JANUARY 29, 2016

ARTICLES OF INTEREST
JANUARY 22, 2016 – JANUARY 29, 2016

FOR SPECIFIC NEWS STORIES, SEE THE FOLLOWING PAGE NUMBERS:

NEWS ABOUT

TRUSTEE/SYSTEM INFO  
STATE ISSUES  
UA CAMPUS ISSUES  
UAB CAMPUS ISSUES  
UAH CAMPUS ISSUES  
OTHER STATE UNIVERSITIES  
SPORTS  
NATIONAL NEWS  

500 University Boulevard East
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35401
(205) 348-5938
kreinhart@uasystem.ua.edu
http://uasystem.ua.edu
Witt named United Way campaign chairman

University of Alabama System Chancellor Robert Witt will serve as the United Way of West Alabama 2016 campaign chairman. Witt will offer his leadership experience to the campaign by leading fund-raising efforts to meet the organization's 2016 campaign goal that will provide financial support to its 26 partner agencies in West Alabama.

His has served on the United Way of West Alabama’s Alexis de Tocqueville Society executive committee and the Elizabeth Project Care advisory board.

New United Way directors are Susan Bell of the University of Alabama, Lindsey Case of Capstone Bank, Nicole Perrigion of Nucor Steel and Jay Wells of Alabama Power Co.
Academic services conference looks at problems kids face

By: Angel Coker

Academic services aren't enough to ensure the success of children. It's the additional support services from the community that help children achieve.

That was the overarching theme at the 10th annual “Doing What Matters for Alabama's Children” conference.

Around 400 teachers, school administrators, members of social service and faith-based organizations, counselors, business people and citizens from across the state gathered at the Bryant Conference Center on Tuesday for the conference.

Thomas Bice, state superintendent of education, said many of the issues children face come to light when they are at school.

“Oftentimes teachers get judged based on a test score when a huge part of their day might just be making sure that their children are fed... and clothed and taken care of, and sometimes those things don't get measured because you can't test those and measure them,” Bice said. “Education has so many pieces to what is a very scientific-based model that can't be measured.”

He said it is the wrap-around services offered through the community that must pick up where education tapers off to help solve such issues.

Marvin Lucas, a Tuscaloosa City school board member, said the conference offered an outlet for professionals and organizations that serve children to learn about and exchange ideas about wrap-around services and how children in Alabama can be better served.

“I think this is a great event for the City of Tuscaloosa and Tuscaloosa County. It's an opportunity for us to collaborate and talk to other organizations – see all the different things that are available to help our children here in Tuscaloosa and the West Alabama area,” he said.

The event included panels, breakout sessions and speakers to address child well-being issues such as poverty, health, safety, family strengthening, mental health, the state of education, human trafficking, bullying, homelessness, graduation rates and more.

Charles Nash, vice chancellor for academic and student affairs at the University of Alabama and chairman of Tuscaloosa’s Promise, said Alabama ranks around No. 45 or so in the nation in terms of the well-being of children, and the conference is an effort to improve that.

“We thought one way of doing that is to bring people together to spend the day learning about the nature of the needs of our children and then talking about what they in their organizations, in their private lives, in their businesses can do to help children be better,” Nash said.
He said the event offered an opportunity for those who work with children and families to re-energize their efforts, get informed about the nature of children's needs and share best practices with others at the conference.

Teresa Costanzo, a founding member of Tuscaloosa's One Place and an adjunct professor at the UA School of Social Work, said sharing best practices is one of the greatest things that comes from the conference.

“Teresa Costanzo, a founding member of Tuscaloosa's One Place and an adjunct professor at the UA School of Social Work, said sharing best practices is one of the greatest things that comes from the conference.

“I think that's one of the things that we take away is that opportunity to maybe begin a practice in a community by hearing about it here and going back and replicating it in their own community,” she said. “Children need to be in the forefront of all of our thoughts. They are our future.”
Bill could affect college campuses: proposal would allow carrying concealed pistols

By: Ed Enoch

A bill pre-filed ahead of the start of the 2016 legislative session next week would amend the state constitution to allow concealed carry of pistols by permit holders on college campuses in the state.

House Bill 12, sponsored by Rep. Mack Butler, R-Rainbow City, would allow colleges and universities to set rules about the storage of pistols in dorms and other residential facilities on campus and allow for “reasonable rules” limiting the concealed carry of pistols, but it would prohibit public institutions from establishing a general ban.

The bill focuses on handguns and concealed carry permit holders and does not allow for rifles nor open carry of firearms, Butler said. The legislation has been in the works for about a year.

The University of Alabama is still studying legislation for this year’s session and declined to comment on the bill, according to Deborah M. Lane, associate vice president for strategic communications. Generally, possession of firearms is forbidden on the UA campus with limited exceptions such as weapons carried by university police or other law enforcement officers.

The Alabama Community College System, which has 26 community college campuses statewide, has a similar policy in place banning firearms on campus.

“Our position for the system is until we are told otherwise, we will continue to abide by that policy,” community college spokeswoman Janet Kincherlow-Martin said.

Butler said gun-free zones like campuses that prohibit firearms have become targets during mass shootings.

“I just think public places are safer when we allow law-abiding conceal and carry for our citizens,” he said.

Butler expects a lengthy debate, including public hearings on the issue. But he believes the frequency of mass shootings nationwide during the past few years makes it a timely discussion.

“This bill I don't think would have had any success in passing five years ago,” Butler said.

He also argued for the First Amendment rights of students and faculty on campus.

“They do not give up their rights just because they are furthering their education,” Butler said of students.

Though the bill includes language that addresses private colleges in the state, Butler said private schools, unlike their public counterparts, would be able to opt out totally, noting private property rights.

See next page
The bill’s language on what constitutes reasonable rules is intentionally broad to allow universities to have a say in the regulation of handguns on campus.

“The way I left the bill, the college can impose certain limitations,” Butler said.

Butler said universities, as an example, could limit concealed carry at football games or other sporting events.

“That would be a perfect example of a good exception,” Butler said, noting the armed police officers at Bryant-Denny Stadium during home games. “Basically, you are protecting me in that stadium.”

Butler is not opposed to conditional permitting of firearms on campus, noting an existing waiver program at Athens State that allows concealed carry permit holders to keep a firearm on campus in their vehicle.

“Something a little different to get into their conform zone …,” Butler said.

The lawmaker also suggested the possibility of a qualifying course taught on campus.

Colleges would still be required under provisions of a 2013 law passed by the Legislature to identify areas where guns are prohibited with notices at the public entrance of buildings.

The bill would provide immunity for the colleges and their employees from damages arising from action or inaction under the proposal unless the action or inaction was capricious. The bill states the liability in a claim for personal injury or property damage rests with the person who possesses the pistol.

The bill would also require public institutions to provide a report each even-numbered year to the speaker of the House and Senate president pro tempore about the rules and the rationale justifying them.

As a constitutional amendment, the bill would require approval of a supermajority in the Legislature and voters statewide in a referendum.

“It’s a constitution amendment. We are going to allow every Alabamian that is registered here to vote to weigh in on it,” Butler said.

The constitutional amendment is key to the legislation, Butler said, noting the state constitution gives authority for the management and control of Auburn University and UA to their respective boards of trustees. That sovereignty has been the basis of past arguments by the universities against legislative efforts to set tuition rates, change board policies and other changes.
Colleges That Ask Applicants About Brushes With the Law Draw Scrutiny

By: Stephanie Saul

The online admissions application for Auburn University appears simple, until you get to this question on Page 7:

"Have you ever been charged with or convicted of or pled guilty or nolo contendere to a crime other than a minor traffic offense, or are there any criminal charges now pending against you?"

Those who check "yes," even though they have never been convicted of any crime, face extra scrutiny — a call from the admissions office asking for additional information, the university says.

Auburn, in Auburn, Ala., is one of 17 universities in the South that include broad questions on their admissions applications about any contact with the legal system or the police that applicants might have had — even an arrest, with no conviction — according to the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, an advocacy group. The universities are now the focus of an inquiry by the organization, which says such questions unfairly penalize minorities, who tend to face arrest more frequently and, as a result, could face higher admissions hurdles.

"The disparities and underrepresentation we see at schools is a concern, and this may indeed be one of the contributing factors," said Kristen Clarke, the group's executive director, citing statistics showing low black enrollment at some of the colleges. At Auburn, for example, African-Americans make up 7 percent of the student body in a state where blacks total about 25 percent of the population.

The organization announced Thursday that it would inquire about practices at Auburn and the 16 other institutions that question prospective students about arrests or other contact with the criminal justice system that stops short of a conviction.

The inquiry comes amid growing concern that admissions questions about criminal history and disciplinary action discriminate against black applicants, as a body of statistical evidence emerges showing that black teenagers are singled out for disciplinary action in school and stopped by police at unusually high rates.

The Common Application, used by 600 colleges, does not ask about arrests, but does require applicants to check "yes" or "no" to whether they have been convicted of a crime or faced serious disciplinary action in school.

On Wednesday, New York University's vice president for enrollment management, MJ Knoll-Finn, wrote a letter to both the chairman and the chief executive of the Common Application asking for an expedited review of whether those questions on its form are fair or necessary. N.Y.U. uses the Common Application.

"Especially in the context of high rates of school discipline and incarceration among people of color, it seems vital to pose two questions about the checkboxes: do they, in fact, have any
predictive value, and does their presence work against universities’ mission as engines of social mobility and diversity either by discouraging applicants or by resulting in unjustified denials of admissions on the grounds of safety or integrity?” Ms. Knoll-Finn’s letter said.

A spokeswoman for the Common Application, Aba Blankson, said the group had received N.Y.U.’s letter and was in discussions about the topic, but she declined to discuss details.

A study in 2010 by the Center for Community Alternatives, a nonprofit group in New York, found that 66 percent of colleges ask for criminal history information in admissions, and that some of them look unfavorably even on misdemeanor arrests. At the time, the organization said, the use of such questions appeared to be on the rise after several high-profile criminal cases on university campuses.

Michael Reilly, executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, said that many schools did not like to ask the questions but had been spurred to do so by campus violence. “And they feel they need to do what they can to screen students,” he said.

The Lawyers’ Committee said it planned to contact the 17 institutions on its list as the first wave of a national initiative aimed at reducing the impact of even minor criminal histories on college admissions. Ms. Clarke said her organization planned to ask the colleges why their application forms included such questions. While the current focus is on universities in seven Southern states, the organization said such questions may be asked by colleges nationwide. The 17 colleges on the group’s list include several historically black universities and colleges.

Charles Martin, an Auburn spokesman, said indicating “yes” to the crime question on the application did not disqualify students. “The admissions office calls the applicant directly to obtain more information,” he said.

But Ms. Clarke said that in some cases, students might be intimidated and elect not to apply rather than answer the question.

The University of Alabama, where blacks make up 12 percent of the student body, asks prospective students if they are “subject to arrest” and also poses this question: “Have you ever received a written or oral warning not to trespass on public or private property?” A university spokesman, Chris Bryant, said the college had included disciplinary-related questions on its application since 2010, to try to determine whether an applicant’s past behavior posed a safety risk. Answering yes to the questions was not an absolute bar to admission, he said, adding that the university was committed to ensuring that its policies were not discriminatory.

The civil-rights group identified Virginia Tech, whose enrollment is 4 percent black, as one of the colleges it would look at. The university’s application asks, “Have you ever been arrested or convicted of a violation of any local, state or federal law, other than a minor traffic violation?”
A spokeswoman for Virginia Tech said the university added questions to its application after April 16, 2007, when a student there shot and killed 32 people and wounded 17 others before committing suicide. The student had previously been accused of stalking. "These questions are part of a holistic approach in selecting qualified applicants for undergraduate admission," said the spokeswoman, Tracy Vosburgh. "We do not believe this is racially discriminatory."

In 2014, three New York colleges dropped arrest language from their admissions applications after a request from the state attorney general, Eric T. Schneiderman. "An arrest or police stop that did not result in a conviction, or a criminal record that was sealed or expunged, should not — indeed, must not — be a standard question on a college application," Mr. Schneiderman said at the time.
Hide your students and teachers!

Alabama politicians are at it again

John Archibald  jarchibald@al.com

Alabama politicians say they're about to save education. Again.

So run for the hills. Hide your teachers and children. It's gonna get ugly.

Granted, it's hard to know just yet the full extent of the damage this bill can do. The Rewarding Advancement in Instruction and Student Excellence Act, or RAISE Act of 2016, is still early in the legislative process. It will surely change. But the early drafts look like a big chunk of trouble.

It is called the RAISE Act, for starters, a name straight out of the Legislature's Ironic and Antithetical Rebranding Simulator (LIARS).

It is billed (get it, billed) as a way to create pathways for teachers to get pay raises, despite the fact that there are other bills and ways of giving teachers raises. From what we've seen so far, what it really does is weaken tenure for teachers, make them easier to fire, and make pay raises dependent on the ability of students to improve on standardized tests, and on the whims of parents and students themselves.

It's not that teachers don't need evaluation. They do. And perhaps it should take a little longer for teachers to achieve tenure. Five years — as proposed in this bill — seems reasonable. But that could be accomplished with a simple, straightforward bill. This one is complicated and fraught with dangers.

It encourages teaching to standardized tests and discourages the kind of creativity that separates the great teachers from the good ones. It relies on the false presumption that teachers are motivated exclusively by money.

If that were the case, they wouldn't be teachers.

And like most of the Legislature's fix education plans, it most threatens the poorest systems that need the most help. Yes, there are pay incentives set out in the earliest versions of the bill designed to reward teachers who achieve excellence in disadvantaged schools. But face it, this kind of law will make it even tougher to recruit and keep teachers in the poorest and most challenged schools, where lack of system and family support makes success exponentially harder.

It is reminiscent of that other education law that spewed through Alabama's LIARS program: the Alabama Accountability Act.

You remember that one. It had about as much to do with accountability as Uranus has to do with grape Jello.

That act, passed in 2013, was supposed to offer children in failing systems the opportunity to go to better public and private schools.

But what it really did was take students and money out of schools that needed students and money the most. It gave a few students a path out of those schools, sure. But it left many more behind, and helped those who did not need helping. Reports last year found that seven out of every 10 scholarships given under the accountability act went to students who weren't in failing schools to begin with.

The state even set up a way for feel-good scholarship granting organizations — like that of former Gov. Bob Riley — to get paid. Because that's the constant in these education improvements. Somebody's gonna get paid.

No doubt the RAISE Act would do the same in all sorts of hidden ways, from setting up the commission to oversee the program, or the database to contain it, or ways to monitor it, or test prep companies and educational vendors who have already got their tentacles into Alabama politicians.

Don't forget how Alabama House Speaker Mike Hubbard was paid $7,500 a month by a distance learning company even as he pushed for charter school legislation.

It's not because he brought educational excellence.

If these politicians really want to save education, they will fund it and butt out. We don't need a war on teachers. We need real support for education.

For all Alabama students.
RAISE Act threatens student achievement

An open letter to Sen. Del Marsh and the Alabama Legislature

As educators, students are the driving force for everything we do in education, and the bill, as written, is likely to have a significant negative impact on student learning and achievement, not the positive effect we all seek for our students in Alabama.

The proposed Student Growth Model is one of our greatest concerns.

“For purposes of calculating the student growth model, the department shall use student performance on the ACT Aspire examination, if applicable, or a successor examination adopted and used by the department to measure student academic performance and achievement.”

The problem is that ACT Aspire assessments are currently only administered in grades 3-8, 10, and 11 (ACT test), and they only test reading, English, writing, math and science. Additionally, ACT only generates growth data for grades 4-8.

We include below five of the many reasons to reject this bill:

- It increases the number of days dedicated to testing, further decreasing instructional time.
- It increases the likelihood that teachers will teach to the test, increasing the class time spent preparing for the test, emphasizing test scores while actually de-emphasizing the process of learning.
- It will require creating and grading new tests for numerous subjects, draining money from the funds available for improving education for all students and inviting litigation that will drain money from the funds as well.
- It is likely to cause students to focus on the high-stakes, computer-graded tests at the end of multiple courses, not the critical, analytical, and creative thinking essential in a democracy.
- It requires evaluation of classroom teaching by people (“outside evaluators”) unfamiliar with the teachers and students. The outside evaluators would certainly need training, which will drain even more money from funds that could be used in classrooms to improve education for all students.

School systems need the flexibility to develop accountability models based on the needs of their student bodies.

Alabama has made great strides in education, and we must continue to focus on improving student learning. This bill is likely to blur that focus. Please reconsider any support you may have given to this legislation until trusted educators are involved in the discussion.

As educators, students are the driving force for everything we do. Trust us to do our jobs.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Brown, high school science teacher; 2016 Alabama Teacher of the Year
Emily Berry, elementary teacher; 2016 Network for Alabama Teaching Fellow
Katherine Davison, high school exceptional education teacher
Lauren Dressback, high school history teacher; 2016 Vestavia Hills District Secondary Teacher of the Year
Maria Hines, high school science teacher; National Board Certified Teacher; 2013 Presidential Awardee for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching; 2012 Alabama Secondary Teacher of the Year
Jennifer House, high school math teacher; National Board Certified Teacher
Faith Lenhart, high school arts education teacher; Model Cornerstone Assessment Pilot Project teacher
Sharman Martin, elementary physical education teacher; author of “Bo Meets A Hero” and “I Can Play Too”
Tre Munger, middle school counselor; ALSDE Curriculum Guide co-writer for English/Language Arts
Ashley Perry, middle school teacher; 2016 Network for Alabama Teaching Fellow
Anne Palmer, high school English teacher
Meg Rudolph, high school choir teacher
Stacey Thomas, high school math teacher; National Board Certified Teacher
Minnette Wiggins, elementary teacher; 2016 Alabama Elementary Teacher of the Year

The Birmingham News
Friday, January 29, 2016
Retreat from politics makes sense for AEA

We’ve documented the Alabama Education Association’s decline as a political force in the state since Republicans took control of the Legislature in 2010.

Those who think that’s a good thing probably are celebrating as boisterously now as they did then following last week’s news that the AEA, at least for the moment, has decided to retreat from the political battlefield.

Sheila Remington, the organization’s president, and Amy Marlowe, its assistant executive secretary for member advocacy and outreach, told a Montgomery Advertiser reporter in separate interviews that those seeking cash to fund or run campaigns this year had best look elsewhere.

They say the AEA will instead focus on repaying loans taken out two years ago to help fund an effort to reverse what happened in 2010.

That Republican triumph produced legislation aimed at neutering the AEA, which in its heyday under the late Paul Hubbert, its longtime executive secretary, basically was the beating heart of the Democratic Party in Alabama. Most notable was the abolition of payroll deductions for dues to the organization, which has seen its revenues decline in the aftermath.

The AEA’s political action committee, Alabama Voice of Teachers for Education, spent $12 million in 2014 trying to elect what it viewed as more education-friendly Republicans to the Legislature and to unseat key GOP leaders. It borrowed $4 million toward that goal, much more debt than it had taken on in the past for political purposes.

Republicans added seats in the Legislature, however, the leaders survived (although House Speaker Mike Hubbard’s legal issues make his situation tenuous) and the AEA was stuck with debt it hasn’t been able to quickly repay, as was the case with past loans.

Questions about the AEA’s finances cost Henry Mabry his job as executive secretary, and the National Education Association last year placed the organization under trusteeship and is running its day-to-day operations. Its PAC spent virtually all its revenue last year repaying the loans, and is only a little more than halfway there.

The AEA’s decision is the prudent thing to do, although activists who see the GOP lining up controversial new education legislation to link higher teacher salaries to the elimination of tenure protection will be disappointed.

We’ll also note that this is an “off-year” election for the organization, since there’s no gubernatorial or legislative races. Marlowe said it would reassess whether to dive back into politics after this year.

The symbolism of this is significant, however, and we’re skeptical that the AEA will even contemplate the kind of “Hail Mary” it hurled in 2014, given the odds against its completion.

Which raises a question we’ve asked throughout this saga: Can the AEA stop pining for what may never be again, adapt to the present landscape that seems set in place and move forward as an effective advocate for education in this state?
TEACHERS UNION

AEA halts campaign contributions

By Brian Lyman
The Montgomery Advertiser

MONTGOMERY — The Alabama Education Association, long a major presence in Alabama campaigns, will halt direct political contributions while it pays off debts incurred in the 2014 state elections, officials said this week.

AEA President Sheila Remington and Amy Marlowe, a spokeswoman for the AEA, said in separate interviews that the once-powerful teachers' organization, for decades the engine of Democratic politics in Alabama, would focus on retiring a total of $4 million in loans taken out by AEA's political action committee as part of a largely unsuccessful attempt to put its allies in the Legislature.

"We're out of the business," Remington said in a phone interview Wednesday. "We're out of giving people money to run campaigns ... as far as people calling and asking us for campaign contributions, I don't see us getting involved with that anymore."

Marlowe said AEA would re-evaluate its political strategy after paying off the loans, due at the end of the year.

"Our highest priority right now is making sure those loans are repaid," she said.

SEE AEA, A6
Sitting out 2016 would likely have little impact in the state. AEA rarely, if ever, makes contributions to federal campaigns and focuses on state elections, which occur in off-years.

AEA’s political action committee, Alabama Voice of Teachers for Education, spent $2.1 million of its $2.2 million in revenue last year paying back the loans, according to a campaign finance report filed Tuesday. The moves have precedent. AEA took out significant loans for the 2006 and 2010 state elections and paid them both back the following year. But its borrowing in years past were significantly smaller. In 2011, the organization paid Regions $1.1 million. In 2007, AEA paid the bank just over $1 million. Marlowe attributed the larger loans to the scale of the campaign AEA attempted in 2014.

Remington said the payments were part of efforts to clear the organization’s debt for the next director of AEA. “If it’s a large expenditure, we’re paying it off in advance,” she said. “I’m trying to have this office as a whistle.”

The teachers’ organization, once a dominant force in state government, took blows after Republicans won control of the state Legislature in 2010. Long a bete noire of the GOP, Republican legislators in 2011 approved bills cutting off check-off dues for teachers, AEA’s chief source of revenue. The campaign finance report also shows payroll deduction revenue to the PAC falling from about $2.2 million in 2014 to $2.6 million in 2015, a decline of 7.3 percent. Remington attributed that to losses of check-off dues but also to changes in how members can pay their expenses.

AEA pushed hard in the GOP primaries in 2014, spending more than $7.2 million in an attempt to elect friendly Republicans to the state House. The group had some success in House races but failed to elect any of its candidates in the Senate. Attempts to unseat House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, and Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, were also unsuccessful.

In all, the PAC spent $12 million on the 2014 races. Concerns about AEA’s financial stability led former executive secretary Paul Hubbert, who died in October 2014, to criticize then-executive secretary Henry Mabry for what he called “highly volatile stock trades.” An audit commissioned by the AEA’s board of directors found “serious concerns about a lack of financial controls.” Mabry, facing termination, resigned at the end of March. The National Education Association established a trusteeship over the organization. Marlowe said the trusteeship had nothing to do with the loan repayments.

The PAC did nothing but repay loans the rest of the year, according to the campaign finance report. Amid some debate, AEA members last December approved changes to the organization’s constitution that will give the governing board greater oversight over staff financial decisions.

Concerns about AEA’s financial stability led Marlowe, the new executive secretary, to criticize then-executive secretary Henry Mabry for what he called “highly volatile stock trades.” An audit commissioned by the AEA’s board of directors found “serious concerns about a lack of financial controls.” Mabry, facing termination, resigned at the end of March. The National Education Association established a trusteeship over the organization. Marlowe said the trusteeship had nothing to do with the loan repayments.

The PAC did nothing but repay loans the rest of the year, according to the campaign finance report. Amid some debate, AEA members last December approved changes to the organization’s constitution that will give the governing board greater oversight over staff financial decisions.
GOP needs help to oust Hubbard

Rep. Phil Williams may not have enough GOP votes

Charles J. Dean cdean@al.com

The effort by some Republicans to oust House Speaker Mike Hubbard has them crossing party lines seeking the votes of Democrats and offering their old political rivals incentives to help them unseat one of the most influential Republicans in the state.

Rep. Phil Williams, R-Montevallo, announced last fall he would challenge Hubbard, R-Auburn, when the Legislature convenes its regular session on Feb. 2. In an interview at the time of his announcement Williams said he had the votes to win.

Longtime political observers doubt Williams has the votes to win. Whatever momentum his candidacy had in the fall has stalled.

If that is true, Williams and his allies would need virtually every vote of Democratic lawmakers to have any chance to beat Hubbard and they are making the effort to get them, according to key Democrats.

"Yeah, some of us have talked to Phil's (Williams') people and they are pushing us hard to give Phil our votes for speaker," said Rep. John Rogers, D-Birmingham, one of the House's longest serving members and a power in the Black Democratic Caucus. "It's pretty clear, they don't have anywhere near enough votes in the Republican Caucus to dump Mike and they need Democrats."

Rogers laughed at the irony.

"The Republicans have a super majority and for five years have run this place like Democrats have no say," said Rogers. "Now some of those same Republicans are begging us for our votes. ...These guys love to talk about not doing anything they think might hurt the 'Republican Brand' like expanding gambling, expanding Medicaid, giving teachers a pay raise. But apparently the Republican Brand will be just fine if they use the votes of Democrats to dump their Republican leader. It makes me laugh."

Rogers said one key Williams supporter who talked to him said Williams as speaker would be willing to do more to share power with the Democrats. Asked for specifics, Rogers said there was a conversation about reopening legislative committee assignments and letting Democrats take their pick of the committees they wanted.

Rogers said he did not want to name the person who represented Williams in the negotiations. But other Democrats said it was Rep. Ed Henry, R-Hartselle. Henry has been a vocal critic of Hubbard and Gov. Robert Bentley over a number of issues, including supporting tax increases. Henry also is a member of the state Republican Party Steering Committee which governs the party.

Asked if Henry was the representative who talked with him, Rogers said he did not want to "give the name up" but added "you heard it right."

Williams said he never spoke with Rogers. Asked if Henry had, Williams said he doubted it but would check. Williams did not respond to a follow-up email. Efforts to reach Henry for comment were not successful.

Rogers said he will not ask the Democratic Black Caucus or any other Democrat to support Williams in his effort to remove Hubbard.

"I'm not going to ask Democrats to climb out on a limb in hopes that enough Republicans will also crawl out on that same limb to get Mike," said Rogers. "The fact is I know who some of the Republicans are who say they will vote to unseat Hubbard and I just don't believe they have the guts to do it at the end of the day."

The House is composed of 105 members — 70 Republicans and 33 Democrats. Two seats are currently vacant. It takes a majority of the members currently holding seats to unseat Hubbard or 52 votes.

Judge denies motion to postpone

Lee County Circuit Judge Jacob Walker has denied House Speaker Mike Hubbard's motion to postpone his ethics trial, but indicated appeals of some unresolved pretrial motions could still lead to a delay.

Hubbard attorney Lance Bell asked for a continuance of the trial, set for March 28.

Bell said the withdrawal of Hubbard's lead law firm earlier this month and other factors would not allow the defense to be ready.

Prosecutors objected, saying the defense had had time to get ready and has instead spent that time on delaying tactics.

Still pending are Hubbard's motions to dismiss the case on claims of prosecutorial misconduct and his claims that the ethics law, for which Hubbard was a leading advocate, is unconstitutional.

A special grand jury indicted Hubbard in October 2013 on 23 felony ethics counts. He is accused of using his public offices to benefit his businesses.

Hubbard has denied any wrongdoing.
Shelby says he supports tax reform

Lawmaker also backs flat tax

By Nick Privitera
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby said Monday that he supports fundamental reform of the nation’s tax code.

"We all benefit from some provisions in the tax code, all of us, but we do not benefit from all of them. I think if we had fundamental tax reform it would be good for this country," the Tuscaloosa Republican said during a breakfast meeting organized by the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama at the Embassy Suites hotel in downtown Tuscaloosa. "We would become a nation of savings and it might help us fund our government."

Shelby said he supports a flat tax, which is generally defined as a single rate that spans all income brackets of taxpayers instead of the current system, which taxes higher-income people at increased rates and includes many deductions and exemptions.

He said he believes the American people want to change the tax code and would support reforms at the Internal Revenue Service.

During questioning from the audience, Shelby spoke about the importance of lowering the national debt, criticized the Affordable Care Act and discussed the need for a stronger foreign policy.

Shelby said these issues will be important in the upcoming session of Congress and he noted that this is a presidential election year.

"This year is pivotal. I would like (Republicans) to stay in control of the U.S. Senate. I am running, and I run on my record of service to the people of Alabama and to the nation," Shelby said.

Four Republicans are seeking to remove Shelby from the seat he has held since 1987: Marcus Bowman, John Martin, Jonathan McConnell and Shadrack McGill.

On the Democratic side, Ron Crumpton and Charles Nana are running for Shelby's Senate seat.

The primary will be March 1. The winners in the Republican and Democratic primaries will face each other in the Nov. 8 general election.

Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox attended the chamber meeting, and he praised Shelby's efforts to help Tuscaloosa.

"He is certainly not a senator that goes to a castle and disappears. He is always in contact with me personally. His staff does a phenomenal job of working with our team," Maddox said.

Shelby also spoke Saturday during a meeting of the Young Republicans Federation of Alabama at the Hotel Capstone in Tuscaloosa.
OIL SPILL FUNDS

Judge to hear beach hotel arguments

By Kim Chandler
The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY — A federal judge will hear arguments Tuesday in a lawsuit challenging Alabama’s plans to use a portion of the state’s oil spill settlement funds to build a beachfront hotel and conference center at Gulf State Park.

The environmental advocacy group, Gulf Restoration Network of New Orleans, filed a lawsuit in 2014 arguing that a hotel development is a misuse of funds meant to restore natural resources after the largest oil spill in U.S. history.

“Building a hotel and convention center is plainly not an action that will restore, rehabilitate, replace, or acquire the equivalent of injured natural resources after the largest oil spill in U.S. history,” lawyers for the group wrote in the 2014 complaint.

The lawsuit names as defendants state and federal trustees who approved the project, including the United States Department of the Interior, Environmental Protection Agency and Alabama’s Department of Conservation.

Alabama is moving forward with plans to use a portion of BP settlement funds to construct a 350-room hotel and conference center that can handle gatherings of up to 1,500 people. The facility would be built on the site of an old lodge at the park that was destroyed by Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

The state argued that the project will help bring people back to the coast after recreation use plummeted during the 2010 oil spill and cleanup.

“When you look at the facts about this project, there is no reason for the judge to stop it,” Cooper Shattuck, executive of the Gulf State Park Enhancement Project, said.

Shattuck said the project meets the requirements of the law and the state is also proposing an ecologically sensitive design that will have a smaller footprint than the old lodge.

The 2010 Deepwater Horizon rig explosion dumped 134 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. The lawsuit challenges the state’s planned use of $58 million in early restoration funds, a pot of money BP made available for the coastal states, for the project.

U.S. District Judge Charles Butler will hear arguments Tuesday in Mobile on motions for summary judgment requested by both plaintiffs and defendants.

Tourism officials in Alabama have long argued that Alabama needed a beach site that could host large conferences, since Alabama associations often cross state lines into Florida to find venues large enough for their summer gatherings.

Two governors have tried for more than a decade to replace the lodge destroyed in 2014.

Alabama hopes to have the facility open by the summer of 2018, Shattuck said.

SEE HOTEL, A4
Hall of Fame to induct Lee, Flynt

Staff report

Author Harper Lee and Alabama historian Wayne Flynt are scheduled to be inducted into the Black Belt Hall of Fame on Friday during a ceremony at the University of West Alabama.

The ceremony and accompanying luncheon will be from noon-2 p.m. in the Bell Conference Center. Tickets are $15, and reservations should be made by Monday.

Flynt is a well-known Alabama historian and university professor emeritus at Auburn University. Lee is the author of “To Kill a Mockingbird.” Both will be honored for their work on behalf of the Black Belt region and Alabama.

The hall of fame honors those who have had a positive impact on the region, the state, the nation, and the world through contributions in art, business, education, industry, medicine, politics or science.

"In both literature and history classes around the nation, the works of Harper Lee and Wayne Flynt influence the thoughts of others. They are both truly ambassadors for Alabama’s Black Belt, and we are thrilled that they will be inducted in the same class," said Tina Naremore Jones, executive director of the UWA Division of Economic Development and Outreach. "This will be a special occasion honoring the rich legacy of both individuals."

For tickets, contact Amy Christiansen at 205-652-3655 or achristiansen@uwa.edu
Diversity center to open next week

Staff report

The University of Alabama announced Thursday that it will open a new Intercultural Diversity Center next week.

"The Intercultural Diversity Center was envisioned by students to increase cultural awareness and provide resources for increasing inclusion and collaboration on the UA campus," said David L. Grady, UA vice president for student affairs, in a news release. "It will be available to students, faculty and staff.

"The center will also collaborate with other departments and organizations on campus to provide programming to create a supportive and empowering atmosphere for all members of the UA community," he said.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new center, located on the first floor of the Riverside Community Center, will be at 6 p.m. Monday.

The news release says that student leaders who have been instrumental in the creation and opening of the Intercultural Diversity Center will host the event.

A diversity center was one of a list of demands made by We Are Done, a group of students who advocated for changes they believe will make the UA campus more diverse, inclusive and equitable.

The group staged a march across the Quad in November to bring attention to their cause.

The center will be open from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Fridays and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays with after-hours and Sundays available by appointment.
Culverhouse fundraising challenge brings in $3.6 million

By: Ed Enoch

The latest challenge by a Florida businessman meant to spur donations to support scholarships and other assistance at the University of Alabama has raised roughly $3.6 million in three months.

Hugh Culverhouse Jr., the son of the namesake of the Culverhouse College of Commerce, and his wife, Eliza Culverhouse, agreed in October 2015 to donate as much as $1 million to UA as a match meant to encourage other donations and gifts to the business college by the end of the year.

“They are passionate about helping young people and supporting the University of Alabama,” UA President Stuart Bell said in a prepared statement. “We thank them for their generosity and creativity in challenging others and also share our gratitude with the more than 1,000 supporters of the Culverhouse College of Commerce who responded to the challenge.”

The challenge was launched after a conversation with Bell while the Culverhouses were in town to select the newest recipients of scholarships from the Eliza and Hugh F. Culverhouse Student Assistance Scholarship Fund.

At least 1,015 donors participated in the challenge during the last few of months of 2015, according to the university. The Culverhouses contributed $2 million to their scholarship fund during the latest campaign. The $1.6 million in matching funds from other donors will be used for scholarships, professorships and other assistance for the business school, according to the university.

“Eliza and I are happy to have made this additional investment in our scholarship fund at the university and are pleased the matching gift challenge was so successful with more than 1,000 participants,” Culverhouse said.

The couple, which has offered several similar challenges during the past few years, has given the university about $6 million for scholarships since 2013.

The Culverhouses' scholarship fund is an endowment that focuses on helping reduce the burden of student debt by offering assistance to academically gifted undergraduates who don't qualify for other scholarship opportunities and would otherwise face funding their education with loans.
UA FOOTBALL

Annual
A-Day
game set
for April 16

Scrimmage has attracted
average crowd of 81,500

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

The University of Alabama will
hold its annual spring football
A-Day Game at 1 p.m. on April 16, the school announced Tuesday.
Television coverage will be
announced at a later date.
The A-Day Game will be UA's 15th and final spring practice and
will take place at Bryant-Denny
Stadium. The event will be free to
the public, as usual.
Alabama will be coming off its
latest national championship, the
school's fourth in the last seven
years.
Alabama is the national leader in
spring football game attendance
over the last nine years, drawing a
total of 733,532 fans for an average
of more than 81,500 per game over
the course of that span. The largest
A-Day crowd in history — 92,310
— came in 2011. UA drew a then-
capacity crowd of 92,138 in 2007 for
head coach Nick Saban's first spring
game, when the stadium was under
expansion.
More information on additional
activities, parking and traffic will
be released at a later date, and will
be posted on rolltide.com.
Golden Flake is the name sponsor
of the scrimmage.
— Reach Tommy Deas at
tommy@tidesports.com or at
205-722-0224.
Cold can't cool Tide fans' excitement

By Angel Coker  
Staff Writer

High winds and frigid temperatures couldn't keep Alabama football fans away from their national championship celebration Saturday. Fans lined both sides of University Boulevard from Denny Chimes to the Walk of Champions and the steps of Bryant-Denny Stadium. A crowd that appeared to be around 2,000 strong watched as their favorite players, head football coach Nick Saban and other coaches, and the Million Dollar Band walked and rode past.

The band played UA's Fight song, the percussion and brass instruments eliciting excitement from the sidewalk. Linebacker Reggie Ragland walked past, and a young boy called his name. Nick Saban rode past, and the whole crowd erupted into hoots, hollers and screams.

Big crowd bundles up to cheer UA football team

Alabama head football coach Nick Saban speaks during the Crimson Tide's National Championship Celebration on the steps of Bryant-Denny Stadium in Tuscaloosa on Saturday.
It was like a miniature game day.

Suzanne Rywicher from skipping the celebration was not an option no matter how cold it was.

“We came to every home game during the season, so we wouldn’t miss this,” she said. “We love the players. They worked so hard, and we wanted to come show them how much we appreciate it.”

She said driving from Birmingham and fighting the cold with layers of clothes and hot coffee was worth it.

Temperatures were in the low 30s Saturday, but fans bundled up in houndstooth coats, gloves, scarves, red pea coats, black bubble jackets, hats, toboggans, hoodies and windbreakers with the Alabama A slapped across the front.

Shanequa Kennedy, who drove from Montgomery, huddled beneath an Alabama blanket that hid her national championship T-shirt.

“I am a die-hard Alabama fan,” Kennedy said. “We don’t like the cold too much, but we’re Alabama fans so we’ll come out here to support our team any time.”

Collin Wright, 11, from Muscle Shoals, was red from the wind chapping his face. He said Friday’s snow left no indecision as to whether or not he would be in Tuscaloosa Saturday morning.

Clad in multiple layers of shirts, a hoodie and a windbreaker, all with some kind of Crimson Tide logo, he found his way to the sidelines of the celebration.

“We thought it was going to be pretty bad because of the snow. We’re still here, though,” he said.
ALABAMA FOOTBALL

Parade caps championship season

Tide fans, team brave cold to celebrate another national title

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

Hundreds of fans braved the freezing temperatures and a brisk wind that blew outside Bryant-Denny Stadium on Saturday morning for the University of Alabama's national championship celebration. Highlighted by a short parade route from Denny Chimes to the Walk of Champions, the Crimson Tide football staff and coaching staff soaked in the adoration of several hundred fans during the 43-minute celebration. The fans, who lined up outside the north end zone of the stadium, watched highlight videos, listened to the Million Dollar Band and heard speeches from UA coach Nick Saban, UA president Stuart Bell, Southeastern Conference Commissioner Greg Sankey and from the four UA team captains.

Online
Check out more photos from Saturday's parade at www.tuscaloosanews.com

Alabama's Ar'Darius Stewart and other Crimson Tide players greet fans as they walk along the Walk of Champions in front of Bryant-Denny Stadium on Saturday during the National Championship Celebration honoring the Crimson Tide's 16th national title.

STAFF PHOTO/ERIN NELSON

See next page
Derrick Henry, Reggie Ragland, Ryan Kelly and Jake Coker.

Players were introduced by position groups coming down the Walk of Champions by Alabama football play-by-play radio announcer Eli Gold.

It was a brisk 32 degrees during the celebration and even the players took to the warmth anyway they could.

Linebackers Ryan Anderson and Reuben Foster even cozied up to a heater before taking their seats on the bleachers.

"We certainly appreciate you braving the cold and the conditions that we have today," Saban told the crowd. "But that kind of spirit exemplifies what the University of Alabama stands for and that kind of spirit characterizes what this team was all about this year.

"I've said it many times how much I love this team. The togetherness this team had was something special and unique. I think they accomplished what they did because they trade "I" and "me" for "we" and "us."

There was no selfishness on this team. Everybody helped everybody be accountable to do what they needed to do so that we could improve and accomplish something of significance that will create a memory for the rest of all of our lives.

"The hard work and sacrifice that this team has done, I think you should really appreciate. To face 12 straight elimination games after the Ole Miss game, the resiliency, the competitive character that this team showed in being able to do that and even coming from behind in the national championship game I think really showed the spirit that made this team really something special, and I hope everyone appreciates that.

"I hope we all remember this team not only for the skill that we have, the great players that we have, the great coaching job that our staff did, but you also remember this team for the hear that they played with and the character that they showed as competitors to win this championship that I think is the most special of all because of what this team was able to accomplish."

All four captains spoke and then unveiled the newest "2015" engraved mark on Saban's area on the championship plaza.

Sankey even had some fun with those detractors who took shots at the conference coming into the season.

"I spent a lot of time listening to people wonder if we were still the best conference in college football. No one can wonder anymore," Sankey said.

The celebration took place on the biggest recruiting weekend before national signing day with a host of the nation's best prospects.

Kelly, who grew up in Ohio, said his five years in Tuscaloosa left an impression on him.

"I'm very fortunate that I can always call this place my home," Kelly said. It's been an incredible opportunity. Roll Tide."

—Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
Warm reception

On a chilly day, Alabama fans celebrate their football champions

Michael Casagrande mcasagrande@al.com

On the stage, they huddled for warmth. There was a festive feel outside Bryant-Denny Stadium on Saturday morning, but the frosty air helped keep Alabama's national championship celebration from going too long.

A snappy 43 minutes saw a brief parade down University Boulevard and a program on the stadium steps overlooking the Walk of Champions.

Emceed by Eli Gold, the celebration included the traditional speeches from dignitaries, a few trophy presentations and the unveiling of the "2015" next to Nick Saban's statues. This was the fourth such celebration in the past seven years.

Saban's produced a few memorable quotes at championship events of the past. His "this is not the end," moment after the 2009 title continues to be played before games in Bryant-Denny Stadium. The past wasn't Saban's focus Saturday.

"This celebration isn't really about all the other championships that we've won or how many we've won in the last seven years," Saban said. "This championship and this day is about this team and what they were able to accomplish and what they were able to do. So we are here to show gratitude for this team, this group of guys and all they did to make it an exciting year for all the fans and all of us as coaches.

"It will give us a memory that will live even beyond our lives."

Saban continued his message of appreciating this team for the resilience to win the final 12 games after losing to Ole Miss. He repeated his feelings about "how much I love this team" for the way they handled everything after the Sept. 19 loss in Bryant-Denny Stadium.

SEC commissioner Greg Sankey was among the guests who spoke to the several thousand packed into the north end zone plaza. He referenced some of the questions raised about the SEC's place in college football.

"I spent a lot of time listening to people wonder if we were still the best conference in college football," Sankey said. "Nobody is wondering anymore."

It was a big day for Alabama's recruiting effort in the final weeks before National Signing Day. Several top prospects were in the chilled crowd for Saturday's event.

An event like that, regardless of weather, won't hurt that effort. And there was certainly a message being delivered to that small segment of the audience in those 43 minutes.

"I hope everybody remembers this team," Saban said, "not only for the skill that we have, the great players that we have, the great coaching job that our staff did, but you also remember this team for the heart that they played with and the character that they showed as competitors in winning this championship that I think is really the most special of all because of what this team was able to accomplish."
Longtime University of Alabama professor who influenced local arts scene dies

By: Mark Hughes Cobb

John Ross, longtime theater professor, designer and director, and a "godfather of the arts" in Tuscaloosa, died Wednesday at DCH Regional Medical Center. He was 76.

Ross helped found the Arts and Humanities Council of Tuscaloosa and the Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham, and served as a driving force behind the evolution of Tuscaloosa Community Players and SummerShow into what is now Theatre Tuscaloosa, all while serving the University of Alabama faculty from 1965 to 1996. Theatre Tuscaloosa Artistic Director Emeritus Paul K. Looney, once Ross' student, later a friend and colleague, said he'll be remembered not just for theatrical knowledge and abilities, but for a raconteur's wit, and endless fascination with all facets of life.

"He had a childlike curiosity about anything he was involved with," Looney said. "It was infectious. It sort of taught us all that that's the way it should be."

Born in New York, Ross grew up in Birmingham, and earned his bachelor's from UA, and a master of fine arts degree from the Yale University School of Drama. He worked professionally in New York, California and New England, but returned to his alma mater in 1965. He'd designed a show off-Broadway, but neither he nor wife Patricia, for many years a leading lady in performances around Tuscaloosa, liked the pace and pressure.

"I have friends who went into commercial theater, and they keep asking me why I stay in Alabama with a college theater," Ross said in a 1970 story published in The Tuscaloosa News. "I tell them I've done 25 plays in the last five years, and then ask them how many they've done. They'll say, maybe, two. I made a very deliberate, selfish decision to return to the university to teach."

Serving as president, and later board chairman of the Arts Council, Ross was among those helping resurrect the Bama Theatre, a movie palace that had by the '70s fallen into disrepair.

"That came from his love of historic theaters," said Edmond Williams, another former Ross student who became a colleague, chairing the UA theater and dance department from the '70s until retirement in 2013.

"He cared about all sorts of things that a lot of people don't: Proportion, line, getting it right; not just getting something, but getting it right," Williams said. "That was a signature of his. He was able to look at, let's say, a historic period and find the things that were distinctive in it, and put it into his designs... He would achieve absolute clarity in terms of detail."

The irony behind that particular focus was that his design could almost go unnoticed, becoming a seamless part of a show.

"If it's not right, it's calling attention to itself," Williams said. "His work was just right."
Williams also remembered Ross' way with a story. "He was compulsively articulate, finding the wrinkle that made it interesting. That wit made him great to be around, a fabulous teacher, a bon vivant in so many ways.

"So many times I'd call him in the middle of the night, because I knew he'd be up, and because I knew it was something only he and I would care about," Williams said, laughing.

Ross had suffered health scares before, but on this most recent visit to DCH, doctors gave him bad news. Ross could not speak audibly, due to shortness of breath.

"When you get John Ross to the point he can't talk, he's no longer John Ross," Williams said. Instead, Ross wrote notes. He wanted to prepare his old friend, so when Williams visited earlier this week, Ross wrote a note: "May not make it this time."

"He was just a great guy. There are tons and tons of John Ross stories. Sometimes they were stories he told, and would embroider, and you'd have to say, 'Wait a minute John, that didn't really happen that way,'" Williams said, laughing.

"He was a true artist, a great teacher, and grand, unique human being. It's hard to imagine the world without him."
The Alabama Medicaid Agency is asking the Legislature for more funds so it can continue providing all of its services. Here's a breakdown of the numbers involved.

**$685M**
The appropriation for Medicaid this year

**$157M**
How much the AMA is asking in additional funds, a 23 percent increase.

"Medicaid's budget request of an additional $156 million is very responsible and really a bare-bones request."

**WILL FERNIANY, UAB Health System CEO**
on the requested funding increase for Medicaid.
VFA further legitimizes Bham startup scene

Almost a year ago, multiple members of Birmingham’s technology and entrepreneurial sectors started a campaign to brand Birmingham as the next hot destination for innovative job growth.

One major aspect around that effort is the recruitment of talented tech workers and millennial entrepreneurs to not only fill those jobs, but also live in the city and help continue downtown’s positive momentum.

It didn’t take long for the city to score a win in that department. Venture for America added Birmingham to its list of 15 host cities last summer and sent eight fellows from around the country to work at local startups for two years.

They were hired across a variety of positions at companies r-squared macro, Pack Health, Fleetio and Alabama Power.

Sure, it’s only eight employees to start out, but when you talk with them, it’s clear the program is making strides at boosting Birmingham’s standing in both the startup and tech worlds.

For this week’s Cover Story, I spoke with all of them about what led them to Birmingham, and they all cited the job opportunity at their respective company as the main reason for coming here.

Mainly, they wanted to begin their careers at a startup where they felt they could add more value by working in small teams, as opposed to being in a corporate environment. Even the fellow at Alabama Power is part of an entrepreneurial-minded area of the company called the “innovation team.”

In terms of job opportunity and talent recruitment, Birmingham’s main source has been big business in industries like banking, health care and energy. Companies like Regions, BBVA Compass, Alabama Power, UAB and others have created thousands of jobs in Birmingham over the years.

But that’s not to say Birmingham’s startup scene is lagging in job creation. At last count there were more than 1,000 open tech positions in metro Birmingham, many of which are at downtown startups.

The fact that Birmingham is now attracting highly educated millennials from outside the state to fill those startup jobs says a lot about how Birmingham has developed its entrepreneurial culture.

Much of that culture is fostered at Innovation Depot, which worked with startups, other technology groups and even large companies like Protective Life and Alabama Power to help build up Birmingham’s brand for VFA.

And now that we’ve started to recruit more of these young professionals, the next step is retaining that talent.

That’s something that has traditionally been a challenge for Birmingham, which has long suffered from “brain drain.”

While many of the fellows were very bullish on their career potential in Birmingham after their fellowship ends, others said mitigating factors like opportunities for graduate school, a change in industry and proximity to family could see them move elsewhere.

But they all voiced excitement to live and work in what many of them dub an up-and-coming city. They themselves are emerging entrepreneurs with a spirit that mirrors that of Birmingham as the city continues to revitalize, redevelop and rebrand.

That ongoing transformation will be critical for Birmingham to land more of these young professionals, but it will also take the combined efforts of startups and large companies to maintain that momentum.

Venture for America is a great start. But there’s still more work to do.
Moms’ plea: Legalize CBD oil

Mothers of epileptic children ask legislators to pass ‘Leni’s Law’

Paul Gattis  pgattis@al.com

Three moms, three children suffering from various forms of epilepsy, three different stories trying to share one message: Legalize medicinal oil derived from marijuana.

In Alabama, that legislation has been dubbed “Leni’s Law” for Leni Young, an epileptic girl from Wetumpka whose family was forced to move to Oregon to obtain cannabidiol, or CBD oil, to treat her seizures. State Rep. Mike Ball, R-Madison, is the bill’s sponsor. Sen. Paul Sanford, R-Huntsville, will carry the bill in the Senate.

On Monday, the three moms addressed the Madison County legislative delegation at its annual public forum. Their singular message came from three different vantage points:

› One mom said her child has never had a drop of CBD oil because she was not accepted into the Carly’s Law study at UAB.
› In 2014, Carly’s Law passed the Legislature without dissent once it stipulated UAB would maintain control over the study and distribution of CBD oil — a derivative of the marijuana plant that has proven effective in cases of reducing seizures and does not yield an intoxicating high.
› One mom said her child has flourished in receiving the CBD oil in the UAB study.
› One mom said her child had to withdraw from the UAB study, not because of the CBD oil, but because of complications from pharmaceutical medications.

Possession of the marijuana oil is illegal in Alabama unless the recipient is protected by Carly’s Law. “Parents need to be able to not worry about whether they are going to jail to try to save our children,” said Jodi Mitchell, whose son Robert was forced to leave the UAB study. “There is nothing in this world worse than watching them suffer. We need help. We need y’alls help.

There is no reason I should have to consider becoming a criminal to help my child because I live in the wrong ZIP code.”

Karl Forsyth told legislators her daughter, Chesney, was not accepted into the UAB study. The family last month visited with the Young family in Oregon — where they had relocated from Wetumpka so that their daughter, Leni, could have access to CBD oil.

Leni’s improvement while taking the CBD oil is what Ball said drove him to sponsor the bill.

“[I] see a dramatic improvement made with ‘Leni,’” Forsyth said, accompanied by Chesney. “She can look you in the eyes, she is starting to babble. She has a voice.”

Forsyth also told lawmakers she is awaiting approval for a medical marijuana card from Oregon for Chesney.

“I was to give her the oil now, I would be considered a criminal,” she said. “I’m not a criminal. I might speed occasionally, but I’m not a criminal.

“Leni and many other kids and people are your proof it works. Please stand with us parents and help us giving the kids of Alabama their best quality of life.”

Ball and Sanford teamed in 2014 to pass Carly’s Law without dissent in the legislature and it was signed into law by Gov. Robert Bentley. Despite the initial celebration that accompanied the law, Sanford said the law did not meet its intentions — citing the restrictions applied to the study group at UAB by the Federal Drug Administration.

“I want to personally apologize to y’all for not getting the bill to where it could help your daughter,” Sanford said. “Carly’s Law ended up not what we wanted it to be but it was the best we could do at the time.

“I think you will see Rep. Ball and myself fight to get government out of the way so you can help your children.”
Law would loosen CBD oil restrictions

Rep. Mike Ball’s bill would legalize medicinal cannibis derivative

Paul Gattis pgattis@al.com

Amy Young and her family moved to Oregon because the medicine her daughter needs is illegal in Alabama.

State Rep. Mike Ball said he plans to introduce a bill next month to change that. And he’s confident it’s going to pass.

“The people I’ve talked to about it seem very receptive to it,” said Ball, R-Madison. “It’s nothing like it was a couple of years ago when I started on Carly’s Law. This is a whole different dynamic.”

In 2014, Carly’s Law passed the Legislature without dissent once it stipulated UAB would maintain control over the study and distribution of CBD oil — a derivative of the marijuana plant that has proven effective in cases of reducing seizures and does not yield an intoxicating high.

Young said her daughter, Leni, applied to be a part of the UAB study but she did not meet FDA qualifications. Without access to the CBD oil at UAB, the Young family left for Oregon, where it’s legal.

What happened when Leni, who is now 4, began getting doses of cannabis oil, according to her mother, was nothing short of a miracle.

“I prayed and hoped that it would help. But I had no idea that the changes would be this profound. She’s doing things we were told beyond her realm...ever,” Young said. “It has given our little girl her life. She is a happy, sweet, opinionated little girl.

“Every moment is just such a gift.”

Rep. Mike Ball, R-Madison, holds Leni Young, who has a seizure disorder that her family says is helped by CBD oil, a cannibis derivative that is currently illegal in Alabama except for a few children chosen to participate in a University of Alabama at Birmingham study.

Contributed photo
LENI'S LAW

Ball is calling his bill "Leni's Law." "I woke up a few months ago in the middle of the night — I couldn't sleep — and Amy had posted a video on Facebook of Leni after she had just started taking it and it's like she had changed a life," Ball said. "And I knew what I had to do. And even though they are not here — they're refugees — there are other families (in Alabama) and we don't need people leaving to try to help their families."

"I think it's time to take this step and I'm going to do everything I can to get it done. I think a lot of folks are going to come out of the woodwork to help me."

Leni had a "pretty catastrophic stroke" before she was born, her mother said. "(The stroke) destroyed all of her brain except for a small strip of frontal lobe and her brain stem," her mother said. "We had a pretty grim prognosis for her. When she was 7-months-old, her seizures began and immediately they were pretty life threatening."

NO 'HIGH' WITH CBD OIL

The seizures — dozens a day, Amy said — were so frequent that Amy said she and her husband didn't even count the small ones.

After moving to Oregon and starting a regimen of cannabis oil — which does not contain THC, which creates the intoxicating high, but does include THCA, which does not create a high — Leni's seizures have dropped to about one every four-to-six weeks.

Her other pharmaceutical drugs have been reduced by 20 percent as well, Leni's mom said. "Her oil does not get her stoned," Amy said.

Leni has progressed to the point to where she can sit up almost independently and watch the Disney movie "Frozen." Her parents now have to spell "ice cream" because she's learned what it means and she wants it all the time," her mom said.

"This Christmas was the first Christmas we could buy toys with that she could actually play with," Amy said. "Every day, there's something new."

Even on a Facebook video, Ball could tell the difference. He got to know Leni and her family when he helped push Carly's Law through the legislature.

"So if you weigh the potential benefits against the potential risks of doing this, it's a no-brainer," Ball said.

UAB RESEARCH

He also cited the research ongoing at UAB that he said revealed the benefits of the marijuana oil — giving scientific backing to what had largely been anecdotal evidence of effectiveness. UAB spokesman Bob Shepard said in an email to that the school was not in a position to discuss their findings at this time.

Researchers at UAB will be submitting their findings for publication in a peer-reviewed journal in the near future, Shepard said. He said the investigators are "encouraged by what they are seeing."

"We've got more understanding of it than we had a couple of years ago," Ball said, referring to the UAB study. "But there is a lot of anecdotal evidence and I will say this: I haven't found any evidence of any negative side effects. The drug stores are full of over-the-counter things that have more side effects than that stuff does."

For the Youngs, who now live near Portland, the bill becoming law would be a lifeline to their home state. Because Leni is dependent on the cannabis oil, they cannot bring her to Alabama without breaking the law. And Leni's big sister is on track to graduate from Auburn University in December and a bevy of grandparents are in Alabama, too.

"The difference in her is beyond anything we could have dreamed for and hoped for," Amy said of Leni. "From this point, I'm not putting any limits on her. I'm never going to say she's not going to talk. I'm never going to say she's not going to walk. At this point, I'm not sure."
Top 50 Online Engineering Management Degree Programs 2016

By: Staff

As our world and businesses grow increasingly bigger and more complex, it is imperative that our leaders understand systems, logistics, and management on a global scale. In the field of engineering, the breadth and scope is growing as well. Engineering organizations are in need of technical engineers who are able to understand the inner workings of technical projects, systems, and tools while understanding the scope of running global teams and organizations. This type of leadership goes beyond the technical training in an undergraduate engineering degree.

A Master’s in Engineering Management (MEM) degree is the perfect graduate program for professional engineers looking to grow into leadership positions. A Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree trains students in overall business practices, marketing, accounting management, etc. Whereas, a Master’s in Engineering Management degree provides high-level technical training, as well as the business training with the specific perspective of engineering projects and organizations. An MEM positions professional engineers, with higher technical and managerial training, perfectly for leadership roles. Students will graduate with the specific training to lead cross-disciplinary teams, lead and manage organizational change, manage technical projects, and help manage organizational decision-making and communication. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Engineering Managers have one of the top 20 best paying jobs in America today, with the 2014 median pay of $130,620 per year. For more information on Engineering Management, visit our Resource Guide.

An online master’s degree in engineering management will allow students to not only gain the integral education, but also allow students to continually build their professional experience without interruption. An online degree can give flexibility without compromising educational integrity. Here is our list of the Top 50 Online Master’s Degrees in Engineering Management.

Methodology

This Top 50 list was ranked on the following criteria: reputation, prestige, flexibility, estimated cost, and estimated early career salary. Each criterion was given equal weight in order to gather a well respected and high quality program. Data was gathered from each program’s website, US News and World Report, the Princeton Review, PayScale, as well as the National Center for Education Statistics. Let this ranking help you find the highest quality master’s degree in engineering management.

#50 Old Dominion University Frank Batten College of Engineering and Technology – Norfolk, Virginia

#49 Duke University Pratt School of Engineering – Durham, North Carolina

#48 Florida International University College of Engineering and Computing – Miami, Florida

#47 Rowan University Henry M. Rowan College of Engineering – Glassboro, New Jersey

See next page
#46 Lamar University College of Engineering – Beaumont, Texas

#45 Robert Morris University School of Engineering, Mathematics and Science – Moon Township, Pennsylvania

#44 Oakland University School of Engineering and Computer Science – Rochester Hills, Michigan

#43 Eastern Michigan University College of Technology – Ypsilanti, Michigan

#42 Case Western Reserve University Case School of Engineering – Cleveland, Ohio

#41 University of Alabama in Huntsville College of Engineering – Huntsville, Alabama

#40 Kettering University Online – Flint, Michigan

#39 Milwaukee School of Engineering – Milwaukee, Wisconsin

#38 Syracuse University College of Engineering and Computer Science – Syracuse, New York

#37 University of Idaho College of Engineering – Moscow, Idaho

#36 University of Kansas School of Engineering – Lawrence, Kansas

#35 Texas A&M University–College Station Dwight Look College of Engineering – College Station, Texas

#34 Colorado State University College of Engineering – Fort Collins, Colorado

#33 Lawrence Technological University College of Engineering – Southfield, Michigan

#32 University of Texas at Austin Cockrell School of Engineering – Austin, Texas

#31 University of Colorado Colorado Springs College of Engineering and Applied Science – Colorado Springs, Colorado

#30 Northeastern University College of Engineering – Boston, Massachusetts

#29 University of Louisville J.B. Speed School of Engineering – Louisville, Kentucky

#28 University of North Carolina at Charlotte William States Lee College of Engineering – Charlotte, North Carolina

#27 Stevens Institute of Technology School of Systems and Enterprises – Hoboken, New Jersey

#26 New Jersey Institute of Technology Newark College of Engineering – Newark, New Jersey

See next page
#25 George Washington University School of Engineering and Applied Science – Washington, District of Columbia

#24 University of Massachusetts Amherst College of Engineering – Amherst, Massachusetts

#23 University of Colorado Boulder College of Engineering & Applied Science – Boulder, Colorado

#22 Drexel University’s College of Engineering – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

#21 University of Dayton School of Engineering – Dayton, Ohio

#20 University of Tennessee-Chattanooga College of Engineering and Computer Science – Chattanooga, Tennessee

#19 Oklahoma State University College of Engineering – Stillwater, Oklahoma

#18 Texas Tech University Edward E. Whitacre Jr. College of Engineering – Lubbock, Texas

#17 Washington State University Voiland College of Engineering and Architecture – Pullman, Washington

#16 University of Arizona College of Engineering – Tucson, Arizona

#15 University of Wisconsin–Madison College of Engineering – Madison, Wisconsin

#14 Iowa State University College of Engineering – Ames, Iowa

#13 Stanford University School of Engineering – Stanford, California

#12 Ohio State University College of Engineering – Columbus, Ohio

#11 Ohio University Fritz J. and Dolores H. Russ College of Engineering and Technology – Athens, Ohio

#10 Lehigh University P.C. Rossin College of Engineering and Applied Science – Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

#9 Missouri University of Science & Technology Engineering Management Department – Rolla, Missouri

#8 University of Nebraska–Lincoln College of Engineering – Lincoln, Nebraska

#7 Johns Hopkins University Whiting School of Engineering – Baltimore, Maryland

#6 University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Engineering – Birmingham, Alabama

#5 University of South Florida College of Engineering – Tampa, Florida

See next page
#4 Kansas State University College of Engineering – Manhattan, Kansas

#3 Arizona State University Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering – Tempe, Arizona

#2 Purdue University College of Engineering – West Lafayette, Indiana

#1 Pennsylvania State University World Campus – University Park, Pennsylvania
The Alabama college you should attend if you want to make the big bucks

By: Leada Gore

If your future plans include making big bucks, you might want to check this out.

Business Insider recently used information from Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce and the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard to highlight the median earnings of students from more than 1,400 colleges 10 years after starting their studies.

Then, they looked at the school in each state where students go on to earn the most, factoring in how much students pay annually between tuition, required fees, and room and board.

The ranking put the University of Alabama in Huntsville at the top of the list for the state. Median earnings for UAH students 10 years after enrolling was $46,600, according to the data. You can compare that with annual in-state tuition of about $18,333 and out-of-state tuition of around $29,827.

You can see how that compares to colleges in other states here.

Welcome to Monday's Wake Up Call. Let's get going:

No third term for Obama...

President Barack Obama said he wouldn't run for a third term even if he could.

In an interview with CBS, the president said he thought the office would benefit from new energy and fresh ideas. He also said he's looking forward to leaving the tight security that comes with his office and gaining more freedom when he travels.

The president's term ends in January 2017.

Eight go to trial over King Tut

Eight museum employees in Egypt are going on trial for allegedly attempting to reattach the beard on the burial mask of Pharaoh Tutankhamun.

Last year, officials found that the blue and gold braided beard had become detached from the mask and then sloppily glued back on. The employees face charges of negligence and violating professional standards.

The 3,000-year-old artifact, one of Cairo's biggest tourist attractions, has been repaired by a team of German experts.

North Korea says it's invented hangover-free alcohol

See next page
Move over hydrogen bomb – North Korea claims it has invented liquor that won't leave you with a hangover.

The state-run newspaper claims the hangover-free liquor, known as Koryo, is made of ginseng and scorched rice. It comes just a year after North Korean scientists released a drug they claimed cured HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, cancer, MERS and Ebola.

Liz Cheney running for House seat

Liz Cheney, daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, is planning to run for Congress.

Cheney is seeking Wyoming's House seat. The seat is currently held by Rep. Cynthia Lummis, R, who has announced she will retire after 2016. State Senator Leland Christensen and State Rep. Tim Stubson are both running.

All three candidates are Republicans. Wyoming hasn't elected a Democrat since to the House or Senate since the 1970s.

Until tomorrow.
Calhoun, UAH ink credit transfer agreement

By: Staff

Students enrolled at Calhoun Community College will soon be able to transfer credits to the University of Alabama in Huntsville with greater ease, thanks to an agreement formalized Wednesday by administrators from both schools.

The agreements will make it easier for students to successfully transfer between the two schools, and will allow more transfer options for students to earn their undergraduate degree. The agreements also prevent students from taking classes that won't transfer.

"Calhoun and UAH have long enjoyed a very successful partnership as we have worked together in providing the best educational opportunities for our students," said Calhoun President Dr. James Klauber. "With the signing of today's articulation agreements, this further cements this relationship and opens up even more options for our students as they continue on their path toward earning their undergraduate degrees."

Klauber added that UAH has become Calhoun's primary transfer partner, with more than 22 percent of Calhoun's transfer students choosing to attend UAH.

Utilizing the UAH Pathways program, Calhoun students may enroll in both institutions to simultaneously complete the associate degree at Calhoun, while also beginning to take courses at UAH.

A Reverse Transfer Articulation agreement signed by officials would enable a student completing UAH coursework to transfer those credits back to Calhoun to meet requirements for an associate degree.

"The ultimate goal is for students to have a smooth transit to UAH and be synchronized with the program of study without delaying graduation," said a release about the agreement.
Walk inside the International Space Station? Now you can in Alabama

By: Lee Roop

Want to walk inside the International Space Station and practice docking a robotic arm? See the latest in astronaut food? Bedrooms? Toilets?

You can do that and more in a new exhibit opened Tuesday at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville. It's called "ISS: Science on Orbit," and it's in the main center building on I-565.

Special guests at Tuesday's opening were dozens of real space station science mission coordinators meeting this week at Huntsville's Marshall Space Flight Center. They're in town to plan the next six months of space science with officials including station Chief Scientist Dr. Julie Robinson.

The exhibit seemed to pass their test, based on comments during the tour. "Just like that," one NASA researcher was heard saying when asked if a certain feature of the bathroom closet was like the one in space.

In opening remarks, Robinson called the Marshall center the "heart and soul of the research that goes on on the space station since this where all of our payload research operations happen."

The exhibit's first stop is a mock-up of the multiple monitoring screens and command consoles at the Payload Operations Center at Marshall. The real ops center is on a daily bus tour that leaves from the center.

Space Center CEO Dr. Deborah Barnhart said everyone knows there is a space station, "but very few people know what kind of science is going on. That's the point of this exhibition, to make sure people understand the benefits of the space station."

Barnhart called special attention to the station's Sally Ride Earth Cam, "a huge camera pointed at a view of the Earth. We are proud that NASA has chosen the U.S. Space & Rocket Center to operate that camera along with our partners from (the University of Alabama in Huntsville) and Teledyne Brown (Engineering). On our very first mission in November, we had more than 20,000 students from 26 countries get images of their home town from the Earth Cam."

The exhibit features two walk-through mock-ups of ISS modules with a "connecting node" containing a full-scale replica of the Cupola Observation Module, where astronauts take their famous photographs of Earth and space.

"ISS: Science on Orbit" is open to center visitors during regular hours and is included in museum admission or membership.
Rare architect's drawings show Huntsville's change from cotton town to Rocket City

By: Lee Roop

Architect Heinz Hilten helped design Germany's V-2 rocket program in World War II, and he helped design America's Saturn rocket program that took humans to the moon.

Hilten, whose papers have just been donated to the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH), also helped design modern Huntsville at a time Washington doubted an Alabama cotton town could handle a modern moon shot program.

Hilten, who died in 2013 at 103, also helped start Huntsville's symphony and design a church, a concert hall and even Point Mallard Park on the Tennessee River.

Putting that life's work in context will be a job for history, and historians are expected to benefit the most from the Historic Huntsville Foundation's decision to give Hilten's collected papers to UAH.

Hilten's family had given the collection to the foundation, but HHF Executive Director Donna Castellano said she realized they needed a bigger home when she saw they included site plans for the research institute that would become UAH - arguably the critical building that kept NASA in Alabama.

People say modern Huntsville's history started when Wernher von Braun and his German rocket team came to Redstone Arsenal from Ft. Bliss, Texas, in 1950. But an equally important day came in 1961 when von Braun spoke about his challenge to the Alabama Legislature. Hilten's personal copy of that speech is part of the collection.

Von Braun told Alabama lawmakers that Washington was doubting the wisdom of spending more money on NASA in Alabama, considering the area's problem attracting top minds. We need good schools and a research institute in Huntsville, von Braun said, or this big opportunity could pass by.

"If the Legislature hadn't responded," Castellano asked, "where would Huntsville be?"

The Legislature did respond by appropriating money for a research institute that became the University of Alabama in Huntsville. German architect Hannes Luehrsen designed it, but Hans Hilten reviewed and commented on Luehrsen's plans.

What else in Huntsville did Hilten's pen mark?

* Many of the elementary schools built in the 1960s

See next page
* St. Mark's Lutheran Church, where the German team and their families worshipped

* The Von Braun Center's concert hall, where Hilten also helped found the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra

* Memorial Parkway

* Point Mallard Park

* The personal homes of many German team members including von Braun

There's also Hilten's greatest personal Space Age achievement. He was architect of record for the national landmark Saturn V test stand on Redstone Arsenal.

Castellano and Moore are like all Huntsvillians – proud of the city's Apollo program history. But they're also fascinated by what happened outside the gates of Marshall Space Flight Center in the cotton fields of Madison County. That's a huge change Hilten's papers also illustrate.

"You think about this little town that existed in 1950, and all of a sudden you have these new forces coming in," Castellano said.

A much bigger city had to be built – quickly – by locals and newcomers with sometimes different visions and motives. Choices were made, and they weren't always unanimous.

"It's obviously the life work of one individual," Castellano said of the collection, "but I think it's documenting the transition of Huntsville in a very broad sense from a cotton-oriented ... era into the Space Age period and all the changes Huntsville had to make to adapt."

"This is very significant," UAH library Director David Moore said last week, "because of the significance to the history of Huntsville, the history of UAH and of NASA, and how it all ties together. It's perfect for us, the UAH library, to preserve it and make it accessible forevermore to whoever wants to access it."

UAH will organize and index the collection and publish a guide for scholars. The work will be digitized and put online, and some will be showcased on campus.

"We want people to use these papers...," Castellano said. "To ask the serious questions here that could be asked, and to fill in this period that we all agree is very important to Huntsville, our nation and, really, internationally."
Ted Cruz keeps saying that satellites don’t show warming. Here’s the problem

By: Chris Mooney

Last week, when NASA and NOAA jointly announced that 2015 was the hottest year on record by a sizable margin, the news may have seemed purely factual in nature.

Yet it’s also politically resonant. Not only are this year’s crop of Democratic candidates much more gung-ho on climate change than their Republican rivals, but one leading Republican candidate, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, has repeatedly argued that based on data from satellites, there has been “no significant warming whatsoever for the last 18 years,” as he put it recently in New Hampshire. That raises the question of whether Cruz would accept what these two U.S. science agencies say, which is based on surface data rather than the measurements of satellites.

“The satellite and weather balloon data do not show 2015 as a record year,” said the senator’s communications director, Rachael Slobodien, when asked for Cruz’s reaction to the announcement of a record hot year.

“That 2015 may have been a record year in the surface data set, this in no way contradicts the Senator’s statements that there has been a pause in warming,” she continued in a statement to the Post. “Furthermore, even taking the surface data at face value, a nominal record is not especially significant. The important question is whether temperatures are rising as fast as the models say they are supposed to. And even the global warming alarmists acknowledge that they are not.”

Cruz’s contentions on climate change, and especially about satellite data, have been challenged by climate scientists. But the senator has continued to raise doubts. He even convened a December Senate hearing on the matter entitled “Data or Dogma: Promoting Open Inquiry in the Debate over the Magnitude of Human Impact on Earth’s Climate.”

Among the current field of Republican presidential contenders, skepticism of human-caused climate change is no rarity, but Cruz has arguably gone the farthest in actively making a technical counterargument and invoking data.

“It doesn’t matter, it could be a combination of Stephen Hawking, Einstein, and the Pope, and it’s not going to move him off his talking point,” says David Titley, a retired Navy rear admiral and a meteorology professor at Penn State University, who countered Cruz during the December Senate hearing and defended the idea that the globe is indeed warming.

The debate over satellite data

So what’s going on with this claim that satellite data — rather than the surface data that NASA and NOAA used to proclaim the 2015 record year — don’t show any warming?

Cruz’s claims actually harken back to a longstanding debate in the climate sphere, one dating at least back to 1990. That’s when Roy Spencer and John Christy, two satellite experts affiliated with NASA and the University of Alabama in Huntsville, argued in the prominent journal Science that satellite measurements are able to deliver “more precise atmospheric temperature
information than that obtained from the relatively sparse distribution of thermometers over the earth’s surface.”

The satellite data in question are derived from polar orbiting satellites that carry microwave sounding units that can measure the microwave emissions given off by oxygen molecules in the atmosphere. They don’t measure just the planet’s surface, but the entire troposphere (the layer of the atmosphere where weather happens, extending up to about 6 miles) and above it.

And over the years, these data have been often cited to call into question whether the globe is warming as fast as surface temperature readings would seem to suggest.

The University of Alabama in Huntsville’s Christy — often dubbed a climate change “skeptic,” though he says he agrees that “humans do affect the climate” — was a witness at Cruz’s December hearing, where his testimony criticized the “failure of the scientific community to objectively approach the study of climate and climate change.” Christy also argued that satellite measurements of the troposphere show less warming than climate change models would predict, thus calling those models into question.

Reached for an interview, Christy reiterated this idea — that the overall satellite record, which dates back to 1979, doesn’t show as much warming as climate models would predict. “There’s something weird here, there’s a discrepancy in our understanding of how the system is supposed to respond to greenhouse gases,” he said. In his statements about satellites and about climate models, it appears that Cruz is relying at least in part on Christy as a key expert.

But other scientists who focus on the satellite data, such as physicist Carl Mears of Remote Sensing Systems in Santa Rosa, Ca., take a significantly different tack. Mears agrees the satellite record shows less warming than models expect in recent years, but he also emphasizes potential problems and uncertainties with the satellite data.

“Part of Sen. Cruz’s argument is that the satellite data is more accurate than the surface data. We don’t think that’s true,” Mears said.

Mears and Benjamin Santer, a climate scientist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, recently co-authored a strong critique of Cruz’s “Data or Dogma” hearing. “Satellites are not a thermometer in space, they’re not making direct measurements of atmospheric temperature, they’re measuring the microwave emissions from oxygen molecules,” Santer said. He cites numerous types of uncertainty associated with satellite temperature data and numerous corrections to it required — such as due to satellites’ orbital drifts — making the entire endeavor a “tough job.”

“There’s over a dozen satellites that you need to string together and each of them have calibration and drift issues that need to be dealt with,” added Gavin Schmidt, director of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies at NASA. “If there’s an issue with any particular satellite or any particular calibration it affects all the temperatures, so it’s much easier to have systematic issues that affect the whole record.”

No warming in 18 years?

See next page
Warts and all, the satellite datasets are the basis for Cruz’s claim that there has been little or no warming lately — or, as the senator says, in the past 18 years.

If you only consider satellite data — and on top of that, if you grant Cruz the particular time window that he’s chosen and start the analysis around the very warm El Niño event of 1997/1998 — then Mears concurs that recent warming in the satellite record is quite limited.

“In the most recent decade and a half, the satellite data show maybe a little bit of warming, or maybe no warming, and that’s considerably less than the surface record shows,” he said.

“But,” he continued, “if you look over the longer period, the satellite data show enough warming that you can’t possibly explain it without using the forcing caused by the increase in CO2 and methane and so forth.”


The upshot was clear. For the lower troposphere, for instance, there is a considerably greater warming trend if you start in 1979 than in any of the later years. The trend is in fact negative in Mears’ dataset if you start in 1998. But if you take the entire record, then the trend is 0.123 degrees Celsius per decade. (You can see for yourself here.)

“That enormous El Niño is right at the beginning of their time period, and that tends to make the trends less than they would be if you picked the other year,” says Mears.

When asked whether it’s fair to only consider 18 years of the satellite record, Christy noted that the “real world” produced a relative dearth of warming in the satellite record over the past 18 years, and Cruz is simply describing that. “The data is telling you that that’s the period of time that doesn’t have significant warming,” he said. He added, though, that “I like to start in 1979, in the beginning.”

How El Niño years reverberate in the troposphere

When announcing the 2015 temperature record, NOAA noted that 2015 was only the third warmest year on record for the lower troposphere, according to both the University of Alabama in Huntsville’s data and that produced by RSS. The middle troposphere — two to six miles into the atmosphere — was either the third or fourth warmest in 2015, depending on whether you cite the University of Alabama-Huntsville dataset or RSS, the agency said.

The warmest year for the troposphere in both records remains 1998 — the second year of a very hot 97-98 El Niño event. And that, say scientists, is because El Niño years produce particularly pronounced spikes in atmospheric temperatures — with a time lag.

“In the atmosphere, higher up, the response to events is different than at the surface,” said Thomas Karl, head of NOAA’s National Centers for Environmental Information, which announced the 2015 temperature record along with NASA. “In the upper parts of the atmosphere there’s a delayed response to any warming due to El Niño, it’s usually the subsequent year that it
becomes much more sensitive, usually it responds about 50 percent greater than the surface.” For this reason, Karl says 2016 could show a very warm or record year for the satellite record — and Mears agrees.

So, for that matter, does Christy. “I wouldn’t be surprised if 2016 would be the hottest in the satellite record,” he said.

The strong warming of the troposphere during El Niños, Santer said, is a key reason why it’s misleading to start a trend analysis with a year like 1998.

“It’s impermissible to cherry pick,” he said. “You can’t do that. You need to look at all 18 year periods of record....and you get a very different opinion and perception of the reality of warming.”

Where we live

Surveying all of this, it’s clear that if you wanted to find an argument to raise doubt about global warming, then the claim that satellites show little or no warming in the past 18 years is not a bad choice.

Nonetheless, the rebuttal that this constitutes cherry picking — first, choosing a favored dataset, and then on top of that, choosing a favorable time interval too — is hard to counter. It simply isn’t a full presentation of the evidence.

There’s also a question of relevance. True, satellites have a more universal view of the Earth than do ground-based readings, which are only taken in specific locations and can be very limited in some areas, like the Arctic or Antarctic. Yet the temperature at the surface is what we most care about.

“We don’t live up in the middle of the troposphere. The only time we’re up there, we’re in a sealed container called an airplane,” said Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist at Texas Tech University.

The surface record is also far longer — dating back to 1880 — and as of the end of 2015 shows a full 1 degree Celsius of warming over pre-industrial temperatures, according to NASA and NOAA. That’s halfway toward the 2 degree marker that the world agreed, in the recent Paris climate accord, to avoid. It is a major planetary change.

Finally, it’s worth noting that the idea that one has to either trust the satellite data, or trust the surface data, is a false choice. From a scientific perspective, one should survey all of the data, not just temperature records from Earth’s surface or from space but also data on the warming of the deep oceans (which has quickened of late), on the dramatic loss of Arctic sea ice, on the shrinking of land-based glaciers and the stark melting of Greenland, on the clear rising of the seas, and so on.

All of these are indicators of changes in planetary temperature. And it is surveying the totality of all of this evidence that makes many scientists support the consensus view on climate change, even if the satellite record may still hold mysteries that need explaining.
Alabama’s State Climatologist debunks claims that 2015 was the ‘hottest year on record’

By: Cliff Sims

Alabama’s State Climatologist finds himself in a familiar position this week: at odds with global warming alarmists, many of whom are now claiming 2015 was the hottest year on record.

“2015 Was Hottest Year in Historical Record, Scientists Say,” read last week’s headline atop the New York Times.

“The whole system is warming up, relentlessly,” warned Gerald A. Meehl, a scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

“At some point, you would think most climate change deniers would throw in the towel,” added Peter Hannam, Environment Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald.

Dr. John Christy is a climate scientist at the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) and has been Alabama’s State Climatologist since 2000.

He agrees with his colleagues that the climate is always changing, but believes their alarmist rhetoric — and even some of their research — is misguided at best, and perhaps even deliberately misleading.

The temperature data cited by most global warming alarmists comes from surface-level measurements, which are notoriously inaccurate.

A 2009 study of the surface-level reading stations found many of them “located next to the exhaust fans of air conditioning units, surrounded by asphalt parking lots and roads, on blistering-hot rooftops, and near sidewalks and buildings that absorb and radiate heat.” Sixty-eight stations were found to be “located at wastewater treatment plants, where the process of waste digestion causes temperatures to be higher than in surrounding areas.”

Dr. Christy notes that there are more accurate ways to measure temperature data, but they are often ignored by climate scientists because they do not affirm their predetermined outcomes.

“The deep atmospheric temperature — a much better metric for monitoring climate — as measured by satellite sensors was the 3rd warmest year since 1979,” he said of 2015. “If no mention is made of what the bulk of the atmosphere is doing, then these folks are withholding important information.”

Dr. Christy laid out his approach to climate science during testimony before the U.S. Senate.

“I build data sets from scratch to answer questions about climate variability and to test assertions people make about climate change,” he said. “That’s really what the scientific method is all about.”

It is that commitment to starting “from scratch” that has made him a particularly bothersome thorn in the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) side in recent years.

See next page
While Christy does not deny that the Earth’s climate is changing, he vehemently rejects the assumptions at the core of the EPA’s growing list of environmental regulations.

In recent comments submitted to the agency, Christy pointed out that “the (climate change) models do not yet have the ability to discern ‘why’ a climate variation may have occurred simply because they cannot even reproduce ‘what’ has occurred.”

This is summed up in the chart below, which Christy submitted to the EPA along with his comments. The black line in the middle of the chart is the average temperature increase that all of the global warming models projected over the last several decades. The green circles and blue squares at the bottom are the climate variations that actually occurred.

“We should have little confidence that the future will play out as the models suggest,” Christy said of the global warming projections frequently cited by the Obama Administration and in the media. “The EPA cannot conclude it knows ‘why’ the climate system changes and thus cannot assert it will control ‘what’ the climate will do.”

In its Clean Power Plan, the EPA is pushing for a 750 million metric ton reduction in CO2 emissions, which it seeks to achieve in large part through regulations on existing power plants, especially coal-fired plants.

A study released by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce earlier this year predicts the environmental mandates in the plan will cost the United States more than 220,000 jobs over the next several years.

According to the study, the proposed regulations will have a disproportionate impact on southern states, where energy costs would jump by $6.6 billion per year over the next decade-and-a-half. The “East-South-Central” region of Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee and Kentucky would see its GDP shrink by an estimated $2.2 billion and would lose 21,400 jobs as a result of the plan.
Local trio part of groundbreaking UAH team

By: Steve Irvine

For the next few months, winning lacrosse games is the priority for a trio of local products playing for the University of Alabama at Huntsville. Along the way, they also get a chance to be part of a special team.

UAH is the first university in Alabama to play college lacrosse at the Division I or Division II level. The Chargers are competing in Division II, and the program’s first roster includes Spain Park High products Conner Tinney and Colton Nall and Oak Mountain High graduate Jack Bishop. They are part of a young roster that includes 21 freshmen, two sophomores and a junior. Nall and Bishop are freshmen, and Tinney is a sophomore transfer from Mount Union University, a Division III participant in Ohio.

The first game for the program is Feb. 13 at Sewanee.

Connor McGowan, who was part of a startup program at Transylvania University as assistant coach and also served two terms as an assistant coach at Birmingham-Southern College, was hired to serve as the Chargers’ first lacrosse head coach. He chose to build a foundation with the young roster.

“They knew coming in that there would be a lot of ups and downs going through it, a bit of a roller coaster,” McGowan said. “At the same time, coming in and starting in a program is not something you can ever do again. You could score 100 goals or win 100 games or whatever it may be, but you can never be part of a first year program again. For these guys to commit to us and come here and be here to build something is something they’ll never be able to change. When we look back 50 years from now, these guys are going to be on that first picture of that first roster ever. I couldn’t be more proud of these guys and excited going into the season with them.”

McGowan largely built his roster with players from the Southeast, with seven players from either the Birmingham metro area or Huntsville as home. While lacrosse is not yet a varsity sport in Alabama, the youth and high school programs in those areas are the strongest in the state. Spain Park and Hoover have traditionally fielded the strongest Division I high school teams in the state.

“The biggest thing was getting the word out in Birmingham and Huntsville, where lacrosse is kind of the hotbeds in the state, and moving out from there,” McGowan said. “That was very helpful, having been at BSC before, and kind of knowing the lay of the land, especially in Birmingham, knowing about Spain Park, Oak Mountain, Hoover, those types of schools that have been successful as of late here in the state.”

Nall, a 5-foot-11 long stick midfielder, who helped Spain Park win the Division I state title last spring, said the addition of lacrosse at UAH was “perfect timing.”

See next page
“I started getting recruited really late,” said Nall, who began playing lacrosse in the seventh grade. “The timing was a blessing, especially at this school, because they have engineering, which I intend to major in. It was a really good thing for me.”

Bishop, a 5-foot-11 attackman, almost came to UAH directly out of high school. Tinney, a 6-foot-1 defenseman, chose to begin his college career at Mount Union but jumped at the opportunity to come back closer to home.

“The distance definitely affected me, just being so far away from home,” Tinney said. “Like the old saying, there is no place like home and it’s just amazing to be back. I liked Mount Union but I missed my family and the people around me.”

The only other varsity college lacrosse options in the state are Birmingham-Southern and Huntington College, which both are non-scholarship Division III programs. Many schools in the state, including Alabama and Auburn, field club programs. As a Division II program, UAH can give up to 10.8 scholarships in men’s lacrosse and 9.9 scholarships in a women’s lacrosse program that also begins this season. McGowan hasn’t set any recruiting boundaries — his first roster includes players from Nebraska, New York, Maryland, Nevada and California — but players from this area will certainly get a look.

“The biggest thing that stands out is the athleticism of the guys in Alabama,” McGowan said. “They match up with anybody in the country athletically. As the sport grows, there are starting to be more coaches. That’s the biggest piece is guys playing at the next level and then coming back and giving back to the community. As that happens, you just see guys getting better and better.”

Nall and Tinney each said they’ve seen improvement in skill level and numbers in the Birmingham metro area since they first picked up a lacrosse stick.

“It’s definitely increased,” Nall said. “I know from playing travel ball, we got a little bit better each year. This state got better and there was always a lot more competition each year.”
Alabama teachers could get pay hike

The Associated Press

DOTHAN — Alabama Sen. Del Marsh says the legislature is considering a raise for education employees with a performance-based model for teachers.

Marsh said the amount of the raise has yet to be determined, but there is an emerging consensus that education employees should receive a raise, the Dothan Eagle reported.

The last time Alabama teachers got a raise was in 2013, the same year their contributions to retirement increased.

“Cost of living is inching up,” Dothan City School Superintendent Chuck Ledbetter said. “Our teachers are going backward by staying in the same place.”

Educator salaries are a cause for concern among education advocates in Alabama, who reason that stagnant pay will be a turn-off to people seeking a career in education.

The average pay for a teacher in Alabama is $48,720, while the national average is $56,610. The starting salary for teachers in Alabama is $36,867.

Single educators contribute $15 per month for health insurance, while the family rate is $177 per month and the family plus spouse rate is $202 per month.

Teachers receive step increases about every three years, until they reach their 27th year of service.

Melissa Bailey, a teacher at Highlands Elementary School, said she believes a lack of wage growth will deter people from pursuing a career in education.

“It’s hard for me to encourage people to go into education considering the amount it costs to go to college,” she said. “You don’t do it for the money, but not receiving a raise makes you feel unappreciated.”

For every one percent educator salaries are increased, it costs the state between $35 million to $40 million. Salary increases don’t just cost the state money. Many systems hire more teachers than their allotted state funding by using local tax revenues to fund the positions.

When educators get a raise, these teachers get one too and the money must be found to fund these salary increases.
Linebacker Jake Ganus had hopes of playing in the Reese's Senior Bowl someday. He just thought he'd do it wearing a UAB helmet, not the headgear of Georgia.

Ganus' football journey has taken him from quarterback at Chelsea High School to four-year starter on defense at two colleges to the edge of the NFL as an inside linebacker in Mobile this week.

"It's been wild," Ganus said this week. "It's been up and down, but I've enjoyed every minute of it, and I'm just really excited to be here. I just want to take advantage of this opportunity."

Ganus earned a spot on the Class 5A All-State team in 2011 in the "athlete" slot as a two-way standout for the Chelsea Hornets. He was a starter in his freshman season at UAB and led the Blazers in tackles in 2013 and 2014.

But when the UAB football program was shuttered, Ganus was a linebacker without a team. He landed in the SEC at Georgia and led his new team in tackles, too, with 102 — 28 more than any other Bulldog.

Ganus still found his way to the Senior Bowl, but sometimes wonders what-if about a senior season at UAB.

"I think about it," Ganus said. "It's hard to say with how everything worked out, but I'm glad it did work out the way it did with Georgia. I'm happy to be where I'm at."

As a quarterback at Chelsea, Ganus passed for 1,058 yards and ran for 1,491 his senior season after throwing for 1,673 yards and running for 1,055 as a junior.

"I learned a lot about the value of hard work," Ganus said about his days as a Hornet. "You can't replace it; you can't beat it. If you decide you're going to do something, if you work hard enough, you can make it happen. That's kind of what has carried me through my whole college career."

Now Ganus is working hard during Senior Bowl week trying to impress NFL personnel evaluators in Mobile.

"Someone saw something in me and let me come here and compete against some of the best players in the country, so I'm excited," Ganus said. "It's something I've wanted for a long time. I was really hoping for it. It's a great opportunity to get in front of these scouts and show them what they can do. ...

Just show them that I can play at this level, that I deserve a chance and do everything I can to move up some draft boards and make a team fall in love."

The South's linebacker corps for Saturday's game reads like an SEC all-star roster. Six of the other eight linebackers also played in the league — Alabama's Reggie Ragland, Florida's Antonio Morrison, Georgia's Jordan Jenkins, Kentucky's Josh Forrest, LSU's Deion Jones and Missouri's Kentrell Brothers.

The other two South linebackers are Oklahoma's Eric Striker and Virginia Tech's Dadi Nicolas.

"We've got a really, really good group of guys," Ganus said. "A lot of us played against each other, so it's just cool to talk about that.

Georgia linebacker Jake Ganus led the Bulldogs in tackles this past season with 102.

Brett Davis / Associated Press
UAB

Clark staying put

UAB head coach Bill Clark's name has been tied to the vacancy at Southern Miss, but he won't be going to Hattiesburg.

Sources confirmed to AL.com that Southern Miss expressed interest in Clark not long after Golden Eagles head coach Todd Monken left to take the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' offensive coordinator title.

But he won't be taking the position, which came open just days before National Signing Day as Clark and his staff have set out to recruit top talent geared toward its 2017 return to the gridiron.

"I am 100 percent staying at UAB to do what we set out to do," Clark told AL.com.

Clark led UAB to a 6-6 record in 2014 after the Blazers were just 2-10 under Garrick McGee in 2013. He then stayed with the program after president Ray Watts originally shut it down in December 2014 and brought it back last June.

UAB has signed several quality players and will host double-digit recruits on official visits this weekend.

FootballScoop.com had listed Clark's name as still remaining in the process with Florida offensive coordinator Doug Nussmeier and Alcorn State head coach Jay Hopson.

Clark has a $600,000 buyout on his contract through Jan. 1, 2017.
Blazers' run ends

UAB had the nation's longest current win streak for five days, but it was snapped Thursday night in a 69-62 loss at Western Kentucky.

"For about the first 12-14 minutes of the game, we weren't physical, we weren't in tune," UAB head coach Jerod Haase said on the postgame radio interview. "We had one of our best weeks of practice leading up to it and it did not carry over to the game. We were a step slow in everything we did for the first 12 minutes."

UAB dropped to 17-4, 7-1 in Conference USA, losing the 14-game win streak as the Blazers rallied to make a WKU late first-half 14-point lead competitive in the second half, but never led. With SMU's loss at Temple on Sunday, UAB then took over nationally for the longest win streak, but that ended on Thursday.

"I thought we had some really good looks and some really good opportunities," Haase said. "One thing we've done is take advantage of those opportunities, but we certainly didn't do that tonight."

UAB dropped into a first-place tie with Marshall, which beat Middle Tennessee 82-66 on Thursday to improve to 11-10, 7-1. UAB is at Marshall on Saturday at 11 a.m. CT in a game televised by CBS Sports Network.

William Lee led UAB with 20 points and seven rebounds, but fouled out along with starting center Tosin Mehinti. UAB was called for 22 fouls and WKU, which improved to 9-1 at home this year, was whistled for 12 fouls. UAB shot 7-of-8 from the free throw line, WKU 14-of-25.

Robert Brown scored 11 points and Nick Norton 10 for the Blazers. Aaron Cosby, a former guard at Illinois and Seton Hall, led four WKU double-digit scorers with 20 points.
Obasohan leading by example

After part-time starting last year, Crimson Tide senior the heartbeat of team

Matt Zenitz mzenitz@al.com

Avery Johnson was at Retin Obasohan’s church as a guest on Sunday.

Once the service ended, the Alabama basketball coach was approached and greeted by people wanting to share their love of Obasohan, the Tide’s senior guard.

“People were just coming up to me after the service just telling me that he’s really a great example of leadership, and he is,” the first-year coach said.

“Every day in practice, he works hard on his game before and after practice. He’s a model citizen. Great community guy. Smart. Articulate. I don’t know where we’d be without him.”

Obasohan has become Alabama’s clear leader, a consistent producer and the unquestioned heartbeat of an 11-8 Tide team that has exceeded expectations after being picked to finish second-to-last in the SEC.

Since an eight-point night when the Tide was forced to use overtime to beat in-state foe Jacksonville State, Obasohan has scored in double figures all but once. Oddly enough, the one game Obasohan did reach double figures has been Alabama’s biggest win to date.

Alabama (11-8 overall, 2-5 SEC) blew out then-undefeated South Carolina 73-50 on Jan. 13 at Coleman Coliseum. Alabama finishes the home-and-home Saturday with a 5 p.m. tip scheduled at Colonial Life Arena.

South Carolina, then ranked 15th, has since fallen out of the Top 25, losing 10 days later — again on the road — to Tennessee, 78-69.

A reason, South Carolina coach Frank Martin told The State. “Our point guard play has been completely out-played,” South Carolina coach Frank Martin told The State. “I’m talking about (Marcus) Stroman, (P.J.) Dozier and Sindarius (Thornwell). We’ve been out-played at the point guard spot for three games in a row. That has to change.”

Thornwell, the team’s second-leading scorer, has shot just 2-for-23 in the past two games for the GAmecocks (18-2, 5-2) and was nearly held scoreless against the Vols. He had only two points in the loss to Alabama, as well.

Alabama won that previous meeting on a career night by sophomore Riley Norris as he knocked down eight 3-pointers and lead all scorers with 27 points.

Norris’ play was largely why Obasohan could afford have his rare, single-digit night.

A part-time starter last year that averaged just 6.2 points per game, Obasohan is averaging a team-high 15.2 points per game this season.

He has scored 20 points or more in six of Alabama’s past eight games, including a career-high 27 during the Tide’s 83-77 loss to Auburn last week.

“He’s a really great example of leadership,” Johnson said, “and I’m really proud of his maturation and development in that area.”
Renovation of Sewell-Thomas Stadium nearly complete

By: Ben Jones

It's hard for University of Alabama athletics director Bill Battle and baseball coach Mitch Gaspard to pick their favorite part of the rebuilt Sewell-Thomas Stadium.

But it's not for lack of options. There's premium seating behind home plate and a dozen new luxury boxes for fans. There's a 7,500-square foot indoor training facility with batting cages that players have already been able to use. There are better sight lines, wider concourses, a new locker room and more.

"I like everything right now," Gaspard said. "When you go through the locker room, the lounge, the meeting room, the club levels for our fans, it's hard to pick out what's going to be the best facility. I'm sure if you ask a student, they're going to say the right-field area. We feel like that's what's most important to us: We didn't miss one area. Every area is top scale and everything is nice."

There's a lot to like at the new "Joe."

That's the final product of a $42 million renovation at the stadium that will finish in time for the Crimson Tide's season opener on Feb. 19 against Maryland.

"What we wanted it to be was a stadium that our players could enjoy, our fans could enjoy, and certainly that prospects and recruits would be impressed with," Battle said. "So we tried to put features in that would accommodate all of those and I think our people have done a great job of doing that so far."

Plans for the stadium included major overhauls and construction, but also countless details to improve the facility. Seats down the first- and third-base lines are angled slightly toward home plate to help fans keep their eye on the action. New entry gates in the outfield make for better access to the stadium from the parking lot. Fans beyond right field are within shouting distance of the visitors' bullpen.

The architecture melds with its surroundings on campus, including Coleman Coliseum and Bryant-Denny Stadium. The team has a separate room to aerate cleats to avoid lingering smells in the clubhouse, and catchers will have wider lockers to store their extra gear. Signage throughout the stadium pays tribute to great players and teams in Alabama history. Alcohol will also be available for sale in areas with premium seating, as it is in Bryant-Denny Stadium.

The updates have already made an impression on players and recruits.

"It's going to make an immediate impact, there's no question," Gaspard said. "But the future of the program, that's a part that we've already seen how much of an impact just from a recruiting
standpoint what it's going to do for us down the road. I think now, when you mention Alabama baseball throughout the country, just the facility itself, we're not taking a back seat to anybody. That's in postseason play, regional, super regionals, recruiting, all those things that are very important to your program. We're going to be at the top of that list now throughout the country."

Fans can also get a peek at the new stadium this weekend during three open scrimmages at the stadium that start. Friday's practice begins at 2 p.m., Saturday's at 10:30 a.m. and Sunday's at noon.

"We want to have the best product on the field, but we also want it to be a show," Gaspard said. "We want people to want to come out to the ballpark for the ballpark itself, but also to enjoy the game as well."
Mercer added to Tide's schedule for 2017

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

The University of Alabama put the finishing touches on its 2017 football schedule when it was announced it will host Mercer, which joins Florida State, Fresno State and Colorado State to fill the nonconference portion of the Crimson Tide's schedule.

Mercer announced the two-game series Friday. UA will also host the Bears in 2021.

Alabama opens the season and the new Georgia Dome with a date against Florida State on Sept. 2. UA follows with home dates against Fresno State on Sept. 9 and Colorado State on Sept. 16. Alabama usually hosts an out-of-conference game the week before its annual tilt against Auburn, meaning the game with Mercer would likely fall on Nov. 18.

Besides its annual games with SEC Western Division foes, Alabama hosts Tennessee in 2017 and travels to Vanderbilt.

Mercer plays in the Southern Conference in the Football Championship Subdivision of the NCAA. The school broke the news of its two-game series with UA.

"We are excited to add one of the elite college football programs to our schedule in 2017 and 2021," Mercer coach Bobby Lamb said in a news release "This will be a great opportunity to test ourselves against a championship program in one of the most storied gameday environments in the country."

-Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
U.S. Colleges Get Record Donations

**Huge gifts to Stanford, Harvard and other wealthy universities help propel total to more than $40 billion, up 7.6% from previous year**

By: Melissa Korn

U.S. colleges and universities raised a record $40.31 billion last year, buoyed by megagifts to Stanford University, Harvard University and other wealthy institutions.

The 7.6% increase in charitable donations was fueled by more gifts from individuals, rather than from foundations, and benefited from soaring valuations of gifts of art, according to an annual survey set to be released Wednesday by the nonprofit Council for Aid to Education.

Stanford led the pack with a record $1.63 billion raised in its fiscal year ended Aug. 31, followed by Harvard, which brought in $1.05 billion in its fiscal year ended June 30. Stanford's haul included the donation of a major post-World War II art collection, valued at more than $600 million and announced in 2011.

The new money pouring into higher education continues to be concentrated at just a handful of schools, further stretching a gap between institutions that can afford to offer free tuition for upper-middle-class students, such as Stanford, and those struggling to make payroll and considering mergers or even closure.

The top 10 fundraising recipients accounted for 18% of gifts in the latest year, or $7.27 billion, up from 17.5% the preceding year and 16.1% a decade earlier, said Ann E. Kaplan, who directs the survey.

The richest schools are encouraging an arms race among donors as they seek funds to build sprawling health-care and academic complexes or to launch interdisciplinary programs. Successful alumni donors are eager to preserve their legacies by backing institutes that take on pressing challenges like global poverty and climate change.

The survey didn't address whether the donors were based in the U.S. or abroad.

Eight gifts of $100 million or more were recorded in the latest year. Valued at a combined $1.44 billion, the donations went to four schools. There were five such nine-figure gifts the prior year, totaling $698.6 million.

Schools continue to welcome much smaller donations, too. Stanford said it received contributions from nearly 83,000 people; the majority of donations it got last year were less than $1,000, and nearly half of all donors gave $100 or less.

"We spend a lot of time talking about how all gifts matter, about the power of collective giving," said Martin Shell, vice president for development at Stanford. "That $50 gift, when combined with other $50 gifts, can make a fundamental difference." He said such gifts can cover

See next page
scholarships or faculty research grants, and noted that some million-dollar donors start with more modest donations.

Ms. Kaplan predicted that charitable support for U.S. higher education would increase again this year, but at a more moderate pace.

“It’s going to be tempered,” she said, citing weak stock-market performance at the end of the calendar year, a popular time for donations, and poor results so far in 2016, which will affect the value of any securities donated. “Even if people make the gifts they were planning to make, they will be worth less,” she said.
Despite Cuts, More Pension Woes

Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin prepares another state pension overhaul

By: Timothy W. Martin

Kentucky’s new governor is preparing a fresh overhaul of the state’s pension plans, a sign of greater pain coming in states that already implemented rounds of cutbacks after the financial crisis.

Three years after trimming benefits to head off a looming funding gap, the Bluegrass State has less than half of the money it needs to fund future obligations for about 345,000 public employees and retirees. One of its plans has just 17.7%, making it the worst-funded U.S. pension of the past 15 years. Standard & Poor’s Ratings Services cut the state’s bond rating to the nation’s third-lowest in September, citing mounting retirement liabilities.

Kentucky represents a painful reality across the U.S. as public retirement plans try to close a $1 trillion funding gap made worse by the recent downswing in the markets. States that pushed through benefit cuts after 2008 financial crisis are planning a second wave of reductions for public employees after the initial moves failed to alleviate funding woes.

In Pennsylvania, state officials are considering an increase in worker contributions and placing some employees into a 401(k)-style plan, just several years after cuts to cost-of-living-adjustment increases to retirees and higher retirement ages didn’t soothe matters. In Oregon, a key component of its 2013 pension overhaul was struck down by state courts, meaning lawmakers must again find another path to saving billions.

Kentucky Republican Matt Bevin won the race for governor in November after signaling he wanted to reshape the state pension systems again. During a Tuesday budget speech in Frankfort, Ky., he proposed a special fund to pay down pension debt.

The governor in a separate interview said he wants to complete an audit of the state’s pension plans by summer and then propose deeper pension cuts by early 2017. He said he believes new hires should be placed onto 401(k)-style accounts instead of defined-benefit pension plans that offer guaranteed payouts.

“We have to deal with reality,” Mr. Bevin said. “Everything is on the table, absolutely.”

Pensions across the U.S. ran into problems because benefits were sweetened in fat times, investments soured or lawmakers skirted requisite payments. Kentucky suffered from all three.

Some of the state’s current woes can be traced to 1996, when lawmakers buoyed by years of double-digit returns agreed to give retirees an annual cost-of-living increase. Two years later, some state workers were offered a 10% boost to benefits if they retired early, lowering the annual payroll but inflating long-term costs.

See next page
But lawmakers didn’t provide an additional way to fund that benefit boost, such as increasing annual worker or employer contributions or levying new taxes. Instead they banked on robust investment profits.

Then, Kentucky lawmakers tightened the flow of money into the state’s pension plans starting in 2004. The most severe underfunding occurred with the public-employees plan, where lawmakers withheld more than $2.5 billion in contributions over the past decade.

A decline in the state’s coal industry plus a slowdown in certain manufacturing jobs motivated lawmakers to redirect funds elsewhere, said Jason Bailey, executive director of the nonprofit Kentucky Center for Economic Policy.

Over the next nine years, the situation worsened for the public-employees’ plan. Lawmakers never once made a full payment. In 2008, they paid just 22 cents for every $1 the public-employees’ plan should have received. Teachers and county-worker pension plans, the other two large funds, also received less.

The state’s investment choices widened the funding gap as officials moved aggressively into nontraditional assets such as private equity and hedge funds around the mid-2000s and deemphasized stocks and bonds. They missed out on big years in the public markets following the 2008 crisis and returns have trailed pension-industry benchmarks.

The Kentucky Retirement System’s five pension plans have a 10-year annualized return of 6.05% through June 30, 2015. The median return for public pensions was 6.6%, according to Callan Associates.

The 2013 changes championed by then-Gov. Steve Beshear, a Democrat, included permanently halting pension rises for retirees and cycling some public workers onto a “cash-balance” plan that provides a retirement benefit more tied to financial markets.

But the gap between the state’s pension assets and liabilities only became larger. It rose to $30 billion in 2015, up $4 billion from 2012.

“The goal is just to not run out of money,” said David Peden, a 39-year-old lifelong Kentuckian who manages investments for five of the state’s eight pension plans. “Since I’ve gotten here, it basically went from being a bad situation to a dire one.”

Mr. Peden oversees $11.5 billion in assets and the retirements of about 230,000 public workers and retirees. His biggest headache is managing the public-employees plan, which covers corrections officers, bridge engineers and other state workers. In 2001, its assets covered more than 120% of what it owed to retirees. Now, they cover just 17.7%.

The state doesn’t have a lot of time. Based on a report from its investments consultant, the public-employees’ plan has a 50/50 shot over the next two decades of hitting such financial distress that it would be forced to shift much of its portfolio to cash.
"I just know every time the market is doing what it’s doing now, that’s probably taking a year off of the cushion,” Mr. Peden said.

Write to Timothy W. Martin at timothy.martin@wsj.com
Florida State settles lawsuit with Jameis Winston accuser Erica Kinsman for $950,000

By: Creg Stephenson

Florida State has agreed to pay $950,000 to settle a federal civil lawsuit with Erica Kinsman, the former FSU student who accused star quarterback Jameis Winston of rape in 2012.

According to USA Today, the school also agreed to "make a five-year commitment to awareness, prevention and training programs." The settlement is the largest ever for a lawsuit filed under Title IX, the federal statute that holds schools accountable for failing to fully investigate accusations of sexual assault.

Kinsman, who left Florida State in 2013, chose to identify herself in a 2014 CNN documentary detailing the Winston case. She released the following statement to USA Today:

"I will always be disappointed that I had to leave the school I dreamed of attending since I was little. I am happy that FSU has committed to continue making changes in order to ensure a safer environment for all students."

Winston, a former Hueytown High School star, won the Heisman Trophy and a national championship at Florida State in 2013 before being drafted No. 1 overall by the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers this past spring. He recently completed a successful rookie season with the Buccaneers.

Florida officials declined to charge Winston in the Kinsman case, and he was later cleared of misconduct charges in a university disciplinary hearing. The accusation was made in December 2012, but did not become public until nearly a year later, when Florida State was in the midst of an undefeated season.

Kinsman had accused Florida State officials of being "deliberately indifferent" to her claims and that the school stalled the investigation in order to allow Winston to continue playing football. However, FSU did not admit to any liability in settling the lawsuit.