-fed babies with no mommas.... Beach towels don't equal comfy bedding and Cheez-Its don't fill up hungry bellies but by the grace of God, our children were comfy and full with the love of our caring staff!"

Many people heaped praise on The Beach Club for rewarding teachers through the promotion. "Love this idea! What a wonderful thing to do for very deserving educators!" wrote Cia Stewart Tompkins.

"Thank you for giving back to our teachers who are often forgotten," wrote LaMecha Bush Chamblin.

Winners will be announced Wednesday, Feb. 5, on the resort's Facebook page, said Clark, "pending advice from the Ethics Commission."

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Sens. Jeff Sessions and Richard Shelby: Navy needs full order of 52 Littoral Combat Ships

Al.com

February 3, 2014

Leada Gore

Alabama Sens. Jeff Sessions and Richard Shelby are being joined by four other lawmakers in the continuing fight to keep the Navy's plans to order 52 Littoral Combat Ships in place.

Sessions and Shelby, Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wisc., Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., and Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wisc., have written a letter to President Barack Obama asking that the full order of 52 LCS be included in the Navy's 30-year shipbuilding plan that's part of the 2015 budget proposal.

The ships, the lawmakers said are needed "to meet the warfighting requirements of the combatant commanders."

Reports surfaced last month the Pentagon was considering cutting its order of LCS by as many as 20. The Navy originally planned to build 52 LCS, with 12 of the "Independent" class coming

from Austal USA's production facilities in Mobile. The other ships - the Freedom class - are set to be built by Lockheed Martin at its facilities in Marinette, Wisc.

The Navy has not confirmed the plan or said if the overall order would be cut or if building on one variant would be stopped.

Senators: LCS critical to Navy mission

The lawmakers said LCS is a "fast, versatile, fuel-efficient, highly capable, and relatively inexpensive ship. Moreover, it meets three critical warfighting needs the Navy has consistently deemed essential to its mission.

"Additionally, tens of thousands of hardworking Americans have jobs that depend on the continued construction of these valuable ships. The failure to produce all 52 Littoral Combat Ships would significantly reduce the size of our fleet, set back the Navy's shipbuilding program for decades, and thus damage America's national security. Truncating this important program would also harm our recovering economy."

Critics have claimed the ship does not meet requirements needed for combat. The Senators disagreed, saying it addresses "warfighting gaps" critical to the Navy, including defense against fast attacks from smaller boats, anti-submarine warfare and mine warfare.

"Our senior Navy leaders have been clear: LCS will deliver capabilities in these mission areas that far exceed those capabilities in the fleet today. Filling these warfighting capability gaps will be extremely important as we continue operating forward in the Middle East region and as we continue to pivot toward the Asia-Pacific," said the letter, which was also sent to Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus.

They also stressed the Alabama and Wisconsin shipyards have made substantial progress in getting production on schedule and costs under control.

"In fact, the unit cost of production for the LCS is on a marked, steady decline, and, as a result, the Navy is now purchasing LCS below the Congressionally-mandated cost cap," they wrote.

The program is at a critical time and reducing the number of ships on order will "introduce tremendous instability" into the shipyards and the host of suppliers that support that work, they said.

"This program provides high-quality, high-wage employment for workers across America. It will cost the economy thousands of jobs, and hurt economic growth in over forty states. Now, as the economy recovers, is not the time to be cutting back on the LCS program."

Sessions, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the letter is just the latest effort to preserve the LCS. He said he has supported the concept of the LCS since the late 1990 and after the Navy formally introduced it in late 2001 as part of its future surface combatant program.

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Volkswagen's union vote set for next week; outcome could be key for Alabama's auto industry

Al.com

February 3, 2014

Dawn Kent Azok

A vote has been set for next week on whether the United Auto Workers union will represent employees at the Volkswagen plant in Tennessee.

It's an event that's being watched closely by people across the South's auto sector, particularly those in Alabama.

If the UAW prevails, it would mark a dramatic shift for the region, which is dominated by foreign-owned factories that are non-union.

The UAW also has a campaign underway at Tuscaloosa County's Mercedes-Benz plant.

While that campaign is smaller than the one at Volkswagen, it could get more attention from the UAW if next week's vote is successful, said Dennis Cuneo, a former Toyota executive turned site selection consultant who spoke today at the Economic Development Association of Alabama Winter Conference that's being held in Hoover.

"I think if the UAW is successful there, they gain momentum. My guess is the next step would be Mercedes," he said.

Likewise, if the union fails at Volkswagen, that's a setback that also will likely be felt in Alabama and elsewhere, Cuneo said.

"Whatever occurs, it's significant," he said.

Cuneo listed the UAW's increasing focus on the South as one of several challenges for the auto industry in Alabama.

Economic developers often tout the lack of a large union presence in the state's auto industry when recruiting new companies. But if the UAW advances, that's not going to work anymore, Cuneo said.

While Alabama is an automotive powerhouse -- producing more than 915,000 vehicles last year compared to none 20 years ago -- it also faces growing competition from Mexico for new plants and additional production capacity, he said.

Meanwhile, there are still opportunities on the table, including deepening its supplier base and landing projects tied to new automotive technologies, Cuneo said.

Workers who support the UAW efforts at Mercedes cite the plant's increasing use of temporary workers, safety concerns due to injuries and the lack of a voice in other workplace issues.

UAW President Bob King said today that the union could not aim for certification by Volkswagen (without a vote) due to sabotage by "right-wing" anti-union forces.

The UAW said later that the election has been set for Feb. 12 to 14. The National Labor Relations Board set the election after an agreement was reached between Volkswagen Group of America and the UAW.

The vote will decide whether the union can establish a German-style works council at the Chattanooga plant. Such panels include both members of management and the rank-and-file.

Last fall, the UAW said a majority of Volkswagen workers had signed cards favoring the union's representation in creating a works council at the plant.

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Heritage Foundation hails Sessions as ‘Senator who most vigorously opposed amnesty’

Yellowhammer News

February 3, 2014

Cliff Sims

At the height of the debate over the so-called Gang of Eight’s immigration reform bill last May, Yahoo! News published an article in their “Power Players” section titled “Sen. Jeff Sessions almost single-handedly trying to derail ‘Gang of Eight’ immigration bill.”

Although he wasn’t able to stop it in the Senate, the consistent pressure he put on House Republicans to hold the line was a major factor in getting the bill bogged down in the lower chamber.

And that wasn’t his first rodeo.

“Many blame [Sessions] for the defeat of the last immigration reform bill in 2008,” Yahoo! News noted.

But last week, House Republican leadership released a new blueprint for immigration reform.

Sessions immediately sprang into action.

Once again, we have the same recycled talking points—crafted, it would appear, with the help of the same consultants and special interests. Each time, the talking points are followed by legislation that fails to match the promises — legislation that, at bottom, ensures only the amnesty and not the enforcement. The leadership talking points look like an attempted repackaging of the tired Gang-of-Eight-style formula that has been proposed, rejected, and re-proposed for years. It is no surprise then that Senator Schumer and former Speaker Pelosi are so

encouraged by these developments. But while Democrat leaders and interest groups appear satisfied, this document was not voted upon by the GOP conference and clearly does not represent the consensus of Republican members. Is it not time we pushed aside the stale proposals stitched together in concert with the same lobbyists, and asked what is in the best interests of the hardworking American citizen—and the nation?

With that kind of rhetoric being aimed at members of the Washington establishment in both parties, it's no wonder that conservatives around the country are starting to realize what we here in Alabama have known for a long time — Sen. Sessions is one of us.

#SESSIONS2016: Here's an idea for the 2017 State of the Union Address

Over the weekend, James Carafano of The Heritage Foundation, one of the nation's top experts on defense and homeland security, wrote a piece for The Washington Examiner praising Sen. Sessions for his efforts.

“In person Sessions doesn't look like the bill-slayer type,” Carafano wrote. “Polite and affable, he comes across as a perpetual ‘Mr. Smith Goes to Washington’ rather than a bulldog. Yet over the years, Sessions has proved to be very serious about some very serious issues. He hates higher taxes, has no use for Obamacare, and has a passion for providing for the common defense.”

The Heritage Foundation scholar noted that Sessions' decision to get so far out in front on the immigration issue has made him a favorite target of leftwing bloggers and TV personalities like Rachel Maddow.

“But, Sessions doesn't back off,” Carafano proclaimed. “One might wonder why he picked an explosive issue like immigration for his lonely crusade. But the impetus for his determined stand is clear: a total commitment to the rule of law. Before running for the U.S. Senate, he served as both a federal prosecutor and state attorney general. After serving as a U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Alabama, Ronald Reagan nominated him for a federal judgeship, but later withdrew it in the face of Democratic opposition. Sessions' entire professional career has been shaped by the belief that impartial justice is the glue that holds a free society together.”

“In the end, Congress may do the right thing and put the principle of rule-of-law above a politically-driven amnesty,” Carafano concluded optimistically. “If that happens, no one will deserve more credit than the not so quiet lion from Alabama.”

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ASU's first female president takes helm

Montgomery Advertiser

February 4, 2014

Josh Moon

Gwendolyn Boyd began her stint as Alabama State University's first female president Monday morning with a warm welcome.

Students, staff and faculty lined the entryway into ASU's Council Hall, where Boyd's new office is located, to welcome the new president with applause and balloons. Boyd stopped, shook hands and chatted briefly with a number of people on her way in.

She also told the crowd that Monday marked "a new day at ASU."

"We will continue to move this university forward in new and exciting ways," Boyd said. "I'm excited about doing this job. I'm excited about where we can go together."

Boyd, who didn't take questions from the media, said her goal is to make ASU's students "great citizens of the world." She also said ASU will be "student focused" during her tenure.

Boyd replaces Joseph Silver, who resigned from ASU in November 2012 after a three-month tenure and a nasty fight with university higher-ups. Silver alleged university funds were being misused — a claim ASU officials have continued to deny. Former president William Harris has served as interim president for the past year.

Boyd's hire came after a tumultuous search process that was criticized by Gov. Robert Bentley, who suggested at one point that it be shut down. A team of 15 on a search committee eventually narrowed a pool of more than 70 candidates down to Boyd, state Sen. Quinton Ross and Brigadier Gen. Samuel Nichols.

Boyd was the overwhelming choice among student groups, alumni and sororities. She is an ASU grad, earning a bachelor's degree in math, and was the first black woman to earn a master's degree in engineering from Yale University. She has worked in the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab for the past 33 years.

Bentley called Boyd "an excellent choice" and said it was "a good outcome for Alabama State." He also said investigations into Silver's allegations will continue following a forensic audit report turning up evidence of potential fraud.

In her office for the first time Monday, Boyd promised to work with the media and take plenty of input to operate ASU with "credibility, integrity and transparency." Boyd has stated repeatedly that operating the university with transparency will help move ASU past many of its current issues.

Boyd already has experienced a bit of controversy since being selected president. The contract she signed last month included a stipulation that Boyd, who is single, can't "cohabitate" with anyone in a romantic way in the ASU president's mansion, in which she's required to live, unless she is married and it is her husband.

After a story in the publication Inside Higher Ed, a number of national media outlets picked up the story. Boyd told the Advertiser that she wasn't bothered by the clause in her contract.

"I can read. I read my contract thoroughly, I knew what I was signing, and I have no issue with it at all," Boyd said. "The clause in question is not a personal imposition to me in any way."