JANUARY 22, 2016

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STATE SPENDING PLAN

Bentley not seeking tax increases

By Kim Chandler
The Associated Press


Bentley said Thursday that he is not proposing tax increases in the spending plan he will present to lawmakers next month. The governor said he wants to see what lawmakers propose as they begin another legislative session with a grim budget outlook.

“They know what they need to do. I’m going to let them do that,” Bentley said.

Budget chairmen said Thursday that they see little enthusiasm for tax increases, which will likely mean cuts for many state agencies.

“We have to deal with Medicaid first. That is going to be the first big obstacle. Then we’ve got to deal with prisons,” said House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Steve Clouse, R-Ozark. “I think basically everybody else is going to be taking cuts.”

Clouse said he could not predict the depth of those cuts. Lawmakers will hear official budget projections when the session begins Feb. 2.

Bentley last year proposed $541 million in new taxes to avoid deep cuts to state agencies, setting off a budget battle that involved two special sessions and a veto. Lawmakers eventually approved a 25-cent per pack cigarette tax, a transfer of $80 million education funds and other measures, but far less than Bentley had proposed.

Clouse said he thought lawmakers had done all they were willing to do on tax increases.

Legislators spent the week in budget hearings, listening to funding requests from agencies expected to far exceed available money in the general fund. The Alabama Medicaid Agency is seeking an additional $156 million to maintain services.

Alabama Law Enforcement Agency Secretary Spencer Collier told lawmakers that the agency needed an additional

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$23.5 million to maintain services. Collier, a former legislator and state trooper, said he was frustrated that legislators would proclaim themselves pro law enforcement while cutting law enforcement’s budget.

“Public safety used to be a priority. You just don’t see that anymore,” Collier said.

Outgoing Senate general fund budget chairman Arthur Orr said the state is looking at another “train wreck” in the general fund and agency heads need to be aware of that when they make their funding requests.

Incoming budget chairman Sen. Trip Pittman, R-Montrose, said lawmakers will have to “cobble together a very difficult budget.”

“As that starts to sink in, we’ll see if people are willing or want to look at some other options. Right now, that with the mood of the country—you see what’s going on in the national elections—people are pretty much frustrated and not necessarily sensitive to spending more or paying more taxes,” Pittman said.

Two GOP lawmakers have proposed a state lottery as a way to generate additional money for the state. However, that money would not be available until 2017 at the soonest.

Sen. Vivian Davis Figures, D-Mobile, said Republicans were showing a lack of leadership. Alabama collects the lowest amount of taxes per resident of any state, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Figures last year proposed a referendum on a 5 mill property tax increase—about $50 for a $100,000 home—to fund Medicaid. The bill did not get out of committee.

Sen. Linda Coleman, D-Birmingham, proposed a “combined reporting” bill that would make it difficult for multistate businesses to avoid corporate income taxes by shifting profits to other states. That bill also failed.
Powerball frenzy could boost odds of a state lottery

A meme was circulating online and in social media Thursday, with the Powerball logo and six circles holding words instead of numbers: “You must go back to work.”

Three ticket holders — in California, Florida and Tennessee — might be channeling the late Johnny Paycheck (“Take This Job and Shove It”) at the moment after winning a share of a record $1.6 billion jackpot. There were seven $2 million winners and 23 $1 million winners.

The final sales total for this drawing isn’t in yet, but stood at 371 million tickets as of Wednesday, according to the Multi-State Lottery Association, which administers Powerball.

Ticket sales for the previous drawing lifted $440 million, and an estimated 1.325 billion tickets had been sold since Nov. 7, when someone last won the Powerball jackpot.

Those numbers and the furor caused by having a jackpot with nine zeros caught the nation’s attention and pushed more conventionally serious issues into the background.

Did it come at an opportune time for legislators bent on bringing Alabama into the lottery ranks?

Two Republicans, Sen. Jim McClendon of Springville and Rep. Alan Harper of Northport, last week introduced a bill that simply would authorize a lottery in the state, with the details of how it would be operated and where the proceeds would go to be filled in later.

House Minority Leader Craig Ford, D-Gadsden, pre-filed a bill he’s introduced before to create a college scholarships for Alabama students. Voters would have to approve either measure to make a lottery happen they failed to do so in a referendum 17 years ago.

McClendon said his constituents constantly tell him they want to see a lottery in Alabama. Streams of Alabamians crossed state borders into Florida, Georgia and Tennessee to take a shot at the big jackpot.

The fact that there were jackpot winners in two of those adjoining states (there also were $2 million winners in Florida and Tennessee, and $1 million winners in Florida and Georgia) surely has gotten people’s attention.

That’s unlikely to sway those in the Legislature who, for moral reasons, vow to block any attempt to launch a lottery or casino gambling in the state. They likely aren’t alone, regardless of how many lottery supporters are vocally buttonholing legislators. It was completely unscientific, but we recently ran an online poll that found nearly 2-to-1 opposition to a lottery.

Our position has been consistent. A lottery won’t solve Alabama’s financial problems.

Morality aside, we share concerns about people who lack discretionary income and financial acuity tossing money away when the chance of being eaten by a shark at a given moment is more likely than winning.

We still think the voters should make this call, for better or worse. Legislators need to quit worrying about what they might say and put this issue before them one more time.
The eight companies to make first pitches are:

- Alternavist, based in Birmingham, is a secure cloud based software to capture patient requests for care without a doctor’s office visit and creates an efficient solution of communication and information capture.
- BSRD LLC, based in Huntsville, works to design, build, test, and sell advanced aerospace propulsion solutions based on the enabling technology of the turbo rocket engine.
- Care Package, based in Birmingham, is a grocery delivery service for Tuscaloosa, with University of Alabama students as a target market, in which customers use an app for services.
- Concur Messaging, based in Birmingham, provides a set of components that complement a backend service to provide real-time chat to applications with fast setup.
- Flood-Con, based in Birmingham, offers an automated control structure that replicates the natural runoff during all real storm events.
- Tech to Table, based in Mobile, develops applications to improve restaurant operations and guests’ dining experiences.
- White’s Environmental Solutions, based in Anniston, takes organic wastes and transforms them into a solution for farmers and landscapers.
- XpertDox, LLC, based in Birmingham, is an online doctor finder tool personalized for patients’ diseases based on doctors’ clinical skill, educational and leadership roles and research.

"The year and the path ahead for our program are more exciting and even bigger than that was imagined when our program first launched back in 2006," Launchpad Programs Director Greg Sheek. “We look forward to continuing our important work with the next round of the competition to help high growth companies start, stay and grow in the state to create jobs."
Secrets of the Alabama 529 college funding plan

It's been a while since I've written a column espousing the advantages of using a college 529 plan to help fund a college education. Recently I had a reader contest where I asked readers to submit their best money-saving ideas to jump-start 2016. One reader, Linda W., focused on this topic and it was full of great tips:

Years ago when our children were young, we wanted to open up a college 529 account for them. Alabama was so involved with its prepaid tuition plan that its 529 was lacking in growth. It was more beneficial for us to invest in an out-of-state plan and lose the tax benefits offered to those who invest in an Alabama 529. But we learned some tricks and this has helped us withdraw some of those funds.

Each year we roll $10,000 over into a College Counts 529 plan here in Alabama. That does two things:

- It allows us to take the maximum contribution off our Alabama taxes for married couples, saving us about $500. And it allows all the gains on our out-of-state deposits to now be tax-free in Alabama — we're one of the few states to tax gains made in an out-of-state 529 account upon withdrawal of funds — because they will be withdrawn for use from an Alabama-sponsored fund.

Yes, the funds are managed better, now, in Alabama, and we could let those funds sit in the account, but we usually roll over the funds and withdraw them in less than 30 days to pay college bills. The whole process to move the funds from out-of-state to in-state 529, to the university (via a charge card with cash back for charging tuition and their grace period for making payments) takes 30 days or less. But the savings are near $1,000.

And we always pay $4,000 in college costs out-of-pocket, and not with our 529 funds, to snag the $2,500 cash given to us by the American Opportunities Credit (not a deduction, which results in less in your pocket). See federal tax instructions for eligible students, expenses and terms. In these high tuition and fees time, it helps to maximize one's college savings and these tips might help others who have set up college funds out of state. We started early enough to be able to pull money out gradually for two kids, thus being able to only have to move $10,000 a year. But even rolling over more, if one needs it, and thus going over Alabama's annual deduction limit, you still receive the benefit of tax-free withdrawals to pay qualified college expenses.

And if you have no savings for college at all, still open up an Alabama College Counts 529 as you can send your child's tuition payment there, let it sit for a day, then pull it out and pay the university, or in most cases, your charge bill where you charged their tuition. This will count as a contribution to the 529 account and allow you to take the Alabama tax deduction. Just read up on the process of depositing and withdrawing so there are no surprises.

So there — my tips for saving a lot with little effort.

Of course, one should consult their tax advisor to confirm the benefits based on their individual status. But these have worked for me and the friends I have helped with their taxes.

My comments: The $10,000 State of Alabama income tax deduction that Linda refers to is based on a married couple filing jointly. For single filers, the deduction is $5,000. Also, when doing a rollover from a 529 plan, be aware that you are allowed only one rollover every 12 months.
Legislators hope to avert budget 'train wreck'

Mike Casey mcasey@al.com

Key state agencies told Alabama legislators late last week that they need increases from the General Fund totaling more than $225 million to maintain services next year.

It’s not clear yet how closely the supply of General Fund dollars will match the demand.

Official revenue estimates will be announced when the legislative session starts Feb. 2.

What is clear is that there won’t be a push for tax increases as there was last year, and no one is expecting a surge in revenues that would meet all needs.

Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, predicted a budget “train wreck.” Orr has chaired the Senate General Fund committee for five years.

“IT’s a complete divorce from reality, because the money, unless we want to start the printing presses down in the basement of the Capitol, it ain’t there,” Orr said about the agency requests for funding.

Orr is moving to the education budget committee when the session begins, swapping seats with Sen. Trip Pittman, R-Montrose, who is taking over as General Fund chairman.

“Right now, I think the best scenario is level funding,” Pittman said.

The Alabama Medicaid Agency told lawmakers it needed a $157 million increase to maintain services and to continue a transition to managed care that’s been in the works for several years.

Lawmakers asked state agencies for a “continuation” budget, the amount needed from the General Fund to avoid cuts in services.

Besides Medicaid, by far the largest General Fund spender, the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency said it would need $23 million more this year. The Department of Human Resources said it would need $30 million more than this year, and the Department of Corrections said it needed $18 million more.

The Department of Mental Health said it would need $7 million more, and the state court system said it would need $2 million more.

For years, the state has relied on money from other sources, such as the state’s oil and gas trust fund, to keep the General Fund afloat.

Then last year, Gov. Robert Bentley called for an end to that practice, asking initially for $541 million in tax increases.

In the end, after two special sessions, legislators raised the cigarette tax and moved a share of use tax revenue from education to the General Fund.

“They passed a budget that cut General Fund spending by 4.5 percent,” Rep. Steve Clouse, R-Ozark, who chairs the House Ways and Means General Fund Committee, said he doesn’t expect any serious tax increase proposals or any more transfers of education money to the General Fund.

“Just speaking from a House standpoint, there’s going to be zero appetite to raise any additional money,” Clouse said.

Clouse said the changes made last year should produce about $66 million in recurring revenue for the General Fund, a little less than a 10 percent increase in the $1.8 billion fund.

Clouse said those changes, while far short of what Bentley sought as a long-term solution, should be enough to delay a “train wreck.”

“I think you’re going to see the train just start slowing down gradually over the next couple of years to the point where we may be at that point again of a train wreck in the next few years,” Clouse said.

Last year, the Senate was more resistant to the tax increase proposals than the House. Pittman said there is no support among Republicans for tax increases this year. He said he was “adamantly opposed” to moving any more education dollars to the General Fund.

Pittman said government will have to be more efficient if it is going to provide the same level of services.

“People expect government to lean itself out,” Pittman said.

Pittman said he plans to move the General Fund budget early in the session. He said he hopes to move it out of committee in about three weeks and out of the Senate in about four weeks.

The session can last up to 15 weeks.
AEA hits pause on political contributions

By: Brian Lyman

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 Wednesday.

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 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.

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 clean 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.

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The campaign finance report also shows payroll deduction revenue to the PAC falling from about $2.4 million in 2014 to $2.2 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.

"That's something we've done in the past, and something we'll do with or without the NEA," she said.

The AEA's PAC did give $78,000 in "charitable contributions" in January and February of last year, shortly before Mabry left. The contributions listed included $25,000 to Gov. Robert Bentley's campaign on Feb. 11. AEA officials Wednesday were not aware of the transaction. The governor's campaign reported the donation in a major contribution report on Feb. 27, listing it as a PAC contribution. Rebekah Mason, a spokeswoman for the governor, said it was used to retire campaign debt.

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.

The group’s 990 form, expected no later than February, should give a fuller picture of AEA’s financial status.
Constitutional amendment would prohibit gun bans at Alabama colleges

By: Mike Cason

A state representative from Etowah County says public places are safer when there are armed, law-abiding citizens around, and that includes college campuses.

Rep. Mack Butler, R-Rainbow City, is proposing a constitutional amendment that would allow people with concealed carry pistol permits to carry on state college campuses.

Butler said mass shooters tend to choose targets where guns are banned, like the killer who left 32 people dead at Virginia Tech in 2007.

"Very possibly a concealed carry first responder could have changed the outcome" of some mass murders, Butler said.

Alabama's four-year universities generally prohibit people from carrying firearms on their campuses, with limited exceptions, such as for law enforcement.

Some have written policies that allow employees to have firearms secured in their vehicles.

Athens State University grants waivers to faculty, staff and students who have concealed carry permits to allow them to have guns in their vehicles while on campus.

The Alabama Community College System prohibits firearms at two-year colleges and technical colleges. Exceptions are for law enforcement officers who are on duty, enrolled in classes or teaching a firearms class.

Butler's bill applies to private colleges, as well as public, but includes a section that says private colleges can adopt policies to prohibit guns.

The minimum age to apply for a pistol permit in Alabama is 18.

The legality of guns on college campuses is the subject of debate in many states.

Eight states authorize concealed carry on college campuses, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

They are Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Oregon, Texas, Utah and Wisconsin. The Texas legislature passed a bill last year, and many other states have considered similar legislation, the NCSL reports.

Butler said he made his bill a proposed constitutional amendment so that voters would have a direct say.

"Instead of the politicians making the decision, let the people weigh in on this," Butler said. "It is a sensitive issue."

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Butler said he universities have contacted him about his bill, mostly just seeking information.

"I haven't had anybody screaming and hollering about it," he said.

Seven other House members have signed on as co-sponsors. Butler expects significant opposition, though.

"I think this is not a slam-dunk in the Legislature," he said. "I think it's going to be a fight."

Constitutional amendments require approval of three-fifths of the members of the House and Senate to be put on the ballot for voters.

The legislative session begins Feb. 2.
Stillman alumnus encourages students to be exceptional

By: Ed Enoch

Quoting the Langston Hughes poem “Mother to Son,” Stillman alumnus Edward Jenkins Sr. encouraged student gathered for the private college’s spring convocation to persevere and dare to be exceptional.

“You can’t be complacent while traveling this journey. You must always work hard and go beyond what is expected of you,” the 1948 graduate said.

Jenkins gave the spring address at Stillman on Thursday. Jenkins, a resident of Tuscaloosa, served a variety of roles during a 40-year career with the U.S. Corp of Engineers as well as roles with the Stillman Community Credit Union and Miles College. He was also the owner of Jenkins Photography.

“Mr. Jenkins is the most optimistic and energetic 86-year-old man you will ever meet,” Stillman President Peter Millet said in his introduction.

Jenkins was also a volunteer with other alumni and community members for the first phase of residence hall restoration initiative in Hay and John Knox halls.

Jenkins recounted a poor upbringing that saw him work to earn money to buy his own school clothes and a career after college with the Corps of Engineers that included roles as a laborer, official photographer and managerial positions. The experience also included the unpleasant realities of the Jim Crow South.

“I was serving as the official photographer. I would be sent home because of my color of my skin,” Jenkins said, recalling times when segregation prevented him from entering buildings to do his job.

Jenkins punctuated his personal journey with a line from the Hughes’ poem about perseverance in the face of adversity. “Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.”

“During my 86 years on earth, life has had its challenges. Life has not been a crystal stair,” Jenkins said.

It is important to strive to be exceptional despite adversity, Jenkins told the students, because they never know who might notice their efforts.

“You will never know who is watching you, who is waiting for someone just like you to bring on board,” Jenkins said.
LEND A HAND

Light Up the Night sale honors community’s cancer victims

Special to The Tuscaloosa News

The DCH Foundation has joined the 11th annual University of Alabama’s Power of Pink events with the Light Up the Night luminaria sale.

The event will take place on Feb. 5, as the Crimson Tide gymnastics team takes on Kentucky, according to Casey Johnson, director of development of the DCH Foundation.

The walkways leading up to Coleman Coliseum will also be lit by pink luminarias during the gymnastics meet, which is scheduled to begin at 7:30 p.m.

Fans attending the meet are encouraged to “think pink and wear pink” to help raise awareness in the fight against breast cancer.

The event will be part of the University of Alabama’s “Pink” weekend with women’s gymnastics and women’s basketball both honoring the cause.

“Helping us light the path to Coleman Coliseum with the purchase of a luminary is a wonderful way to honor or remember a loved one with cancer,” Johnson said. “And, in return, it helps others because this purchase benefits The DCH Breast Cancer Fund.”

Each luminaria is $10, and may include a special message for the honoree.

The DCH Breast Cancer Fund began in 2004 with the help of former University of Alabama gymnastics coach Sarah Patterson, who encountered many women who could not afford mammograms, further testing if needed and additional needs should they be diagnosed with breast cancer.

Since that time, over $1.6 million has been raised to assist the needs of uninsured and underinsured women in West Alabama.

Those who are interested in purchasing a luminaria should visit the DCH Foundation’s website at www.thedchfoundation.org or call 205-759-7349.
Helping at-risk pre-schoolers

Tide’s success helps schools

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama’s success on the football field reaped benefits beyond the Capstone and its legion of crimson-clad fans.

Thanks to friendly wagers between Tuscaloosa Mayor Walter Maddox and the mayors of three cities across the nation, the Tuscaloosa Pre-K Initiative has $250 more to work with this year.

Maddox said he was approached each time by the mayors of East Lansing, Mich.; Clemson, S.C.; and Auburn to

Teacher Roranda Fields reacts to plastic bugs that students show her Friday in their pre-K class at Northington Elementary School in Tuscaloosa. From left are Fields, Jeffrey Smith, Kameron Hinton and Kedaysia Cunningham.

STAFF PHOTOS / GARY COSBY JR.
wager primarily pride but also a monetary donation on the outcome of their universities’ respective games against the Crimson Tide.

Each time, Alabama emerged victorious. And with it, Tuscaloosa escaped having to fly a Michigan State University flag atop City Hall or see its mayor in the tie of another school.

It also amounted to donations of $100 from Auburn Mayor Bill Ham Jr. and Clemson Mayor J.C. Cook as well as $50 from East Lansing Mayor Mark Meadows.

Maddox described the Tuscaloosa Pre-K Initiative as one of his six core beliefs “because of its transformational impact on 4-year-old children who are academically at-risk.”

“Our program has been predicated on expanding and enhancing the Tuscaloosa City Schools program which has had sustained success,” he said.

This effort to bolster pre-k, which receives minimum state funding, has been supported not only by the City Council and Board of Education, but also by the University of Alabama, United Way and others.

“We have provided over 1,000 children the ability to be reading on grade level by the time they enter first grade,” Maddox said, noting that last year’s restructuring of the city and county sales tax allocation and the city school board’s new demographic and curriculum plan “will provide for universal pre-k for academically at-risk students in the years to come.

“It is exciting and a dream come true.”

The Tuscaloosa Pre-K Initiative relies a number of revenue sources ranging from school district funds to grants. For example, 13 classrooms receive either full or partial funding from First Class Pre-K Grants for a total of $938,000 alone.

“Since the Alabama State Department of Education does not fund pre-k instruction, it is the responsibility of the local school system to pay for these classrooms,” said Cheryl K. Fondren, school improvement and pre-kindergarten coordinator for the city school system.

“The district chooses to use Title I funds for pre-k classrooms as an intervention program for students who are potentially ‘at-risk’ for school success.”

And for the past nine years, Maddox has hosted the Tuscaloosa Mayor’s Cup, a 5-kilometer race that has served as a fundraiser for the program.

Since its inception, the Mayor’s Cup has raised more than $140,000 for pre-k programs.

Although the Tuscaloosa City Schools have
been offering pre-kindergarten classes since 1993, the effort got a boost after the Tuscaloosa City Council passed a resolution in December 2005 to form a pre-kindergarten task force. The group examined available preschool programs in the system for at-risk students and related resources.

In 2006, the system served between 210 and 252 pre-kindergarten students in 14 classrooms at four schools within the system.

Now, a record 391 students are enrolled in 24 pre-k classrooms spread throughout 10 schools across the district.

"We were able to expand by two new classrooms this year with grant funding," Fondren said. "This allowed us to serve 36 more children than last year."

Students are considered academically at risk if they score below the 50th percentile in either the language or concepts portion of the Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning, or DIAL-4, a test children take before the beginning of the school year.

All applicants are assessed under this program, save for those diagnosed with disabilities and those who are learners of the English language.

"The TCS pre-kindergarten program offers high-quality, developmentally appropriate instruction to our youngest learners," Fondren said. "Pre-kindergarten provides our students with a strong educational foundation that will yield a lifetime of positive results."

—Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

Events focus on value of freedom, unfinished work

Tuscaloosa will honor civil rights leader today

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

As the community gathers to mark Martin Luther King Jr.’s legacy today, pastors at two local events plan to offer meditations on the cost and value of freedom and the work that remain unfinished despite a half century of progress.

Online
See more photos from Sunday’s Realizing the Dream concert at www.tuscaloosanews.com.

The Rev. Tyshawn Gardner, pastor of Plum Grove Missionary Baptist Church, is scheduled to speak at the Unity Day Breakfast at Beulah Missionary Baptist Church at 7

See MLK Day, A8

Unity day events

Unity March: 11:30 a.m. The march will begin at the Malone-Hood Plaza outside Foster Auditorium on the University of Alabama campus and will proceed to the Tuscaloosa City Hall.

Mass Rally: 6 p.m. at First African Baptist Church, 2621 Stillman Blvd. The speaker will be Reverend Schmitt Moore of Bethel Baptist Church.
a.m. today. The Unity Day march will begin at 11:30 a.m. at Foster Auditorium on the University of Alabama campus and proceed to Tuscaloosa City Hall.

The annual mass rally will begin at 6 p.m. today at First African Baptist Church, 2621 Stillman Blvd. and T.Y. Rogers Ave. The speaker will be the Rev. Schmitt Moore, pastor of Bethel Missionary Baptist Church.

Gardner’s message will focus on the price of the freedoms and rights that King and others championed and the importance of honoring their legacy by valuing those rights.

“My message on Monday morning will be the cost and value of freedom,” Gardner said. “There are those who paid a hefty cost, but when we look at diminishing voting rights, violence in our cities, educational inequity – that is not a value on freedom.”

Gardner argues it is both an individual and community responsibility to honor that legacy.

“No prejudice, regardless of race, regardless of religious affiliation, regardless of sexual preference, we are all made in the image of God for that reason we should respect life,” Gardner said.

Noting racial tensions, questions about disparity in the nation’s criminal justice system and gun violence, Gardner said King’s legacy remains timely today.

“I think this is probably the best time to capitalize on the essence of and spirit of this day because of so much is going on the world as we speak,” Gardner said.

With the 30th anniversary of the holiday, Gardner, 44, argued it is important for those old enough to remember the advent of the holiday to ensure the spirit and significance of King’s legacy endures for younger generations.

The pastor hopes the parade and rallies planned for the day will be more than mere celebrations.

“We wanted this march to be more than a parade,” Gardner said. “Parades call attention to people and direct nonviolent action call attention to issues. That is sort of what we are doing to recapture the spirit of this day. In that way, we will education and re-educate those who have grown a little bit lackadaisical and passive during this day.”

The Unity Day and rally are part of the annual series of Realizing the Dream events celebrating King’s legacy. The series of events is jointly sponsored by the Tuscaloosa Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Shelton State Community College, Stillman College and UA. This year’s theme is “Realizing the Dream Through the Inherent Worth and Dignity of Every Person.”

In the past, the march started at Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School, but the SCLC decided to change the starting location to support students at UA, who rallied in the fall in support of more diversity and inclusion on campus. There will be a 30-minute rally at Foster Auditorium before the march, said Gardner, the president of the local chapter.

“We would like a people of every ethnicity and race to participate in all of the events because we don’t want this to be a Black holiday event,” Gardner said. “We want this to be to reflect the beloved community or our quest to obtain and achieve that beloved community that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Moore’s message for the holiday is inspired by the biblical books of Joshua, chapter 13.

“God tells Joshua in spite of all the progress you have made, the work is not done yet. That will be the basis for my argument that, in spite of all the progress we have made, there is still much work to be done,” Moore said.

Moore’s message will focus on the need to strengthen, first and foremost, families as a foundation for upward mobility. Moore, a member of the Tuscaloosa County Board of Education, also argues community ties need to be strengthened as well as the educational system.

“The work is not done in those areas,” he said.

Moore believes the holiday must do more than celebrate the past of King’s work. People must embrace the civil rights leader’s vision as they look ahead.

“I would be encouraging us to accelerate our push to make his dream become a reality,” Moore said. “Many of our people have not realized the value of that dream. There are many doors open for us, but so many of us are not prepared to go into those doors.”
Hundreds gather in Tuscaloosa for annual march

By Ed Enoch | Staff Writer

Speakers during the annual Unity Day march in Tuscaloosa challenged a crowd of hundreds who trekked from the University of Alabama to City Hall to embrace the spirit of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy beyond the celebrations of the national holiday set aside for him each January.

Speaking on the steps of City Hall, Tyshawn Gardner, president of the Tuscaloosa chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, reflected on the energy of the crowd, bundled against the cold, that participated Monday.

"This is a beautiful picture today," he said. "But can we count on each other tomorrow?"

Gardner was among local religious and city leaders, students, and educators who addressed the gathering. The march led by the SCLC drew supporters of causes including

Citizens listen to speakers at Tuscaloosa City Hall following the Unity Day March from the University of Alabama campus in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Tuscaloosa, Ala. on Monday.

See DREAM, A5
increasing the minimum wage, civil rights, education equality and immigrant rights.

The march fell between a Unity Day breakfast and a mass rally Monday evening. The events are part of the annual series of Realizing the Dream events celebrating King’s legacy. The series is jointly sponsored by the Tuscaloosa Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Shelton State Community College, Stillman College and UA.

The crowd marched west down University Boulevard from Foster Auditorium -- the site of the successful integration of the university in 1963 -- to Tuscaloosa City Hall. As the marchers drew in sight of City Hall, a recording of King’s “I Have Been to the Mountaintop” speech played from speakers at the public building.

“Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And he’s allowed me to go up to the mountain, and I’ve looked over, and I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land,” King said in the recording.

The speakers told the group that work remained to achieve King’s dream as they discussed the minimum wage, disparity in the quality of education, and violence and poverty in the black community.

UA Student Government Association President Elliot Spillers reflected on the fight for integration at UA and challenged the crowd gathered at Foster Auditorium before the march to consider what they were doing to help realize the dream and take advantage of the opportunities made possible by the sacrifices of King and others.

“We have to fight for our education, we have to fight for what we want to see in our communities,” Spillers said.

The campus saw rallies in the fall semester by students calling for the creation of chief diversity officer position and well as more inclusion on campus. A chief diversity officer and new diversity plan were added to the agenda for a strategic plan council that is currently working on a new five-year plan for the university.

The SCLC moved the start location this year to allow for a rally at UA ahead of the march.

Freshmen Taylor Williams and Italia Echols attended to honor King’s legacy and “what he did for us.” The two were also inspired by calls for justice following the string of shooting deaths in recent years of young black men during encounters with police that have led to protests nationwide.

Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox welcomed the marchers to City Hall, encouraging them to not only take their causes to the seat of local government but to Montgomery as well.

“Never in our state’s history have we faced more issues than we face now,” Maddox said.

As examples, Maddox noted overcrowding in state prisons and inadequate funding for education and mental health services.

“Don’t stop in Tuscaloosa,” Maddox said: “Those in Montgomery need to be held accountable just like the people in Tuscaloosa.”

Jim Price, with the $10.10 Minimum Wage Coalition, recalled King was assassinated in Memphis while supporting the rights of sanitation workers. Price evoked King’s last days as he called on the city to increase the minimum wage to $10.10 an hour.

Central High School Principal Clarence Sutton Jr. encouraged the crowd to be active participants in an ongoing movement rather than marchers for a day.

“What are you prepared to do?” Sutton asked. “We are in the most urgent time of our nation.”

Sutton noted low business ownership among blacks, high unemployment, poverty and other challenges facing the community.

“Are you willing to make the same sacrifices that Dr. King showed us to address these issues facing us?” Sutton said.
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Panel to discuss aspects of aging

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama’s School of Social Work will host the Allan V. Kaufman Phi Alpha Symposium, a community panel to discuss aspects of aging adults, on Jan. 20 at Little Hall.

The symposium will cover topics on caregiving for older adults as well as legal and protective services, is named after Dr. Allan V. Kaufman, a professor emeritus at the university's School of Social Work whose research interests included caregiving of older adults.

Kaufman, who'll be honored at the symposium, retired in 2009 as a full professor and now lives in Northport.

The symposium is free

SEE AGING, B2
and open to the public. It will begin at 2 p.m. in room 223 of Little Hall.

Matthew Talley, a two-time UA graduate, is an attorney at Nolan Stewart in Birmingham and will be one of the three panelists at the symposium. Talley formerly worked as a coordinator of mental health services in a hospital and will discuss the legal aspects of care for the elderly, such as having a power of attorney document.

Other panelists include Ginger Roberts McGaughy, a social worker for the Department of Human Resources, who'll discuss issues associated with adult protective services, and Elizabeth Espy of Crimson Village, who'll focus on assisted living and long-term care.

Phi Alpha also will distribute fact sheets at the symposium that include information about caring for aging adults and Continuing Education Units will be provided.
Greatest coach ever is still The Bear

In the current debate about who is the greatest coach of all time — Coach Paul Bryant or Coach Nick Saban — I think one important point is perhaps being overlooked. With due respect to Coaches Frank Thomas and Wallace Wade, Bryant built the tradition and an Alabama "brand" that has benefited every coach who followed him.

If we are debating team accomplishments and records, a strong case can be made that Saban's results have surpassed Bryant's — a truly amazing feat. However, if you are talking about who is/was the superior coach, I give the edge to Bryant.

Building, enhancing and then sustaining this tradition was vital to what Alabama would become in the minds of college football fans around the country. Absent this tradition, I doubt Saban would have been able to accomplish what he has. Indeed, it's probably one of the main reasons he came to Alabama in the first place — he knew tradition still counted and, because of its existence, that he could win big in Tuscaloosa.

Saban is obviously a great coach, but it should be acknowledged that his greatness has moved to an entirely different level while at Alabama. His records at Michigan State, the Miami Dolphins and even LSU do not really hint at "all-time great."

History shows that simply coaching at Alabama elevates a coach's resume. Every coach since Bryant had his best seasons while at Alabama and carded mediocre or worse records once leaving.

Mike DuBose won an SEC championship at Alabama and later went winless at Northview High School. Mike Shula won 10 games and got to No. 2 in the country. Bill Curry shared an SEC title. Ray Perkins had losing records at the NY Giants and Tampa Bay Buccaneers, but had Alabama as a Top 10, competitive team before he departed. Dennis Franchione won 10 games his last year at UA, left for Texas A&M and flopped.

Gene Stallings, who had losing records at Texas A&M and the Phoenix Cardinals, won a national title at Alabama and led one of the best 5-year runs in program history.

Something (fan passion, high expectations, extreme 365-day interest, etc.) in the air in Tuscaloosa is different, and that makes nondescript coaches winners if only temporarily. It also makes very good coaches like Saban likely icons.

It can be argued that the legacy of Coach Bryant — 25 years after his death — helped ensure Nick Saban would and could become a legend.

Finally, we need to look at what Bryant did as a coach at his other stops. Bryant's record at Kentucky — a basketball school — is amazing. No coach before or since has done with the Kentucky football program what he did. In four years he built Texas A&M into conference champs and a national title contender. If he had stayed at Texas A&M, it almost certainly would have become the dynasty Alabama became.

I have no doubt that if a 55-year-old Bryant came to an Alabama with the same tradition he created, his teams would have won at the same clip Saban's have. I do not know, however, that if a 55-year-old Saban had taken over Alabama's program in 1958 (after the Tide had won four games in the past three years) that Alabama would be a bowl team in two years, Top 10 team in three years, and national champs in four years.

Bum Phillips probably said it best about Bryant — "He could take his'n and beat yours'n. And take yours'n and beat his'n."

Nick Saban is clearly the best of his era. But I think Bryant — at four schools over 35 years — was the best coach ever.

Another way to say all of the above: If Saban had coached the past nine years at any other program I doubt he would have won four national titles and seriously competed for two more. I don't think so.

It's the combination of "the process" and the "tradition" Bryant built that has made Alabama a dynasty again.

Rice is the former managing editor of The Montgomery Independent and is editor of the Alabama Gazettte's annual "Reflections" history publication. Rice's late father, Bill Rice Sr., was a 3-year letter winner and member of Coach Bryant's 1961 national title team.
House delegation shouts 'Roll Tide!'

Howard Koplowitz  hkoplowitz@al.com

Alabama's congressional delegation shouted "Roll Tide!" on the floor of the House of Representatives on Tuesday to celebrate the Crimson Tide's 16th national championship Monday night against the Clemson Tigers. The title is the fourth in seven years under head coach Nick Saban.

"From the Heisman Trophy winner, [Derrick] Henry, the quarterback, Jake Coker, and the tremendous 95-yard run of Kenyan Drake, all of the players on the 2016 team deserve our applause and congratulations," said U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell, D-Birmingham, who represents Tuscaloosa in the House. She was joined by Reps. Mike Rogers, R-Saks; Martha Roby, R-Montgomery; Mo Brooks, R-Huntsville; and Robert Aderholt, R-Haleyville.

The victory against Clemson didn't just bring a championship to Alabama. It will also bring embarrassment to South Carolina Rep. Jeff Duncan, who now has to provide Sewell with South Carolina barbecue as part of a friendly wager between the House colleagues. Duncan will also have to sport a Bear Bryant-style houndstooth hat and an Alabama necktie while posing for a photo.

"I know that Congressman Duncan will look great ... on the Capitol steps," Sewell said. "Now bring on that South Carolina barbecue."
University of Alabama predicts state economy will grow slowly in 2016

By: Brad Harper

MONTGOMERY — Don’t expect 2016 to be the year that Alabama suddenly rebounds to the heady job and salary levels of a decade ago.

It’s been a slow, steady climb back for the state since the recession hit, and some of the region’s leading economists said there’s more of the same ahead. In fact, progress may be even slower this year.

The University of Alabama’s Center for Business and Economic Research is predicting a slightly lower rate of growth for the state’s economy in 2016 - partly because of economic concerns in China and the effect it could have on manufacturing here.

The state’s economic forecast was discussed Thursday at the center’s annual conference in Montgomery.

“China is now the second-largest trading partner for Alabama,” said Ahmad Ijaz, executive director of the center. “Any impact on the Chinese economy does have some impact on the state, particularly in manufacturing.”

China’s pullback is also expected to have an impact on the national economy.

But Atlanta Fed Director of Research David Altig said that’s not likely to be as much of a barrier to overall U.S. growth as some people seem to think. Even a dramatic 2 percent drop to China’s growth rate would cause less than a .5 percent ripple in America, he said.

“It would be felt, but you wouldn’t be using words like ‘recession,’” Altig said.

He said fear over what might happen in China is having “an outsized influence” on the economy right now, and compared it to the business community’s reaction to the 2011 debt crisis.

“It’s clearly about uncertainty and the fact that we don’t quite know,” Altig said.

A longer-term problem could be the types of jobs that are being created lately, especially in Alabama.

The state has added about 136,000 jobs in the past five years, Ijaz said. But a big chunk of those were temporary or part-time workers.

About 24 percent of all workers in Alabama are underemployed, according to CBER data. Those workers want full-time jobs or career tracks that utilize their skills but have to settle for something less.

It’s even worse in the Montgomery area, where about 28 percent of all workers are underemployed.

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Auto manufacturing has helped boost the recovery, but it’s only the No. 3 growth sector statewide over past five years.

Business and professional services lead the way, with gains propped up by temp jobs, Ijaz said. The second-most jobs added during Alabama’s recovery have come in restaurants and bars.

That’s a trend that has stunted economic growth.

“It’s a very low value-added sector, so income doesn’t grow that much,” Ijaz said.
As College Football’s Popularity Expands, So Does Its Champions’ Jewelry

By: Marc Tracy

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — After Alabama’s athletic director suggested last month that if college athletes were paid, many would spend the money on “tattoos and rims,” he clarified the statement as a “frivolous” reference to a recent scandal at another university. “We hope to educate our student-athletes,” he said, “that those are not wise investments.”

But should Alabama defeat Clemson in the college football national championship game on Monday night, it is the university itself that will shell out for ostentatious hunks of jewelry.

College football is, in some ways, bigger than it has ever been: more exposure, more money, even larger players. Its national championship rings, which, in recent years, have grown almost comically large, are among the flashiest (though not necessarily the most valuable) symbols of that status.

Greg McElroy, a television analyst who was the Crimson Tide’s starting quarterback during their 2009 national title season, said there was a simple reason he rarely wears his championship ring: “It’s uncomfortable.”

It is not only Alabama that has experienced ring inflation. Super Bowl rings have grown substantially since 2000. Ditto for World Series rings.

“The very, very general trend,” according to Tom Shieber, a senior curator at the National Baseball Hall of Fame, “is they’re getting bigger and bigger.”

Southern California’s national championship rings grew markedly in size from the John McKay era to Pete Carroll’s more recent teams. Ohio State’s N.C.A.A. championship ring from the 2014 season — one of three presented to each player on that team — makes the one from the Buckeyes’ 1968 season look child-size.

Chris Poitras, a vice president at the ring maker Jostens, said the trend began about a decade ago. It started at the professional level, he said, and has funneled down into the college ranks and, now, to high schools.

“They were smaller in stature,” Poitras said of early rings, “whereas now, the school wants their brand. They want to tell the entire story of that season through logos, through scores on the side of the ring, through unique sayings.”

Alabama’s championship rings provide particularly telling points of comparison because there are so many of them. The university claims 15 football national championships — many neutral rankers would set the figure a little lower — including at least one each in the 1920s, the ’30s, ’40s, ’60s, ’70s and ’90s, the 2000s and the 2010s.

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Before the 1950s and ’60s, the most distinctive college football awards included watches and blankets from bowl games. The first ring Alabama bought for its players, coaches and staff at the time of a championship was after the 1961 season. That was the Tide’s first title under Bear Bryant and the first for the program, even by its own accounting, in 20 years.

Mary Harmon Hilburn has her Alabama championship rings in the form of lavaliers — pendants that are what you would get if you sliced off the meaty face of the ring like popping off the top of a muffin. They are the real thing, though, a perk Hilburn enjoys partly from being the oldest granddaughter of Bryant, the legendary coach who presided over six Crimson Tide national championships in the 1960s and ’70s.

The lavaliere for the 1965 title team — the spoils of a 9-1-1 season that included a victory over Nebraska in the Orange Bowl — is on a bracelet that also contains various charms given out for bowl games. But when Hilburn wears the ones commemorating Alabama’s three most recent national titles — from the 2009, 2011 and 2012 seasons — they hang at the bottom of a necklace, separated more out of necessity than sentimentality.

“They would dominate all the bowl charms,” she said.

Which is a polite way of saying that the rings of recent vintage are a little too big for a bracelet. Or, for that matter, a finger.

The six Bryant rings all look roughly alike: gold, with a diamond set in the middle and the year on top.

In size, Alabama’s 1992 ring — the one owned by Clemson Coach Dabo Swinney, who was a senior wide receiver on that team — more closely resembles the 1961 ring than the one from 2009. But it also represents a design shift, probably prompted by Coach Gene Stallings’s previous time in the N.F.L. There are more words, and there is a logo on the face — albeit a block “A” that looks nothing like the more familiar script “A” for which the Crimson Tide are known.

By contrast, the three most recent rings — all won during the Bowl Championship Series, all under Coach Nick Saban — are about the size of table tennis balls. Their bodies contain words (like “champions”) and other information (typically the score of the championship game), and faces studded with shiny stones and the script “A.”

They look like a million bucks. But they are not worth anything approaching that.

The N.C.A.A. caps national championship awards bought by the school at $415. (Bowls may spend up to $550 on player gifts, which was why every Alabama and Michigan State player participating in last week’s Cotton Bowl received an Apple Watch, an Amazon TV media player and the traditional commemorative watch.)

“That’s our challenge,” said Poitras, whose company made Alabama’s 2009 and 2011 rings as well as its ring last season for winning the Southeastern Conference title. (The value of that ring

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could not exceed $315, also per N.C.A.A. rules. Crimson Tide players can also expect another ring if they win the College Football Playoff.)

The goal, Poitras said, is “that when you pick that ring up, you say, ‘Wow, this is a spectacular ring that looks like it’s worth thousands and thousands of dollars.’”

For example, Alabama’s 2009 national championship ring uses a nonprecious metal alloy for the golden body, a synthetic garnet for the crimson backdrop and cubic zirconia to simulate a diamond-studded face. By contrast, rings for professional franchises typically use the real thing.

But, of course, the rings’ value ultimately derives from something else. Unlike most jewelry, a championship ring has a purpose that is not primarily aesthetic. Alabama linebacker Reggie Ragland, a senior, said last week that his mother did not let him take his 2012 ring out of a safe-deposit box. But he also seemed almost to disown the championship ring, saying, “I wouldn’t call it that; I didn’t get to play that much.”

Of his ring, McElroy said, “I’d rather have it in my dresser at home, safe and sound, or my safe, as opposed to having it on my hand.”

He added, “That doesn’t mean I’m any less proud of it.”
UA history professor remembered

Constitution scholar challenged popular histories

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

"Friends and former colleagues remembered University of Alabama history professor emeritus Forrest McDonald as a giant in his field, an internationally-known scholar whose passion in the classroom also made him a favorite on campus. "He was a giant. I think that is the best word to summarize it," said George Rable, the Charles Summerson Chair in Southern History at UA.

McDonald, a distinguished university research professor emeritus of history, died Tuesday at Hospice of West Alabama. He was 89.

Arrangements are being handled privately by Tuscaloosa Memorial Chapel. The award-winning historian, known for his scholarship on the Constitution and early republic, taught at UA from 1976 until he retired in 2002. He authored 20 books and more than 100 articles. As a constitutional historian, McDonald was called to testify before Congress.

"He absolutely amazed me when he came in here in the '70s," said Howard Jones, a university research professor emeritus and former chair of the history department. "He was an absolute ball of energy in everything he did."

McDonald, who was named the 16th Jefferson Lecturer by the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1987, was a meticulous researcher, skilled writer and engaging teacher.

"Most academic historians, to be blunt about it, weren't very good writers. Some are good

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researchers, some are good analysts, some are good writers — Forrest was good at all three," Rable said.

He was a scholar who resisted the computer age, composing longhand on yellow legal pads with the aid of his wife, Ellen, who typed and edited his work on a typewriter.

McDonald came to prominence with his work challenging prevailing interpretations on the early American republic, the Constitution and the American presidency, according to a 2004 university profile.

"Forrest had an innate knowledge for turning the normal kind of accepted wisdom of any historical period or person was turning it upside down and looking at it with a different lens," said Larry Clayton, a history professor emeritus at UA.

McDonald challenged the popular histories of Frederick Jackson Turner and Charles Beard. Jones noted his rebuttal of Beard in his 1958 book "We the People."

"He completely reversed the whole look at the Constitution with his first book," Jones said. "He just undermined the standard interpretation."

McDonald's skewering of sacred cows wasn't mere contrarianism, according to Rable.

"It was not simply based on swimming against the times," he said. "It was based on enormous research, especially his early works (which) were prodigiously researched."

"Forrest may have been a very creative interpreter of history, but he did it on the basis of solid sound scholarship," Layton said.

It was McDonald's provocative and interesting ideas paired with his writing style that first drew Rable's attention as a graduate student.

"He always had interesting things to say about big questions. He didn't shy away from big questions, which is what giants in the field do," Rable said. "It was the sorts of things, particularly as a graduate student, I was attracted to because it was so readable, so interesting and so filled with provocative ideas."

After Rable came to UA in 1998, he said one of his first conversations with McDonald was about his joy at reading the senior scholar's work as a student.

For Jones, among his friend's many amazing traits, was his passion in the classroom. Jones recalled chatting with McDonald in his friend's office before class one day. A few minutes before the class was to begin, McDonald scribbled a few notes on an index card to serve as his lecture notes.

"It was just as clean as could be ... and smooth as he could be. He had the students in rapt attention; he was funny but he was also sharp," Jones said of the lecture he observed. "He was a senior scholar and a distinguished scholar who taught freshman." Rable remembered McDonald as a scholar who enjoyed debating other historians. Though McDonald, who was also known for his conservatism, might disagree with fellow historians and faculty members, he was always congenial, according to his colleagues.

"He could rub people (the wrong way), there is no question," Jones said. "But you couldn't say a word about his scholarship, his teaching and his collegiality."

For McDonald, there was a joy in the study of history.

"I don't think he ever tired of it," Rable said.

For McDonald, the fun of his work was the pursuit to discover the truth.

"You've got to go back to why you do it," McDonald said in a 2002 Tuscaloosa News article at the time of his retirement. "You do it because it is fun. Learning about the past is fun."

"Now, writing history is not fun. You write because you owe the people who came before you. There's an obligation. I can't repay my teachers. They're all dead. This is how I do it."

On Wednesday as Jones reflected about the loss of his friend and his current book project, he talked of his own sense of obligation to his friend's memory. McDonald was a colleague and close friend who offered encouragement, read his materials and provided notes, Jones said. McDonald is one of a handful of colleagues and mentors whose passion for their work and encouragement obliges him to return to work and research when he grows weary.

"I can honestly say he is one of the reasons I stay into it," Jones said.
The celebration will be held Saturday beginning at 11 a.m., with the football team recognized on the north steps of Bryant-Denny Stadium at the Walk of Champions.

The parade kicks off the event, starting at Denny Chimes and concluding at the Walk of Champions.

The university is making concessions available at 8:30 a.m. along the route of the parade with “food, hot beverages and hand warmers” for sale.

Dress warmly as weather.com forecasts the high for Saturday at 42 degrees with a low of 23.

The CFP National Championship Trophy, as well as the American Football Coaches Association trophy (the crystal ball) will be available for fans to take their photo with beginning at 8:30 that morning. Giveaways include 10,000 championship posters and 5,000 promotional items for sponsors.

The celebration will also be televised live on the SEC Network alternate channel or on SEC Network + on WatchESPN. It will also be carried live on the Crimson Tide Sports Radio Network from 11 a.m. to noon.

—Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-0722-0229.
Forrest McDonald, Historian Who Punctured Liberal Notions, Dies at 89

By: Sam Roberts

Forrest McDonald, a presidential and constitutional scholar who challenged liberal shibboleths about early American history and lionized the founding fathers as uniquely intellectual, died on Tuesday in Tuscaloosa, Ala. He was 89.

The cause was heart failure, his daughter Marcy McDonald said.

As a Pulitzer Prize finalist in history and a professor at the University of Alabama, Dr. McDonald declared himself an ideological conservative and an opponent of intrusive government. (“I’d move the winter capital to North Dakota and outlaw air-conditioning in the District of Columbia,” he once said.) But he refused to be pigeonholed either as a libertarian or, despite his Southern agrarian roots, as a Jeffersonian.

Dr. McDonald voted Democratic, for Harry S. Truman in 1948 and Adlai E. Stevenson in 1952, but by 1964 he had switched parties and backed Senator Barry Goldwater, the archconservative Republican running for president.

His becoming an avowed conservative, one colleague suggested, was prompted by the liberal backlash to his early research, which cast Wisconsin’s public utility companies in a favorable light and repudiated Charles A. Beard’s theory that the Constitution was framed to preserve the personal wealth of a ruling elite.

In his book “The American Presidency: An Intellectual History,” published in 1994, Dr. McDonald concluded that “the caliber of people who have served as chief executive has declined erratically but persistently from the day George Washington left office.”

But he added a caveat: “The presidency has been responsible for less harm and more good in the nation and in the world than perhaps any other secular institution in history.”

In “Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution” (1985), which was one of three finalists for the 1986 Pulitzer in history, he pronounced the founding fathers as having been singularly qualified to draft the framework of federalism. He reiterated the point when he delivered the National Endowment for the Humanities’ Jefferson Lecture in Washington in 1987.

“To put it bluntly,” Dr. McDonald said then, “it would be impossible in America today to assemble a group of people with anything near the combined experience, learning and wisdom that the 55 authors of the Constitution took with them to Philadelphia in the summer of 1787.”

He was born on Jan 7, 1927, in Orange, Tex., on the Louisiana border. His father, also named Forrest, worked for what is now the Postal Service. His mother was the former Myra McGill.
He graduated from the University of Texas at Austin and earned his doctorate there in 1955. He later taught at Brown and Wayne State Universities and the University of Alabama, where he remained until 2002.

He is survived by his second wife, the former Ellen Shapiro; five children from his first marriage, his daughters Marcy and Kathy McDonald, and his sons, Forrest, Stephen and Kevin; nine grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

Dr. McDonald was the author of more than a dozen books, including biographies of Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. Interviewed by Brian Lamb on C-Span’s “Booknotes” in 1994, Dr. McDonald revealed that he typically wrote in longhand on a yellow legal pad and in the nude. (“We’ve got wonderful isolation,” he said, “and it’s warm most of the year in Alabama, and why wear clothes?”)

He also remarked that he had been described in The New York Times Book Review as a “neoconservative.” (The article was by the historian John Patrick Diggins.)

“Well, from The New York Times’s point of view, that’s a good thing because they think real conservatives are crazy, and they think that neos are very bright, like Irving Kristol and people like that,” Dr. McDonald continued. “So the reviewer did me a favor.”

“How would you describe your political views?” Mr. Lamb asked.

“Conservative.”

“How conservative?”

“Paleo,” Dr. McDonald replied.
When College Scholarship Programs Falter

By: Paul Sullivan

Eight years ago, Eric Suder decided he wanted to use some of the fortune he had made in telecommunications technology to help students who were the first in their families to attend college.

His family foundation chose eight universities to receive $1 million to $2 million over four years. The money from the program, called First Scholars, would be used to provide scholarships and to create a mentoring and support system for the beneficiaries. After the funding ran out, the universities agreed that they would take over the programs.

But now, Mr. Suder’s initial assistance is ending, and some of the universities’ commitments to the First Scholars program are flagging. Two that took over funding the current scholars are not adding new scholars. A third, the University of Alabama, which received $1.3 million from Mr. Suder, abruptly canceled the program two weeks after cashing his final check for $250,000 in September 2014.

Mr. Suder filed a lawsuit last summer against Alabama for breach of contract but waited until this week to speak publicly about the matter. He is seeking the $1.3 million his foundation gave the university plus interest, legal fees and damages for the harm Alabama’s decision has done to the First Scholars brand.

Linda Bonnin, a spokeswoman for Alabama, said the university denied that it was in default on any agreements.

Philanthropic advisers say such abrupt terminations of agreements are rare, not least because of the unease they create among current and future donors who fear the same fate.

“From the philanthropic perspective, it sends a very poor signal to donors,” said Henry Goldstein, chief executive of Family Foundation Management/Counsel, a philanthropic advisory. “If they make a commitment to the university, there is no assurance that the university will live up to its side of the bargain, and a legal agreement won’t save it.”

He said it was also unusual that Alabama was both canceling the program and not returning the money. He noted the $20 million donation that the Texas financier Lee M. Bass made to Yale University in the 1990s. Mr. Bass wanted the money to be used to create a Western civilization curriculum. When Yale couldn’t come up with a program that met his conditions, it returned the money.

Alabama’s reluctance to do the same is “not going to inspire any confidence among donors that contributions made in good faith are going to be honored,” Mr. Goldstein said.

Mr. Suder’s lawsuit and the supporting correspondence paint a picture of a partnership that seemed to be going well until two weeks after the final check was cashed.

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The university’s application, signed by Robert E. Witt, then the university president and now chancellor of the state system, talked about Alabama’s commitment to helping first-generation students.

The application also stated that the university’s “leadership has designated an endowed support fund to be used to support the Suder Scholars program once the Suder Foundation funding is complete in 2015.”

Each year, the university signed an addendum to the original agreement and reported its progress to Mr. Suder’s foundation. On Sept. 4, 2014, Judy Bonner, the provost when the contract was negotiated but by then the university’s president, sent Mr. Suder a note thanking him for his final $250,000 check and larger contribution to the university.

Eleven days later, she sent him another note saying that the university was opting out of his program now that it had to pay for it itself. “It was a total surprise to us,” Mr. Suder said.

Ms. Bonnin, the Alabama spokeswoman, said she could not explain the discrepancy between the sentiment in the letters and the university’s actions. “All of the people who were involved in setting up that agreement are no longer here,” she said. “The president is gone, the provost is gone, and the development folks have turned over. We can’t ask them that question.”

She added that the university continued to provide scholarship support for the 57 students who had been admitted as part of the First Scholars program. She said the university had four other first-generation college programs serving a total of 110 students.

To date, Alabama’s legal response has been scant. In a two-page motion last fall, it denied all the claims. Its lawyers have spent more time filing motions arguing that the university cannot be sued in Texas, where the Suder Foundation is based.

Among the few details of the reasons for canceling the program came in a letter from Leslie Abernathy, director of corporate and foundation relations, on Nov. 14, 2014. She said that the demands for data collection were too great for the program coordinator, denied that the agreement was meant to last indefinitely and said it was always set to end in May 2015.

If Mr. Suder wanted to end the relationship sooner, she offered to return $162,500, which represented the spring scholarships for the 65 scholars at Alabama.

Mr. Suder argued that the letter was evidence of the university trying to find reasons to cancel a program that was working well. He said the data collection was the same for all the universities and the need for it was explained in the grant agreements.

“We made it clear that it was going to be a data-driven program to prove that we could do what we were going to do,” he said. “We wanted to be able to raise more money and do this on a national level.”
The data collected has been positive. “We’ve have four-year graduation numbers around 57 percent versus first-generation numbers in these same schools of only 24 percent,” Mr. Suder said.

While Alabama’s decision to cancel the program and limit the foundation’s contact with the remaining First Scholars students has been the biggest blow to Mr. Suder’s effort, there have been other disappointments. He said the University of Utah was asked to leave the program for not fulfilling its obligations.

Two other schools, Southern Illinois University Carbondale and the University of Kentucky, both took over their programs and are maintaining their commitments. But after initially adding new classes of students, they have both stopped taking on new First Scholars.

“One of the things we didn’t consider is the constant changing of administrations in all of these schools,” he said. “Getting it institutionalized was constant work.”

One place where the program has flourished is the University of Memphis. M. David Rudd, its president, said the university had taken over the program and valued its contribution to students.

“The most surprising part has been the uniformity of success across the board,” Dr. Rudd said. “For first-generation students, the challenge is juggling multiple challenges, multiple stressors. They don’t have the support structure to do that effectively more often than not.”

He added, “You’re not getting 60, 65 percent doing well; you’re getting 95 percent. It speaks to the fact that these students can do well if given the support.”

Oscar Segura, a junior pre-med major at Memphis, credited the program with keeping him in school when he thought of not returning after his first semester. “Me and my mentor, we were always texting,” he said. “We got a month off. He called me each week.”

Back at school, Mr. Segura said, the mentors and professors linked to the program helped keep him on his path to becoming a doctor.

“It’s been pretty difficult, being a first-generation college student,” said Mr. Segura, who grew up two and a half hours from Memphis. “My mom doesn’t understand what it’s like to get up and study for tests and go to class. First Scholars has been there to pull me back to where I want to be.”

Despite individual success stories, Mr. Suder said he was bothered that what was supposed to be seed money for a network of programs has not taken root.

“If you had asked me two years ago, I would have said I wanted to grow it to 100 universities by the proven metrics,” Mr. Suder said. “But I’ve got to tell you the Alabama thing really took the wind out of our sails.”

He said he remained optimistic. “The worst-case scenario,” he said, “is we’ll put a lot of kids through college who wouldn’t have gone otherwise.”

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So far, he has helped more than 400 first-generation students go to college who might not be there otherwise. And 50 to 60 have already graduated.

"I look at the whole thing as a roaring success," he said.
The fairy tale story of Ray Watts and UAB football

By: David Sher

Don’t you love stories with happy endings?

Once upon a time in the sleepy village of Birmingham, Alabama, an evil UAB President Ray Watts (or his Trustee Roundtable) made the decision to terminate UAB football.

The UAB students took up arms, the faculty revolted, and the townspeople arose.

Chicken Little ran through the streets yelling, “The sky is falling—the sky is falling.”

There was distrust everywhere.

Dr. Watts was the Big Bad Wolf—and he was going to blow our UAB house down.

But then a miracle happened…

Glinda, the good witch of the South, smiled down on UAB and as quickly as you can say ‘Abracadabra,’ beauty kissed the beast, the ugly duckling matured into a swan, and UAB turned into a handsome prince…

- UAB football was reinstated
- A new athletic director was selected
- Generous business people donated much needed money at the 11th hour
- Coach Bill Clark signed a five year contract
- A new football facility was announced
- The UA Board of Trustees committed to support a long term lease for a new football stadium
- A study was initiated by the BJCC that will likely result in a new stadium
- The UAB football foundation was established
- UAB football recruiting is going better than expected*
- UAB revealed its 2017 non-conference football schedule

Kind of takes your breath away.

When the history of UAB is written, this past year will go down as one of the greatest years in UAB and Birmingham history.

It’s difficult to comprehend, but one the best things that may have ever happened to UAB and Birmingham will be the termination of UAB football.

We reaffirmed what we already knew—Birmingham’s not going anywhere without UAB and UAB is not going anywhere without Birmingham.

See next page
We proved—maybe for the first time ever—that we could work together as a community to achieve a meaningful goal.

And we will never be able to use the excuse again that we in Birmingham are losers and we cannot do anything right.

This is truly a Birmingham and UAB fairy tale.

And here’s our happy ending...

“Everyone lived happily ever after.”
What the UAB Health System CEO thinks about Alabama Medicaid's $157M request

By: Alan Alexander

During last week's budgetary hearings for the upcoming Alabama legislative session, the Alabama Medicaid Agency requested an additional $157 million in funding to continue providing Medicaid services for the state's one million residents who are dependent on the coverage.

Medicaid's appropriation this year totals $685 million, which is the highest line item in the state budget. The request for more funds would increase that total by 23 percent.

If the funds aren't provided, the AMA said it will have to cut some services and may have to halt the transition to regional care organizations under the new managed care system.

So, why does Alabama need more money to fund its Medicaid program? University of Alabama at Birmingham Health System CEO Will Ferniany said there are a number of reasons, but added that the $157 million isn't a hard ask.

"Medicaid’s budget request of an additional $156 million is very responsible and really a bare bones request," he said.

Ferniany said Alabama still owes the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services a substantial amount from overpayments, which totaled $114 million as of August. That figure is compounded considering the state’s Medicaid program relied on $37 million that carried over from 2014 and a one-time $20 million payment for the BP oil spill. Both of those are off the table this year.

Another factor driving up costs is inflation of health care costs and the number of beneficiaries.

Governor Robert Bentley and other lawmakers have held firm on their decision not to expand the program under the Affordable Care Act. In an expanded program, the federal government will pay 100 percent of the coverage costs through 2017, after which the state would be responsible for paying 5 percent until 2020 when its share rises to no more than 10 percent.

Currently, the feds pay 70 percent of Alabama's Medicaid costs.

However, Ferniany said that after paying a transition cost, additional money will be created if Alabama continues its implementation of a managed care system.

"In addition, to reform Medicaid by transitioning to managed care via the regional care organizations, there will be a transition cost, which is an investment in savings that will be achieved when the RCOs are established," he said.
WEEKEND CONFIDENTIAL:
ALEXANDRA WOLFE

Sarah Parcak

A ‘space archaeologist’ uses satellite imaging to find ruins and fight raiders

SARAH PARCAK can see looting at ancient sites—from space. Dr. Parcak, 37, who calls herself a space archaeologist, uses satellite imaging to find undiscovered ruins and to track those that have been compromised. In the past few years, she has spotted thousands of previously unknown tombs, temples and entire ancient cities, mostly in Egypt, and she isn’t slowing down. Meanwhile, looters of different sorts, from local residents to Islamic State terrorists, are raiding ruins in the Middle East for profit. “We’re in this race against time,” she says. “If we don’t go and find these sites, they’ll be gone.”

Her work is getting more attention. In November, Dr. Parcak received the $1 million 2016 TED Prize for her work as a satellite archaeologist. She plans to announce next month how she will use the money. On the day we met, she was in New York to appear on “The Late Show With Stephen Colbert,” where she showed pictures of ancient settlements, potential pyramids and lost tombs that she had uncovered.

Over breakfast, she showed an example of a find she had helped to make: an image of a circular outline on an agricultural field near Rome’s Fiumicino airport. It turned out to be the remains of a 44-yard-wide amphitheater that archaeologists had sought for more than 30 years.

Satellite imagery has vastly improved over just the past two years, with applications ranging from mapping to weather tracking to monitoring crop acreage. The imagery can incorporate different wavelengths of light, like infrared, that the human eye can’t see.

The satellites that Dr. Parcak uses can pick up variations in vegetation health that suggest whether the plants are growing in regular soil or over buried remains. “We’re literally just beginning to learn how to use satellites to find sites,” she says excitedly. “More and more people are realizing there’s this incredible tool.”

Dr. Parcak is a pioneer in space archaeology, a field that NASA named about a decade ago. She had long been intrigued by aerial photography, in part because her grandfather was among the first to use it in forestry. As a paratrooper in World War II, he had used aerial photos to help plan his jumps. He
The Wall Street Journal
Friday, January 15, 2016

later used them to measure tree height and forest health.

That work inspired Dr. Parcak, who grew up in Bangor, Maine, to take a course on satellite imaging while she was an undergraduate at Yale University. After learning that no one had used such technology in archaeology, she wrote the first textbook on the subject. She later earned a Ph.D. in archaeology at Cambridge University.

These days, satellite imaging can reveal the extent of looting at sites. In a series of photographs, Dr. Parcak shows the increase over time in the number of looting holes—pits dug so that looters can get to ancient burial sites and steal valuable objects. Images can sometimes also pick up tents around the sites, an indication of where looters are digging. To prevent more thefts, she is careful not to publicly release any maps of newly found sites. She does give details to government officials.

Economic need often drives the looting. Some people who live near the sites don’t realize how historically important the antiquities are and sell them on the black market because they need the money. To address the problem, Dr. Parcak sometimes hires local residents so that they can learn about the objects, and she pays them enough that they aren’t tempted to steal.

Looting isn’t just done by individuals. One of Islamic State’s major sources of income is the sale of antiquities from Syria and Iraq. When they take over land that is home to large archaeological sites, they lease it to looters and then take a percentage of the money from sales. Islamic State also has destroyed some ancient sites and reliefs, saying that they promote idolatry.

Dr. Parcak says that the international black market in antiquities is so vast that it’s hard to quantify. Some items, like a rare pottery bowl from the American southwest or a painted mummy from Egypt, can go for hundreds of thousands of dollars. And looting isn’t limited to certain regions. “It’s all over the world,” she says.

She is still trying to get a handle on how much remains undiscov-
ered. “Even though I’ve been doing this for 15-plus years now, I’m consistently wrong,” she says. She is also calling attention to the danger that people in the field can face. In Syria last August, Islamic State militants executed Khalid Asaad, the 82-year-old director of antiquities for the ancient city of Palmyra. A sign placed on his body by his killers accused him of, among other things, managing the city’s collection of “idols” and going to academic conferences abroad.

Dr. Parcak generally spends a few months a year on archaeological sites. She plans to return to Egypt this spring, where she will help to map some of her new finds. When she is not on site, she teaches archaeology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and has daily video calls with her Egyptian colleagues. Her husband is also an ar-
chaeologist specializing in Egypt. “I call him my best archaeological find,” she jokes. They live in Birm-
ingham with their 3-year-old son.

In the future, she hopes to share more of her findings with govern-
ments so that they can detect patterns, preserve endangered areas and catch thieves. Despite the grim realities of looting, she enjoys the daily routine of the job. “You’re basically getting to do what every 5-year-old wants to do,” she says. “I dig in the sand, and I play with pretty pictures, so I never really left kindergarten.”
NOAA says December temperatures warmest on record in Alabama

By: Leigh Morgan

It was a warm December — the warmest on record in Alabama.

That's according to NOAA, which released a nationwide analysis of average December temperatures this week.

A climate report released by NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information said that December 2015 was also record warm in the continental U.S. The average temperature was 38.6 degrees Fahrenheit, which was 6 degrees above the 20th century average.

The previous record was 37.7 degrees in 1939.

The weather pattern in December made for record warmth across most of the eastern half of the nation while keeping the West at average or below-average temperatures, the NCEI said.

Alabama was one of 29 states that experienced its warmest December on record. All of those states were in the eastern half of the nation.

Alabama's statewide average temperature in December was 56.4 degrees, 10 degrees above average, according to the NCEI. The data period is 1895-2015.

Alabama's previous warmest December was in 1984, when the average statewide temperature was 55.1 degrees.

However, that is not the only opinion on the matter.

Alabama State Climatologist Dr. John Christy said that data collected from the University of Alabama in Huntsville may beg to differ about a 2015 being the hottest December.

"The UAH satellite data measures the temperature of the deep atmosphere," he said. "Over Alabama, December 2015 was very warm, but it was actually hotter in December 1984."

Why was last month so warm?

"Weather patterns shift all the time, and this time it was our turn to be in the warmest (relatively speaking) region of the planet," Christy said this week via email. "January won't be that way as you can tell."

Alabama had its second-wettest December on record, according to a NOAA group. Two states had their wettest Decembers on record: Iowa and Wisconsin. (National Centers for Environmental Information)
Christy said the ongoing El Nino, thought to be one of the strongest on record, also had an influence on December's temperatures.

December was also particularly soggy in Alabama, according to the NCEI.

2015 ranked as No. 2 for precipitation when looking at data from 1895 through 2015, the agency said.

The statewide average for precipitation last month was 10.64 inches, which was 5.45 inches above average.

The wettest December on record in Alabama was in 1961, when the statewide average precipitation was 12.21 inches, more than 7 inches above average.
Snowstorm Set To Pummel 75 Million Americans This Weekend

By: Andrew Follett

A massive winter snowstorm could leave 75 million Americans across the Eastern Seaboard covered by record levels of snowfall Friday afternoon, according to weather experts.

"By Sunday morning, nearly one-quarter of the U.S. population (about 75 million people) could get 6 inches or more of snow," Dr. Roy Spencer, a climatologist at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, wrote on his blog. "Consistent with the weather model forecasts for the last several of days... the area around Washington D.C. would be hardest hit, with about 2 feet of snow expected."

"New York City could see 16 to 20 inches, and nor'easter type conditions are expected for coastal areas from the Delmarva peninsula northward, with winds gusting over 50 mph," Spencer added.

The Weather Channel has already issued a blizzard alert for the winter storm named Jonas. The National Weather Service says there's a 70 percent chance of 12 inches of snow for the Washington D.C. area by Saturday. The Eastern Seaboard could see one to two feet of snow. Roads are expected to become impassable and many businesses plan to shut down. Travel is expected to be extremely hazardous.

"Potential life-threatening conditions [are] expected Friday night into Saturday night," states a National Weather Service winter weather advisory. "Travel is expected to be severely limited if not impossible during the height of the storm Friday night and Saturday."
Earth's Temperature Depends on Where You Put Thermometer

By: Seth Borenstein

When it comes to measuring global warming, it's all about altitude.

Temperature readings taken close to Earth's surface — about 6 feet off the ground — show a slightly warmer planet than measurements taken from on high by satellites in orbit.

And that discrepancy has given ammunition to climate-change doubters.

Government agencies and most scientists rely primarily on ground measurements, and they show that 2015 was the warmest year on record.

The National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, NASA, the Japanese and British meteorological agencies and the World Meteorological Organization all use ground data. It's a matter of better accuracy and relevance, scientists say.

"We care about what's happening where we live. That's why ground-based temperatures are most relevant to humans," said Texas Tech climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe.

But those who try to cast doubt on accepted science — most often non-scientists — prefer satellite data that goes back to 1979. And the data shows that 2015 was only the third-warmest year on record.

Politicians who reject mainstream climate science, such as Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz, especially cite one satellite measurement system, Remote Sensing Systems, in asserting that there has been no global warming for 18 years. That's a claim scientists, including the one who runs RSS, say is misleading.

Carl Mears, senior scientist for Remote Sensing Systems, told The Associated Press in an email: "The satellite measurements do not measure the surface warming. They are measurements of the average temperature of thick layers of the atmosphere" about 50,000 feet off the ground.

"For impacts on human society and the environment, the surface data are more important," Mears said.

Mears said his analysis of his own satellite data has five times the margin of error of ground measurements. That's because satellites use complex mathematical algorithms and thousands of bits of code to translate wavelength measurements into temperature readings, Hayhoe said.

Scientists routinely use ground measurements to calibrate and validate satellite information, said Marshall Shepherd, a University of Georgia meteorology professor. He and several other scientists called surface measurements "the ground truth."

John Christy at the University of Alabama, Huntsville, who runs a separate satellite temperature monitoring system, said satellites are better for detecting warming from heat-trapping gases

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because the "surface is affected by too many other variables and doesn't represent the real mass of the climate system."

Both Christy's and Mears' satellite data show that the world has warmed since about 1980, when satellites started measuring temperature. The two satellite systems show about seven-tenths of a degree of warming in the past 35 years, while ground data shows about a full degree.
Division II basketball: Five games to watch

By: David Boyce

Late Saturday afternoon will be a moment that Alabama-Huntsville senior Greg Gardner will soak up and store in his memory bank.

Gardner’s four years as the Chargers point guard has included many memorable moments. As a freshman, Alabama-Huntsville reached the Sweet 16. Last year, the Chargers were picked fourth, but were co-Gulf South regular-season champions, won the conference tournament and made the NCAA Division II tournament.

“It was definitely a good year and a year people weren’t expecting from us,” Gardner said.

At the midway point in the season, Alabama-Huntsville is having another strong year. The Chargers are 11-5 overall and 8-3 and in a three-way tie for first in the Gulf South Conference.

At 4 p.m. ET Saturday, the Chargers get to showcase what their program is all about when they take on West Florida in a game that will be televised on the American Sports Network. The women’s game will air first at 2 p.m.

“I was very excited when I found out we got that,” Gardner said. “I know our program is super excited to play on TV and hopefully the community and everybody can rally around it and we can get a good crowd here. It is going to be good experience and hopefully good exposure for our program and our university.”

For Gardner, it seems like it was only a couple of weeks ago he was packing his bags in Indianapolis and heading to Huntsville for his freshman season of basketball in the 2012-13 school year.

Gardner was joining a winning program led by head coach Lennie Acuff. The Chargers were coming off two successful seasons that saw runs to the NCAA Division II Elite Eight.

The two things that sold Gardner on the program was Acuff and the camaraderie of the players. On his visit, he liked the family atmosphere.

“Being under coach Acuff has been a huge blessing,” Gardner said. “He is a family man and all about the right stuff. He translates that to his players and it translate through the entire program, just being about the right things on and off the court.”

Acuff said Gardner came into somewhat of a difficult situation. He was viewed as kind of the heir apparent point guard, who was going to pick up right where Josh Magette left off. Magette led the Chargers to back-to-back Elite Eights, was a first-team All-American and conference player of the year.
Magette left as the school’s all-time leader in assists and is currently playing in the NBA D-League.

"I think a lot of people thought he would pick up where Josh left off," Acuff said. "That was totally unfair to him."

Gardner, though, was able to handle that kind of pressure. After all, he grew up in Indiana, a state that loves basketball.

"It was a great experience growing up," Gardner said. "I got to play against a lot of good players, some who are in the NBA or are playing high and low Division I. I think the level of competition let me know I had to work hard. The level of play around me helped raise my level a little bit."

Gardner played in all 31 games his freshman season as the Chargers made a run to the South Regional championship game and only a two-point loss to Florida Southern prevented Alabama-Huntsville from a third straight trip to the Elite Eight.

"It was a lot of fun and good experience," Gardner said. "We had three or four seniors who were very successful and very good players. I learned a lot from them and tried to keep some of the things they taught me and held on to them my entire career. Now that I am a senior, I try to pass it on to the younger guys and try to keep the tradition of this winning program going."

Gardner is having a strong senior season. He is averaging 12.9 points per game and is shooting 53 percent from the field. He is also averaging 5.1 assists per game.

"He maybe has been the most improved player we’ve had over four years," Acuff said. "He is one of the leading scorers on the team. He is going to end up second at our school in all-time assists to Magette."

"Most importantly, he has helped us win two league championships and we are tied for first as we come down the stretch and hopefully, we get a third."

Entering Thursday night’s home game against Valdosta State, the Chargers have only 11 regular-seasons left. They are currently tied for first with Delta State and West Georgia. There are two more teams just one game behind them.

"I don’t know if there is a top-10 team in the league, but there is a lot of parity," Acuff said. "It is highly competitive. From top to bottom, this is the best the league has been since I have been here."

It is a grind, but a fun grind, Gardner said.

"We like where we are," Gardner said. "There are a lot of stuff we can improve on, especially defense. We are really focused on defense in practice. We have pretty much the same team back as last year and we added one key piece. He has helped us a lot. We feel like we can keep"
growing. As our coach says, our ceiling is pretty high. We feel if we do the right things and work in practice we can hopefully get there.”

Gardner brings the same competitive spirit to the classroom. He is majoring in communication with a minor in business management. In the previous two years, he has made the Gulf South Academic honor roll.

The biggest thing Gardner has learned over the years is time management, making sure he devotes enough time to his studies and basketball to be successful in both.

Acuff is not surprised by what Gardner has accomplished on and off the court. For one, Acuff said Alabama-Huntsville attracts solid students. It is one of the reasons he has been the head coach at the school for 19 years.

“It is one of the best academic institution of higher learning in the South,” Acuff said. “Our ACT scores for incoming freshmen is 26. It is just a really positive environment. You can attract and recruit really good kids and that is what it is all about. I think we have kids who are direct extension of what our student body is about and that is bright kids with a bright future.”

The other reason Acuff is not surprised by Gardner’s success in the classroom is because of Gardner’s family.

“He has a great foundation at home,” Acuff said. “He is what you want your kids to be about. He values education. He competes in the classroom as hard as he does on the court. He is a fine young man of high character. He wants to be a college coach. He has a tremendous future ahead of him.”

As for the immediate future, Gardner is just going to soak in each game as it comes. Saturday will be one of those games to savor.

“I’m trying to make as many memories as possible and just enjoy the ride and hopefully we go pretty deep in March,” he said.

IMPORTANT UPCOMING MEN’S GAMES

No. 4 Midwestern State, 16-1 overall and 5-0 in the Lone Star Conference, plays at No. 11 Angelo State, 14-3 and 2-3, at 4 p.m. CT on Jan. 23. Senior guard Jordan Stevens leads Midwestern State in scoring at 15.8 per game. Senior forward Stedman Allen is averaging 16.8 points and Senior guard Tre Bennett is averaging 16.5. Angelo State has a sparkling overall record, but can’t afford to lose many more LSC games, especially at home. This game will have significant regional rankings implications down the road.

Alaska-Anchorage, 15-4 overall and 8-0 in the Great Northwest Athletic Conference, plays at No. 8 Western Oregon, 14-2 and 7-1, at 7:30 p.m. PT on Jan. 21. They are the top two teams in the GNAC. Alaska Anchorage is led in scoring by junior guard Sekou Wiggs, who is averaging 24.0 points. Senior forward Andy Avgi leads Western Oregon in scoring with a 21.0 average.

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IMPORTANT SATURDAY WOMEN'S GAMES

Minnesota Crookston, 12-4 overall, plays at home against Northern State, 13-4, at 4 p.m. CT. Both teams at 9-3 and tied for first with Minnesota State-Moorhead in the North Division of the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference. Senior forward Katrina Nordick is averaging 17.4 points for Minnesota Crookston. Sophomore forward Jill Conrad leads Northern State in scoring with a 12.9 average.

No. 12 ranked Emporia State, 14-3 overall and 8-3 in the Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletics Association, plays at Washburn, 11-6 and 7-4, at 5 p.m. CT at Lee Arena. Both programs have proud, winning traditions. Emporia State won the NCAA Division II title in 2010 and Washburn claimed the national title in 2005. In Kansas, the rivalry between the two schools in known as the “Turnpike Tussle.” Both teams are fighting to stay close to Missouri Western and Fort Hays State.
**Flight nurse logs near record-breaking number of missions**

When he completed his final flight nurse mission Dec. 26 before retiring, Tom Grubbs, BSN, RN, EMT-P, had cataloged nearly 6,000 flights and saved thousands of lives, according to a Dec. 25, 2015, article in the Tennessean.

It’s a milestone not many flight nurses reach, said Lis Henley, BSN, RN, EMT, director of Vanderbilt LifeFlight, where Grubbs served from 1984 until his recent retirement.

“For many flight nurses, reaching 1,000 patient flights is a career highlight,” Henley said in a Dec. 15 article published by the Journal of Emergency Medical Services.

“To reach almost 6,000 is probably more than anyone else in civilian flight nursing history,” Henley said in the article. “Tom has been a true lifesaver to so many people and touched so many lives.”

Grubbs, 62, began his flight nursing career when it was a relatively new field for civilian nurses. Today, Vanderbilt LifeFlight has transported more than 35,000 patients using six helicopters in parts of Tennessee, southern Kentucky and northern Alabama.

Grubbs told Tennessean reporter Jessica Bliss that having such a long career in such an intense field is humbling. “We’ve got some really brilliant, life-saving people out there,” Grubbs said in the Tennessean article.

Grubbs has been a registered nurse for 35 years and a licensed EMS provider for 41 years. He received his BSN in nursing from the University of Alabama in Huntsville in 1990.

The first documented medevac by helicopter occurred during World War II, and in 1947, the first civilian air ambulance in North America was established in Canada, according to the Mercy Flight website. Today, hundreds of operations are run across the country, with RNs and EMTs working together on the flights.

“The medical and technical advances in nursing and emergency medicine have been amazing over the last 40 years,” Grubbs said in the Tennnessean article. “But you can’t ever forget that human touch. As a flight nurse we are spending time with people in what is probably some of the worst moments of their life.”

Common prerequisites for becoming a flight nurse include being registered in the state of practice, having two to three years of critical care and ER nursing experience, earning basic and advanced and pediatric life support certificates and becoming a certified flight registered nurse, according to the Air & Surface Transport Nurses Association.
High school student with rare disease helps conduct award-winning research

By: Travis Leder

Hazel Green High School senior Cassie Barnby is working with a University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) professor to find answers about a rare disease called tyrosinemia which can prove fatal in many children.

The reason the 17-year-old is helping with this research is because she has the disease, and she wants to find answers to help improve the childhood of future tyrosinemia patients. Tyrosinemia is a disease in which the body cannot effectively break down the amino acid tyrosine. Barnby spent much of her childhood in and out of the hospital undergoing major medical procedures.

"Currently the only treatment is a liver transplant, which involves a lot of medication and a lot of blood draws, and it's not fun," Barnby says. Her brother was also born with this disease, which is a genetic condition affecting 1 in 120 thousand people.

Barnby recently teamed with UAH physiology professor Gordon MacGregor, Ph.D. to research whether certain effects seen in those with tyrosinemia were related to the disease or NTBC -- a drug which is used to treat tyrosinemia patients.

"We're starting to see some behavioral problems and some learning difficulties at school. So we were wondering if it is the disease or is it the drug," MacGregor says.

MacGregor and Barnby -- with the help of students -- took part in a study involving mice. The goal was to find out if mice taking NTBC had a harder time figuring out mazes compared to mice who were not administered the drug.

"The mice taking the drug behaved the same as the mice taking water," explains MacGregor, "The mice with the disease who also had to take the drug, they were much slower to learn the location of the hole in the maze."

Barnby presented her research at the International Tyrosinemia Conference in Quebec, Canada and won first place for basic research. She hopes these findings are another step toward finding more answers and eventually a cure for tyrosinemia.

"If we increase awareness of tyrosinemia then the doctors hopefully can find a cure, and I'm hoping it will be the collaboration with UAH."

Barnby plans to enter the UAH College of Nursing in the Fall of 2016.
Home in Alabama, Indian Small Business Owner Runs for Mayor

By: Charles Lam

Hanu Karlapalem was born in the state of Andhra Pradesh in Southern India and went to school at the Delhi College of Engineering, but he considers Madison, Alabama, his home. He and his wife Vidya have lived in the city for 16 years, longer than he's lived in any other place. They became United States citizens in 2010. He built a small networking solutions business there and earned a graduate degree at the nearby University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Now, he's positioning himself to run the city with a campaign for mayor. It's the first time he's running for public office.

"Madison is a small city," Karlapalem, 51, told NBC News. "It's one of the most highly educated cities in the nation. We have some of the best schools. But of course, there's always room for improvement."

Madison is a city of approximately 45,000, but it recently attracted international attention after an Indian grandfather visiting his son's family was partially paralyzed after an encounter with the Madison Police Department in February 2015.

Video from a police vehicle shows Madison police knocking now 58-year-old SurehBahai Patel to the ground as he was being detained. Eric Parker, the former officer police say initiated the take-down, testified in a federal civil rights case that he felt Patel pulling away from him. On Jan. 14, a federal judge threw out the case after two mistrials due to hung juries. Parker still faces a civil case brought by the Patel family as well as an assault charge.

Karlapalem said that while the incident was unfortunate, it was not representative of the city of Madison or the state of Alabama. Parker was dismissed from the city's police department, and Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley apologized to the Indian government for the incident.

"It was an unfortunate tragic instance," Karlapalem said. "It was very emotional. It was sad. But the Madison Police Department is one of the best in the state of Alabama. One such incident does not define the department or the city of Madison or that state of Alabama."

"My focus is going to be on positive side of the city of Madison and the state of Alabama," he continued. "I want to see that we put the city on the path to become the number one small city in America."

Karlapalem's plan for improvement is focused on infrastructure and sustainable growth as well as taking lessons from other cities. While he touts Madison's fast growth — the city's population grew 46 percent between 2000 and 2010 according to the U.S. Census — he's just as quick to point out that the majority of the growth is focused in the number of homes, not of businesses.

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"Because of good schools and good neighborhoods, the city has been growing in terms of population, but we don't have enough businesses," he said. "[Madison] is essentially a bedroom community. We're seeing this fast growth in rooftops, but rooftops alone cannot sustain us."

Though he hasn't run for public office before, Karlapalem, who moved to Madison after his wife was offered a job in the area, boosts his time serving on the University of Alabama in Huntsville's alumni board and the advisory council of Global Ties Alabama, a non-profit organization that partners with the U.S. State Department to foster international exchange, as leadership experience.

As mayor, Karlapalem says he would start numerous boards and councils to boost civic engagement and increase city transparency and communication. He would also create incentives for small businesses and startups, floating ideas such as developing affordable, multi-unit co-working spaces and creating an organization called StartUp Madison modeled after Philadelphia's StartUp PHL to help grow the city's startup scene.

"I want Madison to have a unique identity," Karlapalem said. "I would like to see that Madison becomes the Silicon Valley of the South. We have so much knowledge based here. We can tap into that knowledge base, innovate, and create things that we can proudly call 'Made in Madison.'"
New audit slams financial management of university

Auditors hit Alabama A&M for diverting $1.7 million to foundation

Paul Gattis pgattis(at)al.com

A new state audit, to be publicly released Friday, slammed Alabama A&M University on two fronts and appeared to indicate President Andrew Hugine misled the school's board of trustees in how the school handled a harsh 2015 audit.

The compliance audit by the Alabama Department of Examiners of Public Accounts issued nine new findings against the school for the 2014 fiscal year. The new findings focused primarily on financial mismanagement, including diverting $800,000 earmarked for the university to the Alabama A&M Foundation — the school's fundraising arm.

Another $937,500 in university funds was placed in foundation accounts from 2009-2013 without the approval of the board of trustees, according to the audit.

Additionally, the audit also listed seven of the 14 findings in a March 2015 audit as "unresolved." Among the unresolved findings are issues the examiners found regarding Hugine reporting all of his income to the IRS for tax purposes as well as concerns within the foundation.

AL.com obtained a copy of the audit on Wednesday.

The university issued a statement Thursday afternoon stating that many of the audit findings had already been resolved.

"Alabama A&M University is in receipt of the report issued by the Examiners of Public Accounts for fiscal year 2014. Since the report covered two fiscal periods ago, many of the findings have already been addressed," the statement reads. "The University remains committed to the review process, and the continuous yearly improvement across its institutional processes.

Three of the seven "unresolved" findings were had been unresolved in a previous audit and took place before Hugine was hired in 2009. The seven unresolved findings appear to be a direct contradiction of what Hugine told the school's board of trustees in June 2015 when he assured that the examiners and the office of Gov. Robert Bentley were satisfied with the school's plan of action.

The 2015 audit prompted Gov. Robert Bentley to state he had "serious concerns." The governor's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Thursday.

The 2015 audit prompted the university to submit its action plan to the examiners on April 21, 2015.

"This response and action plan document has been forwarded to the office of the governor," Hugine told trustees June 25, 2015. "This document has been forwarded to Mr. Jones at the Department of Examiners of Public Accounts. We have had conversations with both of them. They are satisfied with the response's action plan."

The next day, Hugine echoed those sentiments in an interview with AL.com.

"What we have outlined is what we intend to do to be sure our policies and practices are consistent in those areas we have agreed on and that brings closure other than the implementation thereof," he said.

The 2015 audit also led to the indictment of Kevin Rolle, executive vice president and chief operating officer. According to the indictment, Rolle forged moving expenses of more than $6,500 when he relocated to accept the job at Alabama A&M. He scheduled for trial on theft and forgery charges in Madison County circuit court on April 4.

Among the unresolved findings from the audit released in the 2015 audit was $2.3 million in the foundation accounts that were reclassified as funds available to the university, which did not match up with previous foundation audit reports, according to the examiners report.

The school dismissed the examiners concerns over the foundation last year when the school's outside financial auditors declared the examiners' interpretation as "totally incorrect."

Among the new findings:

- Alabama A&M deposited $800,000 in grants and contributions from service provider Aramark into the accounts of the school's foundation, not university accounts as the contract with Aramark mandates.
- Alabama A&M received $937,500 from the city of Birmingham from 2009-2013 as part of the Magic City Classic football game contract. That money was deposited in the foundation accounts without approval of the board of trustees.
- Examiners outlined concerns about how money was handled within the foundation that conflicted with state law, including none of the investment income by a $1 million endowment was allocated to the accumulated endowment interest available.
- Alabama A&M violated state law in overpaying travel expenses to the Magic City Classic in Birmingham, which led to $797,008 being repaid by the foundation before the conclusion of the audit.
- Alabama A&M failed to properly document travel advances and expenditures, resulting in an employee repaying the school $1,034.81.
- Alabama A&M violated school policy in providing more free football tickets to some employees and failed to document more than 2,700 students who received free football tickets.
- Alabama A&M did not adequately account for the $85 enrollment fee paid by all first-year students. The fee, unlike all other tuition and fees, were not posted to a student's account and the school did not take steps to ensure all enrollment fees were paid.
- Alabama A&M spent more than $10,000 on two Christmas parties for faculty and staff, failing to follow an attorney general's opinion that stated school funds be spent only on business-related events.
- Alabama A&M failed to report non-overnight per diem amounts on employee tax forms as required by federal tax laws.
- Alabama A&M failed to account for 50 assets, including 45 vehicles, with a historical value of $422,489 when taken to a salvage yard. The school could not provide receipts from the salvage yard.
CHEERLEADING COMPETITION

Shelton State earns 9th title

UA teams finish in top 3

By Ken Roberts
City Editor

The cheerleading team at Shelton State Community College earned its ninth consecutive national championship during the Universal Cheerleaders Association national championships in Orlando this weekend.

Shelton State finished first in the open co-ed category, ahead of second place Iowa Western Community College.

Members of the Shelton

SEE CHEER, B3
State team are Ashley Aquilina, Selena Benefield, Daniela Bermudez, Courtney Carlo, Mia DeSinti, Hannah Ellis, Devan Harris, Mary Howerton, Kaitlyn Klubrick, Kaylee Nash, Summer Stewart, Sawyer Bailey, Will Coggins, Tyler Evans, Hamp Freeman, Asad Irfan, Chris Kelly, Kurtis Mauldin, Robert McNatt, Cameron Sampley, Kyle Steele, Seth Stewart, Jimmy Valdez and Elijah Vaughn. The team is coached by Christa Grizzle Sanford.

The University of Alabama all-girl and co-ed cheer squads earned top-three finishes in the Division I level at the competition. UA's co-ed squad earned third, with the University of Central Florida finishing in second place and the University of Kentucky squad finishing in first place. The UA all-girl team was the national runner-up to the University of Indiana.

UA was the defending champion in both categories.

"We are obviously disappointed that it's not a top finish for both teams," said UA head coach Jennifer Thrasher, "but any time you have a chance to compete for the University of Alabama you are proud to represent the Crimson Tide family. We worked hard but came up a little short. We are still very proud to finish in the top three in both divisions."

Big Al, UA's elephant mascot, finished 10th in the nation in the mascot competition, with Auburn University's Aubie the Tiger earning the top prize.

The three-day competition took place at ESPN's Wide World of Sports. Teams from across the country participated in the event at HP Fieldhouse. Cheerleaders were judged based on stunting, tumbling skills, crowd-leading abilities and overall performance.
Gotcha Bike set to roll out on AU campus

By: Sarah Falligant

Auburn University is rolling out a brand-new bike share program, making it the first university to boast smart bikes from Charleston-based The Gotcha Group.

University officials lined up 10 of the 75 Gotcha Bike bikes on the Roosevelt Concourse Wednesday, and the orange and blue drew the attention of students traveling to and from their first classes of the semester.

“We’ve been developing the first true smart bike for bike share for about a year and a half, and Auburn is our first partner that we’re rolling out the program with,” explained Sean Flood, CEO of The Gotcha Group. “Fully-branded, custom bikes with all Auburn branding.”

Unlike traditional bike share programs that require users to swipe a card at a kiosk and return the bike to a docking station, Gotcha Bike operates primarily through a smartphone app or computer and uses bike racks already installed on campus.

“We’ve gotten rid of that model, and we’ve installed all the technology on the back of the bike. So a user – student, faculty member, visitor – can create an account through their smartphone, locate the bikes through GPS on their phone, walk up to the bike, unlock it and then run around and turn it in to a corral without using a docking station,” Flood said.

The bike locks attach securely to a magnetic strip on the side of each bike. The fleet boasts a handful of other technologies, like lights that turn on when the rider starts pedaling and stay on after the bike is stopped for nighttime safety. The bikes also self-charge as the riders pedal, along with capturing energy with a solar panel. A keypad and screen on the back of the bike allow riders to report maintenance requests and keep up with miles traveled, calories burned, CO2 emissions reduced and money saved biking versus driving a car.

“We designed the bike to be as bulletproof as possible and designed for college bike share,” Flood said. “We tried to do a few things that made it not only a unique bike, but fit a college bike share really well. We went with an aluminum frame, and there are a few reasons for that. One, it’s lightweight. It’s designed to be a co-ed bike, so it doesn’t matter if you’re tall or short, you can use a Gotcha bike.

“Aluminum is weatherproof,” he continued. “These are going to be outside year-round, so we wanted to make sure they won’t rust. They’ve got puncture-resistant tires, so the hassle of your tires running flat, you won’t have any issue of that. The seat is Kevlar, so you won’t have a soaking wet seat when you walk out. And what we think is really neat is, we’ve removed the chain, so this is a belt drive. There’s no metal chain; it’s just a rubber belt similar to a belt drive that operates in your car. No grease, nothing like that. And all of the lock technology is on the back.”

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The company provides maintenance and has partnered with local bike shop Southern Trails for day-to-day upkeep.

Riders get two free hours each day, and each additional hour is $5 up to a total of $25. The idea is to keep time short to ensure riders are using the bike share correctly.

“We want to make sure it’s a bike share, not a bike mine,” AU Parking Services Manager Don Andre said, adding riders can rent the bikes for a full day of trail riding or biking longer distances, if desired.

Flood added keeping the bike share running smoothly also relies on having the right number of bikes.

“So, say it takes you 15 minutes to bike across campus. The idea is you bike, lock your bike back up and go to class,” he said. “When you come out, somebody else has probably brought another bike. So you’re not necessarily going to ride the same bike you came in on. But if everybody’s using the system and it’s healthy and maintained correctly, then there’s always a bike available going where you need to go.”

But if riders know they’ll only be off the bike for a few minutes, they can opt for a 15-minute hold.

“One really cool feature is if the student wants to park the bike and grab coffee, they can actually lock it and put the bike on hold, instead of ending the ride and reinitiating that process. They can hold the reservation and keep it active,” said Katie Sargeant, director of Gotcha Bike.

There are about 3,000 registered bikes on Auburn’s campus each year. Out of that 3,000, Andre estimates half belong to students who pick up an inexpensive bike at a discount store just to get around campus.

“We end up with 1,500 at the end of the year because they don’t want them,” he said. “A lot of them are not bikers; they just buy it to get around campus. And that’s what this is for.”

Over the next couple of years, Andre hopes to grow the fleet to between 150 and 200, based on demand.

Gotcha Bike is designed to be a sponsored model without upfront equipment cost to universities. Institutions can opt to self-sponsor or partner with a corporate brand while Gotcha Bike funds the bikes, locks and technology. Auburn’s bikes feature the university’s iconic interlocking AU and “War Eagle Bike Share.” Eventually, Andre said, the bikes will also have secondary sponsors.

The company has contracts with Auburn, Georgia Tech, Florida State, University of Delaware and Northern Kentucky with the goal of expanding to universities nationwide.
The Gotcha Group began its partnership with Auburn in late 2010 when they brought Gotcha Ride to campus, a three-car fleet of eco-friendly vehicles for college students driven by other college students. Over the last year, the two have worked to develop the Gotcha Bike program, focusing on technology and student input.

"The partnership has been really strong. So when we developed this program, the university got very excited about it," Flood said. "It seemed to make a lot of strategic sense to bring another concept to the campus."

In considering options for transportation to encourage a more sustainable, green campus, university officials found a bike share program was the perfect choice.

"There’s not any parking on campus, and the cost of parking is just too expensive," Andre said. With the sustainability issue, what we try to look at is what we can do to provide students a way to get around campus. We just kept looking and looking and decided a bike share program was the best thing to do.

"I think it’s really going to help students get around."

The fleet is expected to be ready for student use soon.
RECRUITING

Top prospects visit UA

By Andrew Bone
Tidesports.com Recruiting Analyst

The heat is on for the University of Alabama with national signing day coming on the first Wednesday in February. Alabama had several top prospects on campus for official visits this past weekend and has an even bigger weekend coming with all the stars flocking to Tuscaloosa with UA’s national championship celebration scheduled for Saturday.

Alabama had 15 official visitors on campus this past weekend and one unofficial visitor. Six players had already committed to the Crimson Tide, including Kendell Jones, four-star defensive tackle from Shoemaker High School in Killeen, Texas; Quinnen Williams, four-star defensive end from Wenonah High School in Birmingham; Trevon Diggs, four-star wide receiver from

The Avalon School in Gaithersburg, Md.; Brendan Scales, three-star tight end from Lafayette High School in Wildwood, Mo.; Riley Cole, three-star linebacker from Oneonta High School; and Joshua Perry, three-star safety from Amite High School in Louisiana. Diggs was in Tuscaloosa for an unofficial visit.

"Everything went great," Williams said. "I really enjoyed being around all the people I am going to be playing with down there and all the people they are recruiting. I loved the home feel. The whole football staff did a really good job of trying to get to know you better. The food they had was great. The shrimp and grits at Chuck’s was my favorite meal of the weekend."

Several key recruiting targets on campus were A.J. Brown, Rivals100 wide receiver from Starkville High School in Mississippi; Keith Gavin, four-star
wide receiver from Wakulla High School in Crawfordville, Fla.; Jared Mayden, four-star cornerback from Sachse High School in Texas; Drake Davis, four-star wide receiver and LSU commitment from IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla.; Mykel Jones, Rivals100 wide receiver from Patterson High School in Louisiana; and Nick Eubanks, four-star tight end from American Heritage High School in Plantation, Fla.

"Alabama was great," Brown said via Twitter. "I enjoyed myself. That's all y'all need to know. Stay tuned."

Other visitors were Jack Jones, five-star cornerback from Poly High School in Long Beach, Calif.; Amir Rasul, four-star running back and Florida State commitment from Coral Gables High School in Florida; Vosean Joseph, three-star linebacker and Florida commitment from Norland High School in Miami; and Sci Martin, three-star defensive end and TCU commitment from McDonough 35 High School in New Orleans.

"I would say they are definitely fighting with Florida at the top right now," Joseph said. "They are the only two schools I am considering. I like everything about Alabama: the coaches, the way they work, and the way the team puts in work."

Nick Saban and the Crimson Tide coaching staff will have a slew of top prospects in town this weekend including eight five-stars: Ben Davis, linebacker from Gordo High School; Mack Wilson, linebacker from Carver High School in Montgomery; Demetris Robertson, athlete from Savannah Christian School in Georgia; Mecole Hardman, athlete from Elbert County High School in Bowman, Ga.; Jeffery Simmons, defensive end from Noxubee County High School in Macon, Miss.; Jonathan Kongbo, defensive end from Arizona Western Community College in Yuma, Ariz.; Terrell Hall, defensive end from St. John's College in Washington, D.C.; and Tyler Vaughts, wide receiver from Bishop Amat High School in La Puente, Calif.

The other top Alabama targets visiting Tuscaloosa include Nigel Knott, Rivals100 cornerback from Germantown High School in Madison, Miss.; Shymie Carter, four-star cornerback from Kentwood High School in Louisiana; Dontavius Jackson, four-star linebacker from Elisk High School in Houston; Nigel Warner, Rivals100 safety from Peachtree Ridge High School in Suwanee, Ga.; Landon Dickerson, Rivals100 offensive lineman from South Caldwell High School in Hudson, N.C.; D'Vaughn Pennamon, four-star running back and Ole Miss commitment from Manvel High School in Texas; and Ahmmon Richards, four-star wide receiver from Wellington High School in Florida.

TideSports.com has interviews with the prospects who are visiting campus and whom coaches are visiting as well as a breakdown of where each top uncommitted prospect stands as of this week. Stay tuned daily.

— Andrew Bone is the senior recruiting analyst for TideSports.com. Follow him on Twitter @ AndrewJBone.
How Lane Kiffin saved his career at Alabama, helped Nick Saban win another title

By: John Talty

As Lane Kiffin's kids celebrated in piles of confetti, super agent Jimmy Sexton walked over to the Alabama offensive coordinator with a big smile and congratulated him.

It was a big night for Sexton and one of his most controversial clients. The once radioactive Kiffin has been saved by Alabama and again many could argue he has a resume worthy of a head coaching opportunity. He wasn't sure he'd ever get back to a moment like Monday night's national championship win over Clemson, or ever get another chance of hoisting a championship trophy after all of his much-publicized failures.

It was on his mind before the game started when Kiffin, who rarely uses Twitter, tweeted at Reggie Bush and Vince Young, "I've been waiting ten years and seven days...RTR," referencing his time as a USC assistant when he helped guide the Trojans to a national championship in 2004, which was later vacated due to NCAA violations. USC then lost the 2005 national championship to Texas, led by Young.

"It just hit me earlier today how long it had been and telling our players you don't know when you're going to get another," Kiffin said. "You just always think you're in a dynasty, we'll be there next year or the year after, you don't know if you'll ever get one. It had been 10 years since the last one and I felt like I screwed up the last one in the game so much."

Kiffin didn't screw up in Monday's 45-40 national championship win against Clemson. The Alabama offensive coordinator dusted off little-used tight end O.J. Howard for 208 yards and two touchdowns to lead the Crimson Tide offensively.

"We just felt we would save him for this game," Kiffin joked. "We didn't want to wear him out in the first 14 games."

Kiffin wasn't the most popular hire outside of Tuscaloosa when Nick Saban called him after he was fired at USC. It seemed like an odd pairing from the outside, but Saban respected Kiffin's offensive mind and believed he could help Alabama go more up-tempo. He delivered in 2014, turning a former running back into one of the most prolific passers in Alabama history. But Year One ended in New Orleans amid complaints Kiffin should have run the ball more late in a Sugar Bowl loss to Ohio State.

He had opportunities to go to the NFL, but wanted to come back for another chance to learn under Saban. He felt he had unfinished business after the season-ending loss to the Buckeyes.

"I think it's been a great two years, just to be a part of it," Kiffin said. "To see how (Saban) handles all of the situations, I take notes on it. Maybe I'll write a book someday."

See next page
Returning to Alabama didn't come without its share of challenges. Kiffin had to replace his starting quarterback, his Biletnikoff Award-winning receiver, one of the more productive running backs in the SEC and multiple offensive linemen. What worked so well with Blake Sims and Amari Cooper wasn’t a real possibility for this year’s group, forcing Kiffin to evolve and go more run-heavy.

He had to mold and adjust around quarterback Jake Coker. It was an awkward relationship for the two at first, and Coker all but said Monday night he didn't like Kiffin when he first arrived in Tuscaloosa. The two were very different, and it took time for a quarterback from south Alabama and a coach from California to start speaking the same language.

"We started off with a different relationship because we were so different and after the Ole Miss game we put everything together, figured everything out and found a way to get it done," Coker said. "I can't tell you how much he's helped me and I can't tell you how much I appreciate him."

Kiffin adjusted his offense around the personnel he had and was rewarded Monday night as a typically defense-heavy Alabama program scored 45 points to win its 16th national championship. With a swarm of reporters around the victorious offensive coordinator, he admitted he never expected his next title would ever come working for Nick Saban. His career took a different path than he expected after working as a head coach for the Oakland Raiders, Tennessee and then USC. But after all the trials and tribulations Kiffin has gone through since his days working for Pete Carroll, his favorite national championship is the one he won at Alabama, he said.

"I think now because you appreciate it more," Kiffin said. "We were so young, and we were just kids kind of, and then all of a sudden we are winning 34 straight, and this is kind of easy. Sometimes you have to have it taken away, lose, have some rough seasons and then you appreciate this more."

Before the game, Kiffin joked about getting left at the airport tarmac after USC athletic director Pat Haden fired him. It was typical Kiffin deadpan humor, poking fun at his past failures, but then he got left behind at the stadium again Monday night as the team buses pulled away while he finished another interview. The images quickly spread on social media, showing poor Lane Kiffin left behind once again --- this time wearing a Miller High Life trucker hat.

But when you win a national championship and help get Alabama back atop the mountain, you hitch a ride in Saban's Yukon on the way out.

Saban and Kiffin might be college football's odd couple, two vastly different personalities and styles. Yet as that Yukon pulled out of the University of Phoenix Stadium, it carried with it two coaches that helped each other immeasurably. Kiffin successfully rehabilitated his tarnished reputation in Tuscaloosa while helping an old school coach evolve into a new world of college football.
Monday night's celebration culminated as symbiotic a relationship either coach has ever had.

"I can't imagine writing a better story for the last two years unless we won last year too," a beaming Kiffin said. "It's been really exciting."
Well worth the pain

Tide lives on the edge, writes a championship story for the ages

No one ever said it was going to be easy, but no one really knew it would be this hard.

How hard was it?

No national championship is a walk on the beach at sunset. None of Alabama’s four national championships in the last seven years came without blood, sweat or tears.

The first one in 2009 required two great escapes with a Rocky Top blocked field goal and an Iron Bowl comeback. The second one in 2011 needed help to get a do-over against LSU. The third one in 2012 required more outside assistance after Johnny Football came to town as well as a little AJ-to-TJ resuscitation in Death Valley.

Nick Saban’s dynasty is all the more impressive because it hasn’t been all wine and Rose Bowls.

But this one? This one was more than a long slog down a hard road. This one was more like a hike up Camelback Mountain — with Mount Cody on your back.

It was the longest, steepest, hardest climb of all. By the numbers alone, this championship journey took 18 games, more than any Saban team had ever played in a single season, but raw numbers don’t capture the raw effort and emotion this team spent along the way.

This team played under more pressure for a longer period of time than any of Saban’s title-winning teams. That Sept. 19 Ole Miss loss in the season’s third game was the earliest on the calendar and on the schedule. It made every game from that point a playoff game.

Think about it. This team won 12 straight must-win games. Seven of them against ranked teams. Seven of them away from home.

To live on the edge for that long and not fall off separates this team from its predecessors.

This team had a first-year starting quarterback, which isn’t unique to this dynasty, but Jake Coker encountered more obstacles than Greg McElroy in 2009 or AJ McCarron in 2011. Coker had to win the job twice.

He started the first two games but didn’t truly become the starter until he came off the bench in that Ole Miss defeat. It’ll be a trivia question and a teachable moment for decades to come. Alabama didn’t go undefeated during this championship season. Coker as a starter did.

He personified this team’s refusal to stay down.

Derrick Henry finally arrived at the intersection of talent, patience and toughness, taking on more and more of the burden as the season progressed. The more Lane Kiffin fed him, the more Henry wanted to eat and the more his teammates drew strength from the big back who would run for more yards than anyone in SEC history to earn the program’s second Heisman Trophy.

Beyond the toughness and the talent, Kirby Smart represented the epitome of this team’s togetherness. In early December, he got his dream job as the head coach at Georgia, his alma mater, but stayed to finish this job for these players. The final month was a grind even for a grinder like Smart, and it spoke volumes about what The Process really means.

At its heart, it’s not a machine. It’s a living, breathing thing made up of dedicated players, coaches and staffers who put their personal ambitions aside for the greater good.

Smart’s defense was the rock on which Saban built this dynasty, and this unit was one of their best. Combined with Kiffin’s second Alabama offense, which morphed from pass-happy to run-heavy to fit the talent, it made for a formidable combination.

As good as that defense was, as good as Henry and Coker became, this team didn’t pancake everyone in its path after Ole Miss. It trailed Arkansas late in the third quarter. It trailed Tennessee late in the fourth quarter. It found a way at every crossroads but still didn’t control its own fate. It needed an overtime miracle for Arkansas to beat Ole Miss just to reach the SEC Championship Game.

Saban family reunions in that game against Jim McElwain and Florida and in the Cotton Bowl semifinal against Mark Dantonio and Michigan State were picnics, but then came the hardest national championship game of all.

Clemson was the best team Saban’s program had met on the ultimate stage, led by the best individual player in Deshaun Watson, and the Tide found itself trailing and flailing to start the fourth quarter. These were deep, murky, uncharted waters for the dynasty, which had never had to come from behind after halftime in a national title game.

Even tied with 10:34 left after a field goal, it felt like Alabama’s time was running out.

And then Saban made the most outrageous decision. Adam Griffith executed the most precise onside kick. Coker threw the most important touchdown pass to O.J. Howard. Kenyan Drake took the most cathartic kickoff return to the house, and Henry ended everyone’s journey with one final push into the end zone.

All of those players had suffered in different ways to reach their moment. It was the story of a special season for a special team.

This championship march was never going to be easy, but a dynasty doesn’t fear difficulty. It welcomes it, overcomes it and remembers it with one more trophy.
Former player: Changes needed to protect kids

Kevin Drake

- Birmingham native, father of three girls
- Played football at UAB, four years in the NFL and three years in NFL Europe/XFL
- “Loving support of a wonderful wife” allows him to manage life despite concussion-related issues
- Owner, Drake Fitness Inc. and program director for his family foundation, the Wise Up! Initiative (www.wiseupinitiative.org)

formed to create awareness and education around the issue of concussions
Tips for improving football safety:
- Strictly follow existing regulations that will not allow an injured athlete to return to play without being cleared by a physician.
- Better training and coaching in youth leagues to “take the head out of the game” whether in tackling techniques or with the ball.

Remove pads and helmets in youth leagues until age 14. “Kids can learn how to play the game properly until that age. ... We can introduce tackling at 14 when they can control their bodies better and lessen the risk of concussions.”
Mitigate risk, don’t eliminate sports

Dr. Sara Gould

Under the bright stadium lights, an athlete goes down. The once boisterous crowd holds its breath and strains to catch a glimpse of the athlete lying on the field surrounded by athletic trainers, physicians and coaches. Somewhere on the sidelines, a mother prays, “Please, God. Don’t let it be...”

The end to that sentence, a mother’s worst fear, has changed dramatically over the past decade. While mothers of athletes everywhere worry about career-ending torn tendons and blown out knees, a more insidious harm has increasingly stalked the injured list over the past 10 years — the concussion.

It’s a buzzword that has everyone from major professional athletic leagues to pee-wee football teams talking. But what exactly is a concussion? And the question parents pose to me in my clinic most often — How do we know if our son or daughter has one?

With over 70 published definitions of concussion, the answer to those questions is complicated. Most experts agree that a concussion results from a head injury and is diagnosed by a set of signs and symptoms that indicate a functional disturbance.

To help explain that concept, I often use the analogy of a snow globe. Shake a snow globe and the snow swirls in a chaotic pattern. Nothing inside the snow globe is broken or damaged, but you can’t see as clearly as before with all the swirling snow.

Set the snow globe down for a few minutes and everything will settle just like before.

This is a vast oversimplification of the chemically complex structure that is our brain, but it’s a good place to start a discussion on the subject.

As more research about the long term consequences of concussions comes to light, some parents are wondering, “Should I allow my child to continue to play sports?”

The answer to that question is a resounding yes, in my opinion. The rationale? The number one cause of concussion is not soccer or football or rugby. It’s car accidents.

It’s also important to consider the innumerable physiologic and psychological benefits associated with sports. Children learn important lessons about cooperation, goal setting and teamwork. They are less likely to engage in hazardous alcohol drinking as adolescents. They are more likely to be physically fit. Sports have so many benefits that extend beyond the childhood years.

That’s not to say anything goes, however. We know some practices are dangerous (Oklahoma drills in pee-wee leagues, for instance). There are things that can be done to limit the risk of concussions while preserving all of the benefits of sports. For example, the Seattle Seahawks implemented several techniques to try to make tackling safer.

Another concept that needs further study is the age at which it is safe to begin tackling. Youth baseball had great success in implementing age restrictions on pitch counts and mandated rest days to prevent upper extremity injuries among young players. Similarly, age restrictions for tackling and mandated limits on contact practices could be imposed in football to mitigate the risk of concussion.

These are just a few examples of how we might make sports safer. As we discover more about concussions and the aftermath of the injury, the more dedicated we must be as parents, physicians, coaches and players to making sports as safe as possible.

The answer lies in mitigating the risk, not eliminating the sport.
NFL concussion settlement lag delays chance for better life

Marlene Beasley

For thousands of retired NFL players, the settlement approved in April over concussions represents a guarantee that they will be taken care of in the future if they develop a devastating neurological disease. For my husband Terry, who has suffered from the effects of repeated head injuries for over 20 years, it represents an immediate change of life.

We joined the lawsuit against the NFL to secure medical care and compensation for retirees like Terry, who after careers in the NFL began to develop terrible neurological disorders. However, we feared it would become an uncertain, emotionally draining and drawn out process. Since Terry needed help immediately, we simply could not afford to waste time. When a federal judge approved the settlement between the League and former players, for the first time we felt a sense of peace, knowing we would finally get the help Terry needs to live a more comfortable life.

Unfortunately, even though 99 percent of retirees supported the deal, a tiny minority has prevented us from receiving the financial support players like Terry need to continue fighting for their health. By deciding to appeal, they have made Terry’s already difficult life even more complicated.

I first met my husband as a nurse in 1992 during one of his early hospital stays. The condition of the man I remember as an All-American football player has declined dramatically since that day. He is suffering from dementia and plagued by an unbearable pain that forces him to live in a room where the blinds are drawn even on the nicest summer day.

After years of watching Terry suffer, this settlement offered the lifeline we had been waiting for. The compensation fund is also uncapped and guaranteed to last for 65 years, ensuring these benefits will be available for any other retired player who may develop similar post-concussion symptoms.

For our family, the financial support from this settlement will help us afford Terry’s medication and will allow us to visit physicians that may find a way to help him manage the type of excruciating pain he is suffering today. Equally as important, it will help give Terry back some of the little comforts in life that many of us take for granted. It will finally allow us to afford an adjustable mattress, a walk-in-tub and a golf cart to help my husband leave the house and visit neighbors.

By devoting funds to brain injury research, player safety and education programs, the settlement is also ensuring that future generations of football players do not suffer the ways Terry has.

For someone with three grandsons who play football and want nothing more than to be like their “Papa Terry”, making the game safer for current and future football players is extremely important.

If these benefits had been available many years ago, Terry and more than 20,000 other retired football players might not be suffering from these horrific brain injuries. It crushes me to think that those few individuals who have appealed the settlement do not truly understand what is at stake, and have no idea what Terry and others like him go through. For now, Terry and I await each day hoping that these appeals will be dropped or dismissed by the court. I have watched Terry suffer for too long from a career in the NFL, and I am desperate to provide him with the best care and comfort I possibly can. I urge the court to rule swiftly and approve the settlement so that I can finally have my wish, allowing my husband to live out the rest of his life in solace.

Beasley is the wife of Terry Beasley, an All-American at Auburn University and a receiver for the San Francisco 49ers.
Now that the Crimson Tide coach has won his fifth national championship, should he be considered the best college football coach of all time?

FROM AL.COM AND WIRE REPORTS

Step aside, Bear.
There’s a new legend in Tuscaloosa.
At the risk of stirring up the everlasting wrath of the Houndstooth Nation, Nick Saban just might have locked up the title as the greatest coach in college football history with his fourth national title in seven years Monday night.

And, yes, that would include Bear Bryant.
If there were any doubts about Saban’s genius — and how could there be? — he pulled off one of the gutsiest calls you’ll see with another championship hanging in the balance.

Alabama, which was manhandled much of the second half by top-ranked Clemson, had just tied it at 24-all on Adam Griffith’s field goal with 10:34 remaining in an instant classic of a contest.

The crowd of more than 75,000 settled back into its seats, eagerly anticipating what the response would be from Deshaun Watson and the Tigers.

Saban wouldn’t give them the chance.

Instead, he called for Griffith to pooch the kickoff toward the Clemson bench, the ball traveling no more than 15 yards. Marlon Humphrey, a redshirt freshman defensive back from Hoover, ran up under it without breaking stride, with no one from the orange-clad Tigers around.

Humphrey couldn’t take it any farther.
It didn’t matter.
Alabama ball.

See next page
"If we wouldn't have gotten that," Saban said, unable to resist one of his customary pokes at the media, "y'all would be killing me."

Two plays after Alabama recovered the onside kick, Coker launched a pass down the middle of the field. O.J. Howard hauled it in — again with no one around — for a 51-yard touchdown that put Alabama ahead to stay. The Tide went on to a 45-40 victory.

With that, Saban's legacy was assured.

The best ever? Maybe.

He is tied with Frank Leahy for the second-most coaching titles as determined by the Associated Press. Throw in a fifth that Saban won at LSU — a BCS crown that is every bit as legitimate, even though it was shared with AP champ Southern Cal — and he's in hallowed territory.

"I mean, that's an incredible accomplishment," Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said. "It's really hard to win one."

Bryant is the only coach with five AP titles. He won them all at Alabama over a 19-season span, showing an impressive ability to adapt to the changing times by winning the first three in the 1960s with all-white teams while his state was embroiled in the civil rights movement, the last two after switching to the wishbone offense and recruiting a large number of African-American players.

Saban has piled up five titles in the last 13 seasons, at two different schools, even while spending two ill-fated years with the NFL's Miami Dolphins. When also considering the stricter scholarship limits, longer schedules and much more competitive landscape in today's college game, Saban's achievement clearly stands supreme.

Last week, Saban refused to put himself in the same league as Bryant. He acknowledged Bryant's enormous role in making Alabama what it is today, establishing the sort of tradition and image that, in some respects, made things a bit easier for those that came afterward.

Then again, every coach who followed the Bear, with the notable exception of Gene Stallings, was overwhelmed by Bryant's legacy. Ray Perkins, Bill Curry, Mike DuBose, Dennis Franchione. Mike Price (who didn't even make it to his first game). Mike Shula.

Not Saban.

Perkins, following in Bryant's shoes, restocked the program with talent that helped Curry win an SEC title in 1989 and jump-start the facility arms race in the SEC with the building of the school's football-only complex that includes the Tide's indoor field.

Perkins got a few nos from the administration to other improvements such as increasing the salary of his staff. Saban didn't.

Saban took over a program in tatters in 2007, spent a year rebuilding it, and quickly restored the Tide to not just national prominence, but national dominance.


And, now, a fourth title with the Tide.

Just don't expect him to spend any time reflecting on where he's been.

"As long as you do this, it's always about your next play, it's always about the next game," Saban said.

His legacy? "I've never really ever thought too much about all that."

For all those who think Saban leads a joyless life, that all he cares about is winning football games and "the process," he'd like to set the record straight.

"I'm a very happy person."

Of course, Saban spoke with his jaw tightly clinched, a steely glare and a smile (for a change).

This is the face of college football.

At 64, Saban is closing in on retirement age but shows no signs of slowing down. Love him or hate him, Saban is considered the best there is, at worse one of the best.

The formula isn't all that complicated. Recruit the best players. Hire the best assistants. Adapt to the times but never waver from your core beliefs.

"He's great at recruiting, and he's great at putting a staff together," said Clemson's Dabo Swinney, a former Alabama player and assistant coach. "The key to being successful, as far as maintaining consistency in your program, is your evaluation in the recruiting process and then your development of those guys. And especially developing those guys maybe
when they're not the starter. I think coach Saban obviously does a phenomenal job of that."

Alabama (14-1) has played only three regular-season games over the past eight years without some sort of national championship implications. The Tide is 98-12 during that span, with eight of the defeats decided by a touchdown or less.

More telling, Saban has the rest of the mighty Southeastern Conference playing catch up.

No one's job is safe, not even a coach such as Mark Richt, who won nearly 75 percent of his games at Georgia over a 15-year period but wound up getting chased out of town, largely because the Bulldogs haven't won a league title since Saban's arrival. Tennessee is on its fourth coach (Butch Jones) since 2007. Florida and Auburn have each had three coaches during that time.

Florida and Georgia have even turned to Saban protégés. Jim McElwain is a former Alabama offensive coordinator who just completed his first season with the Gators. Kirby Smart, the Tide's defensive coordinator, took over at Georgia after the CFP championship game.

LSU's Les Miles is the only SEC coach who's managed to survive in the Saban era, and even the Mad Hatter barely held onto his job this season. The biggest notch against him? Five straight losses to Alabama.

Saban might allow himself to smile if the Tide wins another national title, but the celebration won't last long.

"Coach has said it before: You win the trophy, you hold it up, you take a picture and you hand it away -- and you go get ready to win the next one," said Lane Kiffin, the Tide's offensive coordinator, before playing Clemson.

If that seems like a grim existence, well, so be it.

Saban makes no apologies.

"I'm a very serious person about trying to do the things to have a very good program that benefits the players personally, academically and athletically, helps them have more success in life for having been involved in the program," he said. "So I'm a serious person, but I'm a very happy person. And I have a lot of fun, I really do."

During the offseason, he finds time to fish and play golf. He enjoys spending time with family and a close circle of friends. He gets away to a beach house in southwest Florida and a lake house in the north Georgia mountains on Lake Hartwell.

"It's not like I like to go to the karaoke machine and sing and all that," he said, "but there's a lot of things that I enjoy."

Of course, coaching comes first.

Saban has given no indication that the end is near.

If someone tries to get him to reflect on his legacy, he'll quickly steer the conversation in a different direction.

"I'm so concerned about this team, these players, what they've worked to accomplish," Saban said. "I've got no time to think about that stuff."

If he ever finds the time, he'd see that he's already one of the greatest coaches in college football history.

Right up there with the Bear.
Nick Saban
The College Years

Toledo

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* - Saban resigned before bowl

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Alabama

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* - Wins vacated due to rule violations

Tracking the Bear

Alabama's win over Clemson in the College Football Playoff National Championship Game gave Nick Saban his fifth national title in 20 years as a head coach. Saban now has four national titles at Alabama and is closing in on legendary coach Paul "Bear" Bryant's record six national championships.

6 Paul "Bear" Bryant, Alabama
5 Nick Saban, Alabama
4 Frank Leahy, Notre Dame
4 John McKay, USC
Alabama gymnastics jumps up to No. 4 in latest rankings

By: Sean Landry

Special to The Tuscaloosa News

After opening the season with a score of 196.3 in a loss at UCLA, the University of Alabama gymnastics team has climbed from No. 6 to No. 4 in the latest rankings after winning two meets last weekend.

The Crimson Tide recorded a score of 197.175 against Missouri last Friday and a 196.875 against Auburn on Sunday, moving the team’s average score to 196.783. Florida, Oklahoma and Michigan lead the Crimson Tide, while UCLA rounds out the top five. Only Florida has scored higher than Alabama’s 197.175, with a 197.675 at home against UCLA last Friday.

Alabama is ranked ninth in the nation on vault, sixth on uneven bars and balance beam, and third on floor exercise.

Individually, junior Amanda Jetter leads the Crimson Tide, tied for No. 1 on floor exercise with a 9.95 average. In all-around competition, sophomore Mackenzie Brannan is ranked No. 8 after recording a 39.35 against UCLA, her only all-around competition this year. On vault, Brannan is ranked 10th with a 9.875 average, and senior Lauren Beers is ranked 12th on balance beam with an average score of 9.867.

Sims recovering from injury

Senior gymnast Carley Sims didn’t compete at all in the Crimson Tide’s two-meet weekend, though she did warm up before Friday’s meet against Missouri. Alabama coach Dana Duckworth said Sims’ absence is driven by a nagging ankle injury.

“In the beginning of January, there’s no need to push it,” Duckworth said. “She needs to recover, we need to figure out what it is and we need to go from there. It wasn’t worth the risk. The short-term gain for this meet wasn’t worth the long-term desire we have for her at the end of the season.”

UA basketball commit honored

Terrance Ferguson, who committed to the Alabama men’s basketball program last summer, was named to the prestigious McDonald’s All-America team on Monday.

Ferguson, a 6-foot-6 shooting guard from Dallas, did not sign with Alabama in the early period but has maintained that he is committed to sign with UA in the late signing period in April. Should he follow through on that commitment, Ferguson would be the first UA signee to appear in the McDonald’s All-America game since Devonta Pollard in 2012.
The game will be played March 30 at the United Center in Chicago. Ferguson will play for the East team, which will be coached by Jack Doss, a longtime legend in the Alabama high school ranks and currently the head coach at J.O. Johnson High School in Huntsville.

Also selected to the team was Michigan State signee Josh Langford of Madison Academy. Langford is the first player from the state of Alabama chosen for the McDonald’s game since Demarcus Cousins in 2009.

Alabama signed two players in the early signing period. Braxton Key, a 6-foot-8 forward, is averaging 12.3 points and 6.8 rebounds per game for Oak Hill (Va.) Prep, one of the nation’s top teams with a record of 26-1. Armand Davis, a 6-foot-6 junior college transfer, is leading the College of Southern Idaho, currently 15-6, with averages of 14.6 points and 5.6 rebounds per game.

— Cecil Hurt, Sports Editor

Alabama women’s basketball break down

The Alabama women’s basketball team defeated the Georgia Bulldogs 64-50 Sunday. With a total of 3,732 people watching the game, Alabama set a new attendance record in Foster Auditorium. The number falls in at 13th all-time, including games in Coleman Coliseum.

Sunday's win also marked the first time since 2006 that Alabama has won two of its first five SEC games. It is 13-5, 2-3 in conference.

Alabama has had 11 games that finished with at least three players scoring in double digits. Each one of those games resulted in a win. This happened against Georgia when sophomores Karyla Middlebrook and Hannah Cook scored 17 points and 14 points, respectively, and Senior Nikki Hegstetter finished with 10 points and 11 rebounds for a double-double. Leading Alabama, Cook averages 13.1 points per game.

Last season, Alabama made 63.0 percent of its free throws. Now, it’s making 72.8 percent, which ranks the team third in the SEC. Breaking down the percentage, Alabama has made 275-of-378 free throws. It is ranked 15th nationally in successful attempts and is ranked 23rd in overall attempts.

Against Georgia, Alabama made 21-of-26 shots from the free throw line, resulting in an 80.8 shooting percentage. Middlebrook and Cook both sunk five of their free throws on Sunday. Senior Khadijah Carter made all four of her attempts, which reflects her now 15-for-15 record.

Alabama travels to Gainesville, Florida Thursday to play the No. 22 Gators, who Georgia had defeated 71-61 just days before playing in Tuscaloosa.

— Terrin Waack, Special to The Tuscaloosa News
ALABAMA GYMNASTICS

Community outreach part of Tide's routine

By Sean Landry
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

When a tornado outbreak struck Tuscaloosa on April 27, 2011, Dana Duckworth was only an assistant coach of the University of Alabama gymnastics team. She was a choreographer, recruiter and coach, full-time, but when word came that the storms had left local schools without books in their libraries, she added a role: co-founder and board member of Read Bama Read, a charity seeking to provide enough money to restock those libraries.

Nearly five years later, as head coach for the Crimson Tide, Duckworth is still involved with Read Bama Read, alongside Camp Smile-a-Mile for pediatric cancer patients, the Ronald McDonald House for families with children requiring long-term hospital care, and the Power of Pink, the breast cancer initiative started by her coaching predecessor, Sarah Patterson.

No. 10 Arkansas at No. 6 Alabama

Where: Coleman Coliseum
When: Friday, 6 p.m.
Records: Alabama 2-1,
Arkansas 1-3
TV: SECNetwork
Radio: 90.7 FM

“Im a deep-seated believe that if you aren't giving back, whether it's to a cause or to someone else, then you truly aren't living, you aren't growing as a person,” Duckworth said. “If I believe that and I want our ladies to believe in that, then I feel that you have to walk the walk. I'm so proud of the fact that Read Bama Read was launched and we've done amazing things. I'm honored to carry on the legacy of Power of Pink and what that represents. Then you add Camp Smile-a-Mile with children that have cancer, and Ronald

See next page
McDonald with families that have children who have needs and have to spend a long time in the hospital, offering somewhat of a normal life in that situation. You realize you're taking this sport and using this platform of gymnastics for something so much bigger than you, so and I feel like that's what we were made for."

Duckworth has emphasized community involvement for her team, making each meet about more than winning. Last Sunday's meet in Birmingham raised thousands of dollars for Camp Smile-a-Mile and Ronald McDonald House. Friday's meet, Academic Achievement Night, will raise funds for Read Bama Read, and the next home meet, Feb. 5, will be the team's annual Power of Pink Meet.

"It's good to have something to compete for because, yes we do it for ourselves and we do it for our families and the university, but to take it to another level to the community and out in the world for charity and stuff, it's cool to do your gymnastics for someone else," sophomore Kiana Winston said. "In the end, when people watch and have you to cheer for it's really cool."

Though one of the most public, the gymnastics program is far from the only team involved in the local community. Most teams have their own Pink events, and every team has its community involvement days. Duckworth said, "That impresses me more than anything he did on the football field."