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FULL TEXT

**Tax credits would boost tech studies**

*Decatur Daily*

February 5, 2014

Mary Sell

MONTGOMERY — Willie LaFavor, president of Contractor Service and Fabrication Inc. in Decatur, said good jobs are available in north Alabama — if workers have the right skills. "We do have job openings. The key is finding a qualified workforce," LaFavor said. "That's something we struggle with. We get workers that come to us that have no formal education."

LaFavor said pipefitters, welders and electricians are in demand. Welders can earn \$24 to \$26 an hour.

"I need qualified workers who can come out of school ready to work," he said. "As a contractor, we don't want to be in the training business, but sometimes we are forced to."

That's why he said he was happy to be at the Statehouse on Tuesday, talking about a new Republican-sponsored bill that would create a \$10 million scholarship program for dual enrollment students taking career technical courses.

The \$10 million will come from individuals and businesses who will, in return for their contributions, receive an income tax credit.

A contributor can direct 80 percent of their contribution to a specific community college program. The other 20 percent would be distributed by the community college system.

According to the bill, the tax credit can be equal to 50 percent of a total contribution, but not more than 50 percent of a taxpayer's total Alabama income tax liability. It's capped at \$500,000 per tax year.

According to the fiscal estimate on House Bill 384, the tax credit program would pull about \$5 million a year from the state's education budget.

But Speaker of the House Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, said the bill will increase employment and therefore help the budget.

"It's not going to cost the education trust fund anything. It will be an economic generator," Hubbard said.

Republicans are calling the bill the Alabama Future Workforce Initiative, and it's the last bill in their "Commonsense Conservative" agenda. It will be discussed in committee this morning.

Calhoun Community College President Marilyn Beck said, "To me, the most important thing is to help students who don't always have the resources to pay their tuition."

Calhoun Community College last fall had 892 dual enrollment students from 47 public and private schools and homeschool programs, up from 720 the previous fall.

At Northwest-Shoals Community College in 2013, 467 high school students took technical occupation courses. Another 763 high school students took courses that transfer to a four-year college.

Wesley Persons, an 18-year-old Decatur High and Calhoun student, spoke about his experience taking college courses that will prepare him for a job in aviation maintenance. He said he encourages students to take dual enrollment courses so they can explore their options while still in high school, "instead of getting to college, not liking it and paying a bunch of money."]

This is not Republicans' first education-related tax credit. Last year, lawmakers approved the Alabama Accountability Act. It allows individuals and businesses to donate to scholarship funds to help students transfer from low-performing public schools to participating private schools or non-failing public schools. Individuals can receive a state tax credit for their donations up to 50 percent of their tax owed, or a maximum of \$7,500. Corporations can receive a tax credit equal to their donations up to 50 percent of their tax owed.

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### **House Republicans tout \$10 million scholarship plan to expand career-tech dual enrollment program**

*Al.com*

February 4, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Wesley Persons is still in high school but is already working toward his goal of becoming an aviation mechanic.

It's a goal Persons didn't have until he signed up for the aviation program at Calhoun Community College through a dual enrollment plan that allows him to attend the college and Decatur High School at the same time. Before that, the 18-year-old senior wasn't sure what career he wanted to pursue.

"The first time I sat in the cockpit of a plane, I just completely fell in love with it," Persons said.

Republican lawmakers in the Alabama House of Representatives want more students to take part in career-tech, dual enrollment programs. Today they introduced legislation, HB 384 by Rep. Mac Buttram, R-Cullman, to authorize up to \$10 million in scholarships for students to take advantage of dual enrollment.

The scholarships would be funded by donations. Individuals and businesses could receive a tax credit of 50 percent of their contributions. Total tax credits would be capped at \$5 million a year.

Buttram said the community college system would set eligibility rules for the scholarships. He said he thought those would include minimum grade point averages but not income levels. The dual enrollment programs can be tailored for specific employers with input from regional workforce development councils and others to determine whether that's justified, Buttram said.

Willie LaFavor, president of Contractor Service and Fabrication Inc. in Decatur, spoke in support of the program, saying there is a shortage of qualified craftsman, including pipefitters/welders and electrical technicians. His company does industrial maintenance and projects at industrial plants. LaFavor said certified welders generally make about \$25 an hour.

LaFavor said companies often have to provide additional training for workers and there is a demand for more craftsman who have come through a certified, formal program like the dual enrollment.

House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, said the scholarship plan can be a “historic, game-changer” for Alabama’s industrial recruitment efforts by helping the state build a workforce ready to take high-skilled jobs.

Hubbard said expanding dual enrollment will help reduce the state's dropout rate by giving some students a reason to stick with school.

"This will allow students now dropping out to develop their hidden, untapped potential and become productive members of society," Hubbard said.

Business Council of Alabama President and CEO William Canary issued a statement in support of the program.

"Through career-technical dual enrollment, students are ready to transition seamlessly into Alabama's workforce in a high-paying, high-demand job – in less than two years," Canary said. "Creating a scholarship program to increase the number of Alabama students who can participate in dual enrollment is a no-brainer."

Tax credits for those who donate to the program would be limited to 50 percent of a taxpayers' liability up to a cap of \$500,000 a year.

Up to 80 percent of a contribution can be directed by a donor to a specific career tech dual enrollment program at any two-year college. The Department of Postsecondary Education would allocate the remainder to dual enrollment programs.

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### **Montgomery rolls out plan to expand dual enrollment (VIDEO)**

*WAFF*

February 4, 2014

MONTGOMERY, AL (WAFF) -

Alabama House Republicans are working on giving high school students more career training opportunities.

Montgomery rolled out their plan to expand dual enrollment courses between high schools and community colleges with career tech programs Tuesday morning.

The House GOP plan included \$10 million in scholarships for students in grades 10-12, and an expansion of the program statewide.

"I am enrolled in the dual enrollment program through Calhoun," said Wesley Persons, a student at Decatur High School. "I'm taking an aviation course out there. First when I started my senior year I didn't know what I wanted to do at all and the dual enrollment program kind of opened up some opportunities for me."

"Keep in mind the jobs we're seeking to fill are good paying jobs, averaging around \$50,000 dollars a year while the average income in Alabama for a family is around \$40,000," explained Representative Mac Buttram.

There are currently about 2,100 students in dual enrollment programs statewide, and about 700 of them in North Alabama.

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### **Bill would create scholarship fund for dual enrollment**

*Brewton Standard*

February 4, 2014

Kerry Bean

Under a bill proposed by House Republicans — and co-sponsored by Rep. Alan Baker of Brewton — a new Alabama Future Workforce Initiative would create a \$10 million scholarship fund for dual enrollment programs in state high schools.

"It's no secret that Alabama is on its way to being the most business friendly state in the nation. Our hard work over the past three years has yielded tremendous results when it comes to recruiting new industries and helping existing industries to expand," said Speaker of the House Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn. "If our job creation success is going to continue, we must ensure that our students graduate with the skills to fill the high-paying, 21st century jobs that we are working to recruit."

Baker said the bill would be a "win-win" for students and for workforce development.

"I'm excited for the opportunity for education and for businesses," he said, noting that if students are introduced to technical skills in high school, they are less likely to drop out of school.

Up to 80 percent of any contribution can be directed by a donor to a specific career-technical dual enrollment program or course at any 2-year institution, which Baker said would give businesses a chance to meet their workforce training needs.

In Brewton and East Brewton, dual enrollment programs continue with Jefferson Davis Community College, but students have to pay their own way. In the past, funds from the Neal Trust, which ended in 2010, had helped pay the tuition.

Brewton City Schools Superintendent Lynn Smith said students can take technical classes only at Reid State in Evergreen or in Atmore. One T.R. Miller student is currently in dual enrollment for technical classes.

Rep. Mac Buttram, R-Cullman, the bill's sponsor, highlighted the demand for a highly skilled workforce and the impact that career-technical dual enrollment can have on a student's education.

"It is a fact that there are high-paying, highly skilled jobs available in our state that businesses are unable to find qualified workers to fill," said Buttram. "The Alabama Future Workforce Initiative is an investment in our workforce, an investment in our economic development efforts, and an investment in the young men and women of today who will comprise our future workforce of tomorrow."

The Alabama Future Workforce Initiative would create a \$10 million scholarship program for high school students to participate in career-technical dual enrollment programs. The individuals and businesses that donate to the scholarship program would receive a state income tax credit of up to 50 percent of their total contribution, the bill's sponsors said. The tax credit cannot exceed 50 percent of the contributor's total Alabama income tax liability and cannot be more than \$500,000 per tax year.

House Republicans said in a news conference Tuesday that the career-tech dual enrollment program is the "perfect tool" to train a 21st century workforce.

In 2013, 2,100 students participated in Alabama's career-tech dual enrollment scholarship program – only 6.7 percent of the 31,500 students eligible to participate. Republicans said that with an additional \$10 million in scholarship funds, 9,542 new students could participate in the program.

Debate is set to begin on the bill at 9 a.m. today in the House Ways and Means Education committee.

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### **Alabama House GOP pushes expansion of dual enrollment program for high school students**

*The Associated Press*

February 4, 2014

Kim Chandler

MONTGOMERY, Alabama — Alabama House Republicans said they want to expand a program that lets high school students simultaneously enroll in job training classes at two-year colleges.

Speaker of the House Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, said the program will boost the number of skilled workers in the state and keep Alabama competitive in industry recruitment.

"That will provide them with the skills to compete for high-paying, long-lasting 21st century jobs," Hubbard said during a news conference Tuesday.

The state's existing dual enrollment program already allows high school students to enroll in two-year college classes, such as welding and aviation mechanics. The legislation backed by House Republicans seeks to create \$10 million in scholarships to expand the program to another 9,542 students. The scholarships would be funded by donations from businesses that would get a 50 percent tax credit.

The Legislative Fiscal Office estimated the program would reduce tax collections that support public education by \$5 million annually.

The donating businesses would get a large say in how their money is spent. They could steer up to 80 percent of their donation to help train students in a particular field.

Bill sponsor Rep. Mac Buttram, R-Cullman, said there are welding and other jobs in the state that can't be filled because of a shortage of skilled workers.

"The jobs we are seeking to fill are good paying jobs, an average of \$50,000 a year," Buttram said.

Decatur High School senior Wesley Persons is currently in the program taking aviation classes at Calhoun Community College.

Persons, 18, said the studies are helping him get a head start on his plans to become an aircraft mechanic. The class also helped him solidify his career choice.

"The first time I sat in a cockpit of a plane, I fell in love," Persons said.

A spokeswoman for the Alabama Education Association said dual enrollment was a great program, but they opposed moving \$5 million away from K-12 schools to pay for it.

Spokeswoman Amy Marlowe said after years of cuts, K-12 classrooms have many needs, particularly in technology and libraries.

Alabama Superintendent of Education Tommy Bice said he had only given the bill a cursory review, but said it "looks like a great opportunity for K-12 students who might not be able to afford to participate in dual enrollment to do so."

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**AL House GOP unveils \$10M workforce development plan**

*WSFA*

February 4, 2014

Max Reiss

MONTGOMERY, AL (WSFA) -

The House GOP caucus in the Alabama State House unveiled a \$10 million scholarship program for high school students to attend community colleges and earn dual credits in addition to their standard studies.

House Speaker Mike Hubbard described the plan as a "game-changer" for students to get hands-on experience in career technical fields like welding and engineering.

Republican State Rep. Mac Buttram is sponsoring the measure.

"The jobs we're seeking to fill are good paying jobs, averaging around \$50,000 dollars a year while the average income in Alabama for a family is around \$40,000," Buttram said.

Currently there are approximately 2,100 students in Alabama who already participate in the state's dual-enrollment program with the Department of Postsecondary Education.

Wesley Persons is a senior at Decatur High School and he's enrolled in an aviation program at Calhoun Community College.

"First when I started my senior year I didn't know what I wanted to do at all and the dual-enrollment program kind of opened up some opportunities for me" Persons said.

At first, his mother wasn't sold on him taking a class away from the traditional high school setting.

"As I started out, my mom was totally against it," Parsons said. "I love it a lot and I proved her wrong and I'm really glad that I stayed with it."

The Department of Postsecondary Education advocated for an expansion of the dual-enrollment program and both Democrats and Republicans announced that doing so was part of their platforms for the 2014 session.

Republican State Rep. Mike Hubbard said Republicans did not work with Democrats on the legislation that would create a \$10 million scholarship program that will be extended to students in grades 10-12.

"We're open to change. This is the vehicle that will be used to pass this legislation," Hubbard told reporters.

The bill also lays out tax credits of up to 50 percent for those who donate, up to \$10 million. Republicans say the measure is revenue neutral with the possibility of adding approximately \$5 million to the Education Trust Fund.

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## **Legislators will discuss expanding high school dual enrollment program**

*Montgomery Advertiser*

February 4, 2014

Kala Kachmar

Alabama House Republicans touted a bill that would provide income tax credits to those who contribute to the State Board of Education's Career-Technical Dual Enrollment Program, which allows high school students to take classes through the two-year college system.

Gov. Robert Bentley and House leaders from both parties have said they support expansion of the program, which has been in existence since 2007. In the governor's 2014-15 budget proposal, he appropriated \$6 million for the program.

The funding pays for student scholarships, which covers tuition, fees and books, according to Annette Funderburk, a legislative liaison with the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education.

The tax credit bill will allow individuals and businesses who support students in the career-tech program by paying for tuition, donating to the scholarship fund or helping to fund specific training programs to get an income tax credit equal to 50 percent of the total donation. The credit can't be more than half of that person's income tax liability or more than \$500,000.

The House Ways and Means Education Committee on Wednesday will discuss the tax credit bill, as well as a bill sponsored by Rep. Thomas Jackson, D-Thomasville, that will require \$5 million to be appropriated annually for the program in the Education Trust Fund (ETF).

Currently, there is about \$2 million in the ETF budget for dual enrollment scholarships.

House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, said the tax credit won't cost anything because the money will stay in the two-year college system.

He said the program is meant to provide training for students that will help businesses recruit qualified employees for high-paying, specialized jobs.

"It's designed to fulfill the unmet workforce needs we have in Alabama right now," said Rep. Mac Buttram, R-Cullman, who is sponsoring the bill. "This will address the needs of companies already operating here and companies that will come here in the future."

The tax credit will fund scholarships for students in the career-tech program, but not students who take academic classes through the dual enrollment program.

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## **Republicans roll out plan to boost Alabama career-tech dual enrollment programs**

*Yellowhammer News*

February 4, 2014

Cliff Sims

Alabama House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn and several other Republican legislators today unveiled the ‘Alabama Future Workforce Initiative,’ a bill aimed at boosting the number of high school students participating in career-tech dual enrollment programs around the state.

The initiative creates a \$10 million scholarship program for high school students participating in the programs. With the cost of tax credits reaching no more than \$5 million annually, Republicans say the bill results in a “2 to 1 return on investment for the state.”

Here’s what you need to know about the initiative:

- Individuals and businesses that donate to the scholarship program will receive a state income tax credit of up to 50% of their total contribution.
- The tax credit cannot exceed 50% of the contributor’s total Alabama income tax liability and cannot be more than \$500,000 per tax year.
- Up to 80% of any contribution can be directed by a donor to a specific career-technical dual enrollment program or course at any 2-year institution.
- The remaining 20% can be allocated at the discretion of the Department of Postsecondary Education, as long as the funds are directly related to career-technical dual enrollment program costs to students, which Republicans say ensures that all dual-enrollment students benefit from the Initiative.

Only 2,100 students participated in Alabama’s career-tech dual enrollment scholarship program last year. That amounted to 6.7% of the 31,500 eligible students. Republicans believe the additional \$10 million in scholarship funds would allow 9,542 new students to participate in the program.

“It’s no secret that Alabama is on its way to being the most business friendly state in the nation,” House Speaker Mike Hubbard said in a statement. “Our hard work over the past three years has yielded tremendous results when it comes to recruiting new industries and helping existing industries to expand. If our job creation success is going to continue, we must ensure that our students graduate with the skills to fill the high-paying, 21st century jobs that we are working to recruit.”

Rep. Mac Buttram, R-Cullman, the bill’s sponsor, said he believes the initiative is important because it will help prepare students to go to work for Alabama businesses that are currently having a hard time finding qualified workers.

“It is a fact that there are high-paying, highly skilled jobs available in our state that businesses are unable to find qualified workers to fill,” said Buttram. “The Alabama Future Workforce Initiative is an investment in our workforce, an investment in our economic development efforts, and an investment in the young men and women of today who will comprise our future workforce of tomorrow.”

The Alabama Future Workforce Initiative will be up for debate in the House Education Budget Committee Wednesday morning.

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## **GOP, Dems offer competing bills on dual enrollment for high schoolers**

*The Anniston Star*

February 4, 2014

Tim Lockette

MONTGOMERY — Republican members of the Alabama House of Representatives announced a plan Tuesday to create a \$10 million scholarship program to help students pursue a two-year college degree while attending high school. The program would be funded by donations.

“This will be a chance for Alabama to fight poverty by using a conservative, tax-credit approach,” said Rep. Mac Buttram, R-Cullman. “It’s something that would make Ronald Reagan proud.”

Buttram is sponsoring a bill that would offer tax credits to businesses and individuals who donate to scholarship programs that would fund dual-enrollment for Alabama high school students. Many K-12 schools allow students to enroll in high school and college classes at the same time, allowing them to prepare for college. Buttram’s program would fund scholarships for students in two-year college programs that qualify them for a job.

Buttram and other lawmakers present at a Tuesday press conference said dual-enrollment programs are underused, in part because students can’t afford tuition, and such programs would help the state create a workplace-ready workforce.

Donors to the proposed scholarship program would receive an income tax credit equal to half their donation. Tax credits would be limited to \$5 million per year.

Income taxes go to the Education Trust Fund, which pays for schools. Democrats have criticized Republicans in the past for their willingness to offer tax credits that cut into the state’s school funding — but House Speaker Mike Hubbard said the \$5 million in tax credits would bring in twice as much money which would be paid to the state’s two-year college system.

“It’s not going to cost the Education Trust Fund anything,” Hubbard claimed.

Democrats last month offered their own proposal for dual enrollment — a bill that would provide \$5 million per year to dual enrollment programs by eliminating a \$5 million teacher liability insurance program created by the Legislature last year. Critics of that program said it was a thinly-veiled attack on the Alabama Education Association, the teachers’ association that has historically provided representation for teachers facing legal issues.

“We’re all for dual enrollment,” said Minority Leader Craig Ford, D-Gadsden. “We’re just not for doing it at the expense of public education.”

Buttram's bill is expected to come before the House Ways and Means Education Committee Wednesday.

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## **Margie Wilcox rolls to landslide win as House district in Mobile stays Republican**

*Al.com*

February 4, 2014

Brendan Kirby

MOBILE, Alabama – Republican Margie Wilcox cruised past Democrat Stephen Carr on Tuesday night in a special election for the Alabama House of Representatives, keeping the GOP's 20-year winning streak alive in District 104.

According to complete but unofficial results, Wilcox won 90.5 percent of the vote, carrying all 15 precincts and the absentee ballots. The owner of Yellow Cab of Mobile and a pair of other transportation companies, Wilcox campaigned on making state laws more business-friendly and reforming homeowners insurance. She said she is looking forward to getting to work in House, which already is in session.

"We are thrilled. We've got a large crowd here," she said. "I am just tickled."

Carr, whose professional background is in disaster relief management, recently finished a stint in the Governor's Office of Faith-Based & Volunteer Services helping victims of the 2011 Alabama tornadoes find housing. He said he wanted to offer a choice to voters who have had no Democratic alternative in recent elections.

"I think the main thing is I'm extremely disappointed in the turnout," he said, referring to the fact that the special election drew only about 10 percent of the district's registered voters. "It just confirms to me that the people who should be voting are not voting. (The results) didn't look much different than the Republican primaries."

Wilcox fought a hotly contested primary battle against Susan Hightower, besting her by 70 votes out of 3,380 cast. In a district that supported Republican Mitt Romney by a nearly 3-1 margin in the 2012 presidential election, Wilcox said she urged supporters to guard against complacency for today's vote, which comes a week later than scheduled because of last week's winter storm.

The general election matchup was a financial mismatch. Including the primary rounds, Wilcox reported raising nearly \$75,000 – including heavy contributions from political action committees – and spending more than \$52,000.

Carr, meanwhile, got no PAC money, raising just \$2,551. Faced with a 29-1 fundraising disparity, Carr said he focused on running a grass-roots campaign. He said he would try to repeal the Alabama Accountability Act, which provides taxpayer money for students from "failing"

schools to attend private schools. He said he also favored accepting federal funds under the Affordable Care Act to expand Alabama's Medicaid program.

Wilcox said she intends to have a ceremonial swearing-in Wednesday morning at 9 in Tillman's Conner and then drive to Montgomery to take her official oath of office from House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn. The district has not had representation since former Rep. Jim Barton resigned in August.

"This district needs a vote right away," she said.

As currently constituted, District 104 stretches from the Dog River area and Interstate 65 in Mobile all the way to the Mississippi state line. By the time Wilcox runs for re-election in June, though, the district will be radically different thanks to redistricting.

The new District 104 will be more compact, with a western boundary of March Road between Old Pascagoula Road to the south and Ben Hamilton Road to the north.

Even as she prepares to take off mid-session, Wilcox must turn one eye toward the 2014 elections. Wilcox already has qualified to run in the Republican primary in June. Carr said he is considering running again. The qualifying deadline is Friday.

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### **In District 53 Democratic runoff, Anthony 'Alann' Johnson defeats Arthur Shores Lee in last-minute win**

*Al.com*

February 4, 2014

Madison Underwood

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama - Anthony "Alann" Johnson prevailed over Arthur Shores Lee in a runoff for the Democratic nomination for Alabama House District 53, a seat vacated by the death of longtime Rep. Demetrius Newton Sr. in September.

With 23 of 24 precincts reporting, Johnson garnered 297 votes - 55.72 percent of the vote - to Lee's 236, or 44.28 percent of the vote.

Lee had a healthy lead in the tallies most of the evening, but Johnson pulled ahead on the last box of the night, which he won 161 votes to Lee's 66.

Originally scheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 28, Tuesday's runoff was postponed a week on Monday, Jan. 27, due to a winter storm that crippled Birmingham and much of central Alabama.

When reached for comment Tuesday evening, Johnson let out cries of happiness upon hearing he won, and said he was "overjoyed."

"I am honored, I am humbled, I am thankful, and I'm excited about doing the work of residents of House District 53," he said.

When reached by phone, Lee said he is not ready to concede just yet.

"As of right now, I'm going to wait until the absentee ballots are counted, all ballots are counted," Lee told AL.com. He said he doesn't know how many absentee ballots there are.

Johnson will face Willie "W.A." Casey, who ran uncontested for the Republican nomination, in the special general election April 1.

The winner of the general election will not serve long - District 53 was eliminated from the Birmingham area in the latest redistricting plan. Following the 2014 elections, District 53 will be moved to the Huntsville area, and whoever wins the seat in April will have to run for another seat in 2014 in order to stay in the Alabama House.

Johnson said he'll announce his plans for political life after District 53 is moved on Friday, when party qualifying for the June primary ends.

"I haven't considered that," Johnson said. "Not at this time."

Lee does, however, plan to run in June.

"I am planning on running for the new district in the primary in June." Lee said he lives in District 60, which is currently represented by Rep. Juandalynn Givan, D-Birmingham.

"I'm happy with the campaign that I've run," Lee said. "It was a clean campaign - we didn't tear down any signs, or besmirch anybody's character, so I'm happy with the campaign that we ran and I intend to run in the primary."

Turnout for the runoff was low, but similar to turnout for the December primary, in with 2.6 of registered voters cast ballots. In Tuesday's election, 533 of the district's voters cast ballots, a turnout of 2.56 percent.

In the December primary, Lee led the pack of four candidates with 229 votes, or 41.49 percent of the vote, to Johnson's 180 votes, which added up to 32.61 percent. Frank Topping drew 89 votes, or 16.12 percent of the 552 votes cast Tuesday, while Newton's son, Demetrius C. Newton Jr., drew 54 votes (9.78 percent).

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**Senate passes expanded lobbying bill amid clashes between Democrats and Republicans**

*Montgomery Advertiser*

February 5, 2014

Brian Lyman

It started as a bill to close a lobbying loophole. But it came out of the Senate on Tuesday as a sweeping piece of legislation addressing everything from the Governor's activities after leaving office to obtaining tickets to Alabama and Auburn football games.

But the 33 to 0 approval came after the sponsor warned that the changes could undermine the bill's original intent, and that he may seek changes in the House, where the legislation now goes.

The bill, sponsored by Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, initially would have banned lawmakers from lobbying either chamber of the Legislature for two years after they leave.

The ethics law currently bans former lawmakers from lobbying their former chamber, but as interpreted, the lawmaker can lobby the other one. The issue flared up last summer, as three lawmakers left the Legislature for jobs that would at least in part involve lobbying.

But the Senate approved an amendment offered by Sen. Hank Sanders, D-Selma, that significantly expanded the scope of the legislation.

Among other items, the bill now bans lobbying by the governor or family members for four years after the state's chief executive leaves office; tightens restrictions on lawmakers receiving tickets to sporting events; extends the ban on "double-dipping" to family members of lawmakers; and prohibits the employers of state officials from contributing to their employees' campaigns.

Both Marsh's bill and Sanders' amendment had broad support in the chamber and had been worked on for the previous few weeks. However, Marsh and other Republicans said that Sanders' amendment was not germane to Marsh's original legislation, and expressed concerns that it would jeopardize the bill's original goal.

"If we don't get this right, someone will challenge it," Marsh said after the vote. "I want to get this right. I want it to go into law."

Democrats, in turn, said they wanted to address every aspect of ethics law that they could, and that the amendment process was the only way the minority party could get a vote on the proposals.

"I don't think a bill I introduce on these issues would get a vote in committee, much less get out on the floor," Sanders told Marsh at the podium.

Marsh initially told Sanders and Democrats on the floor Tuesday that he would allow an up-or-down vote on the amendment, after the Senate disposed of sunset legislation in the afternoon. However, after the Senate did so, Marsh called for Ivey to rule on whether the amendment was germane. Marsh said that those issues had been raised during consultations over the bill with the Alabama Ethics Commission and the Alabama Law Institute. Initially, he said, he believed the issues had been resolved Tuesday.

“I thought they had been resolved in the amendment when they came back, but when we looked at them, they had not been,” he said.

Ivey first ruled the amendment was not germane, but Sanders appealed the ruling to the full Senate. The chamber voted 15 to 13 to sustain Ivey; however, 18 votes are needed to uphold the decision.

Marsh then moved to have the amendment tabled, and Ivey initially called the motion, provoking anger from Democrats who said Ivey was ignoring them. Senate Minority Leader Vivian Davis Figures, D-Mobile, and Sen. Roger Bedford, D-Russellville, both said there was an “understanding” that Marsh would allow a straight up-or-down vote on the measure.

“I think your abuse of power, by saying it was not germane, is what caused it to happen,” Bedford told Ivey. “It is clearly germane, because they have been working on this amendment for a week now.”

Ivey said after the vote that the amendment addressed sections of the state code that were not in the original bill and were not germane.

Marsh ultimately withdrew his tabling motion, and the Senate voted to adopt the Sanders amendment 33 to 0. However, the Senate President Pro Tem said he would seek changes to the bill in the House if necessary.

“We all think what he had was good,” he said. “We just don’t think it fits the legislation.”

Sen. Cam Ward, R-Alabaster — who, like 32 of his colleagues, voted for the Sanders amendment and the full bill — accused Democrats of loading provisions onto the bill “to make it collapse of its own weight.”

“It’s interesting he had that sweeping amendment, but in the last four years, that has never been offered as bill in the four years I’ve been here,” he said. “Where’s the bill been at?”

Democrats insisted that they were trying to strengthen the bill. Sanders said killing the bill “was not the intent at all,” and suggested Republicans tried to kill the legislation via procedural maneuvering.

“It says, ‘Let’s not play around with ethics,’ ” Sanders said. “It says, ‘Let’s have everybody operating on the same playing field, on a level playing field.’ ”

Figures also said that Republicans had passed a number of pieces of legislation that had landed the state in court, including the immigration law from 2011 and last year’s Alabama Accountability Act.

“It was an attempt to make the bill better and to make it that all elected officials were included, not just state legislators, from the Governor on down to state legislators,” Figures said.



Marsh said he “hoped” the intent was not to kill the bill. “I do think there was an attempt to get people on a bad vote,” he said. “I do believe that. But at the end of the day, I believe everyone understands the importance of this legislation and wants it passed.”

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### **Alabama Farmers Federation endorses state Rep. Alan Harper**

*Tuscaloosa News*

February 4, 2014

The Alabama Farmers Federation has endorsed state Rep. Alan Harper, R-Aliceville, who is running for re-election in House District 61.

Harper, a 1986 University of Alabama graduate, serves on the Legislature's rules committee, the ethics and campaign finance committee and is chairman of the economic development and tourism committee.

Harper and his wife, Jean, reside in Northport and have two sons and two grandchildren.

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### **Gov. Robert Bentley: Alabama's job-creation structure is in place, will pay off when economy improves**

*Al.com*

February 4, 2014

Dawn Kent Azok

HOOVER, Alabama -- Alabama has a structure in place to create and maintain jobs, and as the economy improves, that organization will pay off for residents across the state, Gov. Robert Bentley said today.

Speaking at the Economic Development Association of Alabama's Winter Conference in Hoover, the governor touted the state's unemployment rate, which fell to 6.1 percent in December.

That's down from more than 9 percent when he took office in 2011, after running on a pledge that he would not take a paycheck until unemployment drops to 5.2 percent.

Part of the decline, however, is due to a shrinking civilian labor force. In December, for example, unemployment fell despite the economy losing 1,400 jobs.

But Bentley says his administration has made progress, both in adding jobs and an organization to support those efforts.

He cited the state's strategic plan for economic development, called Accelerate Alabama, that targets specific areas for growth. There's also the new College and Career Ready Task Force that

aims to bring together representatives of schools and businesses to better prepare students for the workforce.

"We have the organizational structure in place that once this economy does turn around, I think Alabama is going to do fantastic," he said.

Bentley, echoing comments made during his State of the State address last month, tied the jobs initiatives to Alabama's struggle with poverty.

"I do believe the way we fight poverty in this state is we educate our people and give them an opportunity for a job," he said.

Also, since small businesses account for about half of the state's jobs, Bentley said he is setting up an advisory council to bring more structure to small business resources across the state.

Bentley also took questions from the audience and addressed other issues:

On the biggest challenge for small businesses: It used to be capital and not being able to borrow money to initiate new projects or expansions, Bentley said. But now, it's the Affordable Care Act.

"When there's uncertainty in the economy -- and Obamacare has created uncertainty -- when there's uncertainty, then the economy stays really stymied," he said.

On rural economic development: The governor said the state must focus on disadvantaged areas when it comes to job creation.

He cited the new 500-job Golden Dragon Copper Tubing plant in Wilcox County but said smaller projects are critical, too.

"Fifty jobs in a small town is just as important as an Airbus in Mobile," he said.

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### **Summary of action in Alabama Legislature**

*The Associated Press*

February 4, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — A summary of action in the Alabama Legislature on Tuesday, the 10th meeting day of the regular session:

#### **HOUSE:**

—Approved a bill to end the requirement to publish lists of registered voters in newspapers and instead publish the list on the county's website. Goes to Senate.

—Approved a bill to authorize warrantless arrests under certain conditions for trespassing on the property of an education institution. Goes to Senate.

—Approved a bill to require animal shelter directors and owners to publish a monthly report of the number of animals that entered the shelter and list what happened to them. Goes to Senate.

SENATE:

—Approved a bill to add new restrictions to the state ethics law. Goes to House.

AGENDA:

— House Judiciary Committee meets at 1:30 Wednesday in room 123 of the Statehouse to consider a bill regarding grandparents' visitation rights.

—House Ways and Means-Education Committee meets at 9 a.m. Wednesday in room 617 to consider a scholarship program for dual enrollment in high school and two-year colleges.

— House Ethics and Campaign Finance Committee meets at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday in room 622 to consider changes to the Open Meetings Act.

— House Boards, Agencies and Commissions Committee meets at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday in room 428 to consider a bill regarding spay/neuter clinic

—Senate Finance and Taxation-General Fund Committee meets at 9:30 a.m. Wednesday in room 727 to consider a one-time pension bonus for retired state employees.

—Senate Finance and Taxation-Education Committee meets at 10 a.m. Wednesday in room 727 to consider coastal insurance legislation.

—Senate Health Committee meets a noon Wednesday in room 304 to consider a bill regulating tanning salons.

—Senate Judiciary Committee meets at 1 p.m. Wednesday in room 325 to consider medical marijuana legislation.

—House meets at 9 a.m. Thursday and Senate at 10 a.m.

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**One more time, reformers petition the Legislature for payday, car title loan regulation**

*Al.com*

February 4, 2014

Kyle Whitmire

MONTGOMERY, Alabama -- In the last several years, payday lending reform has become one of those perennial Alabama State House issues that springs up like the daffodil bulbs you forgot you planted in your yard, but a coalition of activists hopes this will be the year it doesn't get mowed over by industry lobbyists or killed in the cold snap at the end of the legislative session.

In Alabama, payday and car title lenders can charge interests as high as 456 percent, and reform advocates argue that the industry is predatory, trapping the poor and single, working mothers in revolving debt schemes from which they cannot escape.

On Tuesday, about 50 people representing a wide swath of advocacy groups, including Alabama Arise and the Federation of Republican Women, rallied on the Alabama State House steps to call again for new regulations of the lending industry.

"In order to get people out of poverty we need to regulate these lending practices," Rep. Patricia Todd, D-Birmingham, said. "We do it for insurance. We do it for banking. Why not for this industry?"

Todd is sponsoring one of two bills in the House that would restrict lending practices. Her bill would restrict payday lending to 100 percent interest per a year, and it would limit individuals to having five payday loans per year. It would also mandate a statewide database that lenders could use to track how many loans a customer had already taken.

Rep. Rod Scott, D-Birmingham, is sponsoring a bill to restrict car title loans to 36 percent interest. That bill would also restrict lenders to recouping only the principal of the defaulted loan when selling a car they had taken. Tuesday afternoon, Scott said he had 50 representatives signed on to co-sponsor the bill.

"We do it for insurance. We do it for banking. Why not for this industry?" Rep. Patricia Todd said.

"The way it is now, if you owe \$1,000 and they sell your car for \$2,000, then they get to keep all that," Scott said.

State Sen. Scott Beason, R-Gardendale, has agreed to sponsor both bills in the Alabama Senate.

Shay Farley, the legal director of the Alabama Appleseed Center, said that predatory lenders should be restricted in much the same way as other banks and credit unions. Lenders have argued that it is the borrowers' responsibility to look out for their own interests, she said, but the predatory practices they engage in are identical to those caused the national financial crisis when mortgage lenders gave homeowners more credit than they could handle.

"Our nation's crisis is based on this practice, loaning people more than they know that they can pay," she said.

Local ordinances and moratoriums have restricted payday and title lenders in 18 Alabama cities, where new stores have sprung up, sometimes next door to each other in economically depressed neighborhoods and commercial districts. The Alabama Legislature should follow their lead, Todd said, but the industry has plenty to spend swaying the Legislature.

"Many people inside this house here have some relationship to these businesses and will do everything in their power to make sure we don't pass this bill," she said.