SPECIAL SECTION:

GOVERNOR ROBERT BENTLEY
The inside story of how Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley’s sex scandal broke wide open

By: Amber Phillips

Anyone who has doubts about the importance of journalists in 2016 need be acquainted only with the reporting team at AL.com, the largest statewide news organization in Alabama. The group's reporters cracked open a scandal involving their governor's alleged infidelity last week and have been covering the unpredictable fallout aggressively ever since.

This scandal didn't come to them overnight; they've been hearing rumors of an affair between Gov. Robert Bentley (R) and his top political adviser, Rebekah Caldwell Mason, for months. The story finally broke open on March 22 when a fired top law enforcement official went on the record to AL.com's John Archibald about the alleged affair and offered proof. Faced with damning evidence of a taped phone conversation to a woman named Rebekah, Bentley has denied he had an affair, but few in a state accustomed to scandal believe him.

Alabama lawmakers, led by Republicans, are looking at ways to impeach him or set up a recall. An informal online AL.com poll found that 90 percent of about 30,000 respondents said Bentley should resign. Mason resigned Wednesday.

The story stretches far beyond sex, though. It's also connected to an ethics trial of the House speaker and a shadowy nonprofit that paid Mason's communications firm about $320,000 at the time of her resignation. As AL.com reporter Leada Gore said: "It's got every part of a scandal you could want."

There are a lot of moving parts, so The Fix caught up with Gore to get the latest on the scandal and her thoughts on how this is going to play out. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

THE FIX: First of all, great job.

GORE: Thank you. A lot of it has been old-fashioned, on-the-ground sources calling you, and talking to sources. We're digitally driven, but this has been a true, old-fashioned reporting process.

The issue with this whole story has been that nothing has been out in the open. Until they got rid of the director of our state police, that was the first on-the-record indication of things we had been dealing with for the last six months.

THE FIX: Speaking of that, what's it like to report on a story that requires you to sift through allegations and unsubstantiated claims and people's motives?

GORE: It was very difficult. When the governor's wife filed for divorce last August after 50 years of marriage, it came completely out of the blue -- for not just us, but for him. And so we're automatically hit with his alleged mistress's name, we're hit with everything. So we kept having to go back to what we could prove, and what we could prove was his wife filed for divorce.

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We had very good sources telling us that whether there was an affair or not, she believed that something was going on. We had sources who were unimpeachable saying she almost didn't show up for the [2015] inauguration of her husband over this. So we had to rule out some of the rumors, but it got to the point that they were so loud you couldn't ignore them.

But we consistently tried to go back to: What can we prove? What can we show? And for me personally, and for many of us, what that became was the fact that the governor's chief adviser, whether he was having an improper relationship with her or not, was not a paid state employee. The people just didn't know who she was paid by.

THE FIX: There are so many moving parts in this ongoing scandal. Can you lay out for us what we know and what we don't?

GORE: What we know right now is the governor's wife filed for divorce. He claims it's a private matter. They very quickly quietly settled the divorce. Before this divorce happened -- no wait, I'm going to back [up] even further and make this even more complicated for you.

THE FIX: It is complicated.

GORE: You really need a flowchart.

Anyway, the speaker of the House, Mike Hubbard (R), is indicted on corruption charges. That has dragged on forever. So the governor has this old-time friend who was a legislator with him who he puts in charge of our state law enforcement agency. They get crossways -- which is an Alabama term you can use -- over the handling of an affidavit they are seeking related to the speaker's trial. The top cop says, 'I'm going to give this affidavit because I'm not going to lie to the grand jury about some of the things going on.' The governor supposedly told him not to. When Spencer Collier [the top cop] gave that affidavit, the governor fired him.

Then Spencer Collier became the first person willing to go on the record to say, 'Yes, there was an affair.' That's what happened last week that broke it all open.

THE FIX: So now we get into the affair allegations?

GORE: Not yet. We reported in September about the governor, who was paying his chief adviser, Mason, through a 501(c)(4) [nonprofit] he set up with his campaign funds. At the time, everybody was like, 'Yeah, that's interesting, but not that great of a story.' After this happened, it became a bigger story, because she's now implicated in a personal relationship with the governor.

THE FIX: Okay, then Collier [the state's now-fired top cop] "proved" there was an affair. What happened next?

GORE: So Collier makes the claim, then the governor comes out that afternoon and admits that he made inappropriate comments but he doesn't elaborate on the timing or what exactly those comments were.
That afternoon, we received an audiotape from a member of Bentley's family that was a recorded phone conversation at the governor's beach house that was recorded apparently by his wife's cellphone of him making comments to his friend. And those comments were very very graphic and very, very specific. While the governor said there was not a physical relationship -- he says there was no sex involved -- it became clear there was kissing, touching.

Since that time, it has gone everywhere. Our state auditor has filed an ethics investigation, which in Alabama is extremely serious. There's also a state complaint saying he misused funds.

Mason has resigned her post. Her husband, who is a state employee -- of all things the director of the state faith-based initiative office -- is still there.

And then you get into all this crazy stuff. They all went to church together in Tuscaloosa. They've been asked to leave; he's no longer a deacon. We reported today her husband operated a separate communications company that was not on her ethics forms that received payments from the University of Alabama. And to make it even more of a tangled web, the chairman of the 501(c)(4) that the governor set up is the legal adviser to the board of trustees to the University of Alabama.

THE FIX: That's a lot of people tied up in some way to this.

GORE: It's the most convoluted, crazy mess you've ever heard. But the question everyone wants to know is: At what point is the tipping point for the governor to resign?

We're two years from picking his successor, so people are also keeping an eye on 'Where does this leave us? Do we want to go ahead and line somebody up now to take over for him, and what's their situation? Are we any better off with anybody else?'

THE FIX: Bentley says he's not going to resign. There's currently no way to force him out, though lawmakers are considering ways, whether that's impeachment or a recall. What's the likelihood of that happening?

GORE: The chances of getting either one of those through is going to be very, very difficult. They can't agree on where to go to lunch, and that's with a Republican super-majority in both houses. On top of all this, the speaker of the House's trial will start soon, and he's, what, fourth in line for command? It's almost like, how deep do we have to go to get someone who's not tainted?

THE FIX: In resigning, is there a sense Mason is taking the fall for the governor?

GORE: I don't think so. She is very much resented in Montgomery; the whole accusation that she's the 'de facto governor' was in play big-time. They see her a very willing, wily, complicit person in this.

THE FIX: But Bentley could be in trouble for using state funds to carry out this relationship with her?

GORE: Or personnel. The big question is: Did he pass the line of more failings to a criminal action? It has not been specifically proven. It has certainly been alluded to that he's used state

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resources and property and perhaps personnel to carry this out. [Editor's note: Bentley on Thursday said "there is nothing illegal" that happened.]

Or if there's any sort of telling somebody to lie -- not so much about the affair, but in connection with the Hubbard investigation. It may be one of those things where you get it on something else connected to trying to cover up the original problem. And there is certainly so much out there.

The ethics commission does not typically move very fast. We don't expect something to move next week; it could be months or a year. It's just, at what point does he see the handwriting on the wall?

One thing to remember about all of this is this is the most unlikely of adulterers. The man ran on 'I'm a Baptist, religious doctor who will fight the federal government.' He toed the party line and then when he was elected a second time, he frankly lost his mind. He starts throwing out tax increases -- it's almost as if somebody flipped a switch and we got a different governor.

THE FIX: Let's step back. Two of the previous five governors were convicted of crimes. (Former Republican governor Guy Hunt was convicted in 1993 for taking $200,000 from his inaugural fund for personal use, and former Democratic governor Don Siegelman is serving a seven-year prison sentence after being convicted in 2006 for corruption related to bribery.) The state's House speaker is on trial. Is this just yet another scandal for Alabama residents, or is this something more?

GORE: We've had politicians do all sorts of crazy things before. But I think the turnaround in him was so dramatic, and of all the governors you'd ever think would be running around on his wife, you would not have thought he would. And I think that's why this is so interesting, because frankly our speaker of the House being indicted, people obviously cared. But nobody really stopped during their lunchtime discussion to talk about it. Everybody's talking about this.

This is an embarrassment to the state. I hear that a lot -- that he's embarrassed us. And that takes a lot. We have a high tolerance
Gov. Bentley scandal: Jon Mason refuses to explain $245,600 from UA, couple's complex financial web

By: Connor Sheets

As the scandal over Gov. Robert Bentley's alleged sexual relationship with former senior political adviser Rebekah Mason enters its second week, Mason and her husband Jon's financial dealings have come under increasing scrutiny.

An in-depth analysis of the couple's finances reveals they have their hands in many pots of money via a complicated network of companies, political consultancy and government appointments.

Jon Mason refused to speak with AL.com about the ways he and his wife earn money, citing an ongoing state Ethics Commission inquiry into Rebekah Mason's activities. He instead provided a two-sentence statement via email Tuesday evening.

"An unfair Ethics complaint has now been filed against my wife," the statement said. "I have been advised that until that matter has been resolved, I should not respond further to media inquiries."

But a clearer picture of the Masons' financial network is beginning to emerge in the wake of former Alabama Law Enforcement Agency head Spencer Collier's allegations last week that Bentley and Rebekah Mason had a sexual relationship. On Wednesday, as the controversy continued to roil Montgomery, Rebekah Mason announced her resignation from her post as Gov. Robert Bentley's top political adviser.

Since 2010, University of Alabama records show UA has paid JRM Enterprises - a Tuscaloosa-based advertising, marketing and design company founded in 2005 by Jon Mason and operated by him ever since - a total of $245,600, categorizing the payments under "service and professional fees."

Chris Bryant, a spokesman for UA, clarified Wednesday evening via email that the payments "were for marketing and advertising services provided by JRM."

The payments continued through last month, as the university disbursed $45,450 to the company via PayPal on Feb. 9 alone.

In 2014, UA paid JRM $20,050, UA's records show. That same year, Jon Mason disclosed on the Statement of Economic Interests (SOEI) form he filed with the Alabama Ethics Commission that his household received profits of between $10,000 and $50,000 via JRM.

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In 2013, UA paid JRM $96,200, but Mason reported that JRM's profits that year were between $10,000 and $50,000 as well. Despite the fact that UA records show that the university paid JRM $30,000 in 2012, Mason failed to report any JRM income on his SOEI form that year.

Rebekah Mason did not detail JRM profits on either of the two SOEI forms she filed, which covered the period from 2012 to 2013, though she did note that her husband earned at least $1,000 through the company in 2012.

Jon Mason's financial ties to the University of Alabama predate his January 2011 appointment by Bentley to the position of executive director of the Governor's Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives, known as Serve Alabama.

The university paid Jon Mason $3,750 a month between August and December 2010, according to UA records, which categorize the payments as payroll. He remained on the payroll in early 2011, according to the records, which show that UA paid him $2,321.43 in January 2011 and $2,027.42 in February 2011. A listing on the University of Alabama's website identifies him as an instructor, but provides no information about what classes he may have taught or what department he may have worked in.

Bryant said via email that the "payroll expenses were for his work as a meteorologist at WVUA from July 2010 to January 2011." WVUA is a TV station owned by UA's board of trustees that serves the Tuscaloosa area.

Jon Mason disclosed to the Ethics Commission that he served in 2013 as a member of the Alabama Veterans Executive Network, a commission Bentley created that year to improve delivery of services to the state's veterans. It is unclear whether Mason was paid for his work on that commission.

Jon Mason also reported via SOEI forms that either he or his wife earned more than $125,000 by consulting for a single public official between 2013 and 2014. That official appears to have been Bentley, given that Rebekah Mason has said that a company she owns, RCM Communications, was paid by Bentley's re-election campaign to provide consulting, advertising and media placement services to Bentley for Governor 2014.

Jon Mason disclosed that in 2013 either he or his wife earned gross income of between $25,000 and $50,000 plus an "anticipated annual retainer" of more than $5,000 via the consulting arrangement, which earned one of the Masons another $100,000 to $150,000 in 2014. They have yet to file SOEI forms covering their activities in 2015.

Rebekah Mason founded RCM in July 2013. The firm is based out of the Masons' Tuscaloosa home just a short drive from Bentley's, according to state records, which list the nature of RCM's business as "consulting and advising services."

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A review of state and University of Alabama records showed that RCM appears not to have received any payments from state agencies or UA. But Bentley's campaign committee paid RCM $503,809.13 between July 31, 2013 and Nov. 30, 2015, according to state campaign finance filings.

Rebekah Mason released what she described as a breakdown of her pay between 2013 and 2015 on Friday. She did not provide tax forms or other incontrovertible proof that the breakdown is accurate and complete.

It says that RCM received $153,701 in 2013 – almost $96,000 of which paid for advertising. The gross payment to RCM was $57,727.

The communications firm was paid a total of just over $273,000 in 2014, of which nearly $94,000 was spent on advertising, according to Mason's breakdown. The gross profit to RCM that year, her breakdown indicated, was just over $179,000.

Rebekah Mason said that in her position as senior political adviser to Bentley in 2015 she earned $76,529 for consulting, fees and mileage reimbursements.

She admitted Friday that she was paid $15,000 by the Alabama Council for Excellent Government (ACEGOV), a 501(c) (4) "dark money" group established in February 2015 by Cooper Shattuck, general counsel for the University of Alabama board of trustees and Bentley's former legal adviser.

The Masons have also owned a Tuscaloosa communications and marketing firm called Caldwell Mason Marketing, though records of the company do not appear in the state's online business registry.

The Montgomery Advertiser reported in January 2011 that Rebekah Mason co-founded the firm in 2003. The newspaper described it at the time as an "advertising agency providing marketing, public relations and media relations services for local and regional clients."

The first archived version of the website www.caldwellmason.com available via The Wayback Machine web archive service dates to 2006. The archived website identifies the business as Caldwell Mason Marketing & Design and provides a list of clients it had worked with "over the past few years," one of which was the University of Alabama.

In addition to all of their business dealings, the Masons have also spent much of the past five years working for Bentley and the state.

Jon Mason received an annual state salary of $91,400.08 in fiscal years 2014 and 2015 for his service as head of Serve Alabama, according to state Department of Finance records. Between fiscal 2013 – when he was paid a salary of $76,999.92 – and fiscal 2014, Mason received an
18.7 percent raise. He also received $76,999.92 in fiscal 2012, his first full fiscal year as a state employee.

Meanwhile, the Governor's office paid Rebekah Mason $37,670.45 in fiscal 2013; $66,089.64 in fiscal 2012; and $56,538.85 in fiscal 2011. She served as his communications director beginning in 2011 and ending in 2013.
Bentley scandal: UA used PayPal to 'expedite' $45,450 payment to Jon Mason's company

By: Connor Sheets

A University of Alabama spokesman said Thursday that UA paid a company owned by the husband of Gov. Bentley's former political adviser Rebekah Mason more than $45,000 via PayPal in February "to expedite the process."

UA paid JRM Enterprises — a Tuscaloosa-based advertising, marketing and design company founded in 2005 by Jon Mason and operated by him ever since — $45,450 on Feb. 9 for "service and professional fees," according to university records.

The money was disbursed to JRM via two payments, one for $14,750, and one for $30,700, and was listed as having been paid via the PayPal payment processing system, the records show.

Since 2010, UA paid JRM a total of $245,600. All payments made to the firm prior to the February disbursement were made via check, according to UA's records.

University spokesman Chris Bryant said via email Thursday that the university chose to pay JRM via PayPal in February "to expedite the process." He said the money was "for JRM's coordination of the production, installation and rental agreements for billboards," and added that UA did not pay for the payment processing.

"The payments were placed on the University's Purchasing card and were processed via PayPal by the vendor," Bryant said. "We only paid what we were billed. We didn't pay to use the service. It's a common practice for universities. We have used a Purchasing card for about 15 years."

But UA does not make payments via PayPal very often, according to university records. So far this year, the university has made a total of only $94,643.46 in payments identified in UA's online record system as having been processed by PayPal, of which $45,450 was paid to JRM on Feb. 9. The remaining $49,193.46 was split between a number of different companies that were paid for "supplies," "meetings and conferences" and other services, according to the records.

Bryant did not answer any other questions about the Feb. 9 payments to JRM, including why they needed to be expedited or why UA chose to pay the company via purchasing card for the first time in February.

Jon Mason — who serves as executive director of the Governor's Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives, known as Serve Alabama — declined Tuesday evening to speak with AL.com about his and his wife's numerous revenue streams. He instead provided a two-sentence emailed statement that cited an ongoing state Ethics Commission inquiry into Rebekah Mason's activities.

"An unfair Ethics complaint has now been filed against my wife," he said via email Tuesday evening. "I have been advised that until that matter has been resolved, I should not respond further to media inquiries."

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On Wednesday, Rebekah Mason stepped down from her position as a top aide to Bentley amid a scandal centered on claims by former Alabama Law Enforcement Agency head Spencer Collier.

Collier, who was fired by Bentley on March 22, alleges that Mason and Bentley had a sexual relationship while Bentley was still married to his ex-wife, Dianne.
Gov. Robert Bentley, Rebekah Caldwell Mason scandal: 12 questions that remain

By: Leada Gore

The fallout from the scandal involving Gov. Robert Bentley and his former chief political advisor Rebekah Caldwell Mason is continuing. Mason resigned her post yesterday even as Bentley, a two-term Republican governor, maintains he will not step down.

Bentley has admitted to making "inappropriate" comments to Mason though they both have denied having a physical affair, even after audio of a 2014 phone conversation reveals him discussing touching her breasts and buttocks. The governor denies violating any laws in the course of his relationship with Mason, a married mother of three. The governor's revelations came seven months after Dianne Bentley, his wife of 50 years, filed for divorce.

Following a complaint from State Auditor Jim Zeigler, the Ethics Commission is investigating Bentley and any possible misuse of office.

As information continues to emerge about the relationship between Bentley and Mason, some questions remain:

Timing of the tape?

Gov. Bentley said the audio tape of his salacious conversation – one of several he admitted to – was made in 2014. Dianne Bentley didn't file for divorce, however, until August 2015. Why the delay and was there a specific incident that led to the filing?

If the relationship wasn't physical...

Gov. Bentley and Mason both said they have not had a physical relationship. In his March 23 press conference, Bentley adamantly stated "there was no sexual activity" between the couple. Just hours after that statement, an audio tape was released in which Bentley is heard saying "You know what? When I stand behind you, and I put my arms around you, and I put my hands on your breasts, and I put my hands (unintelligible) and just pull you real close. I love that, too."

If the relationship wasn't sexual – or even physical – how would Bentley define it?

Why the emphasis on the airplane?

Gov. Bentley's press conference included several mentions of a leased airplane that was used during the 2014 gubernatorial campaign. Alabamians are all too aware of the issues involving the use of a state airplane for personal reasons, i.e. Guy Hunt. However, Bentley did not explain why he brought up the leased plane or the significance of the aircraft in this situation. State flight logs show Mason joining other members of the governor's office in what appear to be legitimate trips over the last two years. Those trips were taken on the state's plane. What we don't know is what trips were taken on the leased aircraft. Will the governor turn over those records?

What really led to the firing of Spencer Collier?
Rumors of Bentley's affair had existed for months. However, until former Alabama Law Enforcement Agency chief Spencer Collier's statements, there was no confirmation. The governor apparently went after Collier in connection to an affidavit given in the case against Speaker of the House Mike Hubbard. Bentley reportedly directed Collier not to provide the affidavit and later said an investigation into ALEA found a misuse of funds; Collier said the governor told him to lie. What's the real reason Collier was fired? And who else at ALEA was aware of the governor's relationship with Mason? Were any ALEA resources, such as security personnel, used to facilitate the relationship between Bentley and Mason?

ACEGOV's role?

After his reelection in 2014, Gov. Bentley said he would use leftover campaign funds to set up a nonprofit to help Alabama. A non-profit was established though it appears the money went to the Alabama Council for Excellent Government, a 501(c)(4) used to promote his political agenda. Mason was paid $15,000 by ACEGOV last year for unspecified consulting work with additional money coming from Bentley's campaign itself. ACEGOV has its own board but has done little else and plays no major role in Alabama's political scene. What was the role – if any – of ACEGOV in the relationship between Bentley and Mason? Was Mason technically serving as a lobbyist via ACEGOV? And did ACEGOV violate its own rules in promoting Bentley's plans?

Were funds or state property misused?

State Auditor Jim Zeigler's ethics complaint alleges Bentley misused state property to facilitate an affair with Mason. The audio tape from Bentley indicates the couple had some contact in his office ("Baby, let me know what I am going to do when I start locking the door. If we are going to do what we did the other day, we are going to have to start locking the door."). At what level does something occurring in a government building constitute the use of official property? That's the question the Ethics Commission must answer and one many people are asking.

When will we know something from the Ethics Commission?

It could be months or longer. The Ethics Commission has assigned a special agent to look into the matter. Bentley has pledged his full cooperation with the commission but there's no time frame for its investigation. When will we know the results of the ethics investigation?

What else is out there?

Gov. Bentley conceded he made what he described as "mistakes" on more than one occasion, referencing "inappropriate comments" to Mason. While the recording was made two years ago, Bentley did not provide information on any other conversations that were sexual in nature. He did say the taped conversation – which he claimed not to have heard before they were released – was not the only time he made the inappropriate comments. He did not address the possibility of any other tapes or evidence of a relationship. Are there other tapes – audio or visual – or other documentation of an affair?

Are the governor and Mason still involved in a romantic relationship?
When asked during the press conference if he and Mason were involved in a romantic – if not sexual -relationship, Bentley responded: "What do you mean a romantic relationship?" He was then asked if he "loved Mrs. Mason." The governor said "I love many members of my staff, in fact all the members of my staff. Do I love some more than others? Absolutely." He did not provide additional information on their current relationship other than to say they had moved on. Mason resigned from her post Wednesday but neither party has confirmed the close relationship ended. What is the nature of their current relationship?

Will Jon Mason keep his state job?

Jon Mason serves as director of the Governor's Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives, known as Serve Alabama. He also operates JRM Enterprises, a marketing and consulting firm that has done work for the University of Alabama. Jon Mason earned $91,400 as the agency's chief. Many have questioned why Mason remained on his post even after he learned of what he later described as the "personal issue" involving his wife and the governor. Why did he continue to work for the man who apparently was having an inappropriate relationship with his wife?

Gov. Kay Ivey?

Is Alabama ready for Gov. Kay Ivey? Questions about if Republicans really wanted Ivey in the Governor's Mansion have swirled in recent weeks. Ivey has remained quiet but the question has to be asked: Would Republicans push out Bentley knowing Ivey is waiting in the wings? And how will the Bentley scandal impact the 2018 gubernatorial race?

Here's the big one: Will Gov. Bentley resign?

Gov. Bentley has – repeatedly – said he's not stepping down. An ethics violation would likely answer that question for him, resulting in the governor being removed from office. Short of that or impeachment, it will be Bentley's call when he leaves. What would it take? More evidence of an improper relationship or misuse of state funds? More embarrassing audio tapes? An outcry from state Republicans? Who knows?
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

Mason resigns as Bentley adviser

Lawmaker vows to submit impeachment resolution

By Kim Chandler
The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY — A top political aide to Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley resigned Wednesday, a week after he publicly admitted making inappropriate remarks to her but denied the two ever had an affair.

Also Wednesday, a GOP lawmaker said he planned to introduce a resolution to begin impeachment proceedings against the Republican governor.

Rebekah Caldwell Mason announced her resignation in a statement sent by the governor's office, saying she would no longer serve as Bentley's senior political adviser and would no longer be paid by his campaign fund or work for a nonprofit formed to promote his agenda.

"My only plans are to focus my full attention on my precious children and my husband who I love dearly. They are the most important people in my life," she said.

As Bentley's confidante, sounding board, adviser and message molder, Mason has been there for the biggest moments of his political career, from his improbable 2010 election to the development of his major policy initiatives. More recently, she has been at the center of the lowest moment of his political career.

Last week, Mason was thrust into the spotlight when former Law Enforcement Secretary Spencer Collier — a day after being fired by Bentley — accused the 73-year-old governor of having an inappropriate relationship with Mason. The scandal has engulfed Bentley, a mild-mannered dermatologist and former Baptist deacon.

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from Tuscaloosa whose political ascendency was based partly on his morally upright, honest reputation.

Dianne Bentley, the governor's ex-wife, filed for divorce in 2015 saying their 50-year marriage had suffered an irreparable breakdown.

Recordings obtained by The Associated Press purportedly show the governor — before his divorce — professing love to someone named Rebecca or Rebekah and telling her how much he enjoyed kissing and touching her.

The recordings were provided by a former administration member who did so on condition of anonymity to avoid angering politically powerful former associates.

In a furtive phone call, Bentley says his family is vacationing at the beach and tells the person on the other end: "I love you so much, I worry about loving you so much."

While the governor is clearly heard, the person on the other end is not.

Later, he talks about getting physical. Bentley says he meant to text the person, but accidentally sent the message to a male aide.

"It didn't say, 'Hey baby I love you so much and I'd like to spend the rest of my life with you. ... You kiss me. ... I love that. You know I do love that. You know what, when I stand behind you and I put my arms around you and I put my hands on your breasts and I put my hands on you and just pull you in really close. I love that, too.'"

The governor in a news conference last week said that he did not have a "physical affair" with Mason and there was no "sexual activity."

"I made a mistake. Two years ago I made a mistake," Bentley said.

The governor's press office issued a statement this week saying: "The governor has accepted responsibility for his behavior. He has apologized to his family, Rebekah Mason's family and the people of Alabama for his inappropriate behavior on the recordings.

Although most high-ranking Republicans have taken a measured reaction to Bentley's admission, the fallout from the scandal does not appear to be over. Rep. Ed Henry, R-Hartselle, said Wednesday that he plans to introduce the impeachment resolution when the Alabama Legislature returns from spring break next week.

"There's no credibility. There's no confidence from the Legislature or the people of this state in his office and his abilities," Henry said.

The governor's press office did not have an immediate response.

Henry and Bentley are
both Republicans who have frequently clashed during the past two years, including over the governor’s proposal last year to raise taxes.

However, Henry acknowledged the resolution faces an uphill climb. A majority of House members would have to vote to begin proceedings.

Mason, a former television news anchor in Tuscaloosa, signed on as spokeswoman for the little-known legislator’s 2010 long-shot bid for governor. She worked as the governor’s communications adviser before leaving to work on his 2014 re-election.

Observers said Mason helped Bentley talk through options as he weighed decisions ranging from taking down Confederate flags to his proposed $800 million prison construction project now before lawmakers.

Her detractors within the administration said her opinion increasingly became the only one Bentley would trust.

“At the end of 2014, Governor Bentley made it clear to me in no uncertain terms that from that point forward anyone who questioned Rebekah’s influence would be fired,” Collier said.

As his senior political adviser, she was not paid by the state. Instead, she was paid with campaign funds — something the governor’s office said Bentley had done with previous political advisers in his administration.

Campaign records show Bentley’s campaign paid Mason’s company, RCM Communications, $76,500 in 2015 for consulting and travel reimbursement. Mason disclosed last week that the Alabama Council for Government Excellence, a nonprofit formed to promote Bentley’s agenda, also paid her company $15,000 for consulting work.

Mason’s husband, Jon Mason, also works for Bentley as the director of Serve Alabama, the Governor’s Office of Faith-Based and Volunteer Service.

In a statement issued last week, Rebekah Mason said Bentley “apologized to me and to my family, we accepted his apology and have put all of this behind us.”
The Mason-Bentley matter perpetuates stereotype

It is behavior such as the governor’s and Mason’s that perpetuates many of those biases she is so loudly decrying.

and Mason’s that perpetuates many of those biases she is so loudly decrying.

Let me explain.
During my first year out of college, I worked for an organization researching education and healthcare policy. To celebrate a particularly hard-won battle, my male supervisor treated me to lunch.

When we returned from the restaurant, the organization’s vice president pulled my supervisor aside and warned him not to take female employees out alone, as it could spark rumors of an affair.

Think about that. Two married professionals were forbidden from eating a lunch together in public, surrounded by dozens of other lunching professionals, to celebrate a professional victory because it could be seen inappropriately.

While I have been touched by a few other instances of blatant sexism, this episode has always bothered me the most. If something as innocuous as lunch with a married man could be seen in such a way, what about starting a business with a man, hiring one as a client, or working on senior staff with one in a campaign?

While Mason is calling out sexism, she and the governor actively confirmed in the minds of those who would keep men and women from working closely together many of the biases she is alleging.

And that’s a significant problem for women in politics. Because women and men, married and unmarried, should, and do, work together closely all the time without even a hint of impropriety — both inside and outside Alabama politics. But with high-profile stories of adultery and intrigue once again in the headlines, it is not solely the ones making the allegations of undue influence on whom I place the blame of sexism, but also on the people whose actions perpetuated the stereotype.

BeShears is a freelance writer and communications professional based in Birmingham and owner of BeShears Solutions LLC.
To keep his job, Bentley must reveal all, fire Mason now

AL.com Editorial Board

It is tempting to make this a one-sentence editorial: Gov. Robert Bentley, you must resign.

And maybe, in the end, that’s the only option.

Right now, only Gov. Bentley knows the extent of his actions. If he has violated the law, he should step down. It should be clear to him by now that a full investigation by the press, by state and federal investigators and by his peers will root out any evidence of wrong doing. Mr. Bentley, if there is anything more hidden, you must resign.

But, if the man elected by the people to lead this state plans to stay, then he has a more difficult task: to step up, come clean and rid himself of the secrets and compromises clouding his life, his career and the future of our state.

Alabamians have set the bar pretty low for their political leadership. Speaker Mike Hubbard was re-elected despite an indictment on 23 felony ethics counts, and then the House re-appointed him as Speaker. The Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, Roy Moore, has previously been evicted from his office by the Federal Government but was easily re-elected. Presidential hopeful Donald Trump garnered 43 percent of Alabama Republican support, despite a history of transgressions both personal and public.

We find Bentley’s actions embarrassing — to our state, to Bentley, to his senior political adviser, Rebekah Mason. We do not believe the governor’s claims there was nothing more than adolescent phone calls and “inappropriate comments.” One can’t listen to a recording of the governor talking about caressing Mason’s breasts, doing things that warrant locking the office door and declaring love more than a dozen times and reasonably believe this was just a flight of fantasy. And one can’t hear or watch Bentley’s awkwardness at his press conference when asked whether he is in love with Mason and believe it was just talk, or that it ended long ago.

The governor looked very much like a man struggling for balance between saying something that might get him off the hook publicly without getting him in trouble with the woman in questions. But if this was “just” an affair or “just” some sexual hanky-panky, Alabamians could disapprove but separate it from Bentley’s role as governor. That bar was set decades ago by President Bill Clinton and has been reinforced by numerous politicians nationwide.

The controversy surrounding Bentley is much more, though, leading to questions about Mason’s political influence. Neither he nor she can hide behind personal privacy on this. Alabamians deserve to know what went on, when it started, and when it ended, if it has.

If Bentley intends to stay in office, he must take several immediate and transparent steps:

➤ Sever all ties — professional, political and personal — with Mason;
➤ Reveal all he knows about the murky way she has been paid not by the state but by a political lobby group, and push that group to reveal its funding sources;
➤ Commit that no employee of the governor or his office will again be paid other than through approved state funds (that is, by Alabamians, the people for whom they See Bentley, A4
BENTLEY
FROM A1

work;
› Make public all records of payments (compensation and expenses) to Mason or her

and communications around the firing of that top law officer;
› Make public all records of flights and other travels, accommodations and related expenses involving the governor and Mason together;
› Make public all records and communications around the hiring of Mason’s husband into a top state job, including any and all involvement of Mason herself;

firm by Bentley, his election campaigns and the lobby group;
› Make public all background on why and how he intervened in the Hubbard case, including directing the state’s top law officer to not provide information to investigators;
› Make public all records of deliberations

› Make public the court file on his divorce, since that seems clearly connected to the Mason matter (including the recording of the infamous phone call) and therefore connected to his role as governor.

And he must begin now. Much is required for Gov. Bentley to repair his relationship with the state. If he remains unwilling to provide a full reckoning, then he should resign.
Bentley should do right thing: resign

Robert Bentley is a hometown guy who unexpectedly and almost by default rose from a relatively obscure member of the state legislature to governor of Alabama. When the retired dermatologist started running for the office in a seven-candidate primary, few voters outside of Tuscaloosa knew his name. He won many of them over with the slogan that Alabama was sick and needed a doctor as governor.

Amazingly, he emerged as the last man standing and defeated outgoing Agricultural Commissioner Ron Sparks, a Democrat, in a landslide. In January 2011, he was sworn in as Alabama's 53rd governor. The victory further sealed the Republican Party's hold on Alabama politics.

In 2010, the GOP grabbed hold of both the House and the Senate and now Bentley, a two-term member of the House of Representatives, had emerged to replace Bob Riley as the second straight Republican governor.

Now, after an uneventful first term short on accomplishments, Bentley is in the middle of his second term. House Speaker Mike Hubbard of Auburn is facing a sweeping indictment and Bentley is denying he had an inappropriate relationship with a staffer while admitting that he made inappropriate comments. It is evident that Alabama politics is still sick and Bentley isn't the doctor we need to heal the situation. To say that the Alabama GOP has wasted a great opportunity to fulfill campaign promises is an understatement.

On Wednesday, Bentley apologized for making the inappropriate remarks two years ago, but denied that he has been involved in an extramarital relationship. Last year, his wife of half a century filed for divorce two days after making an appearance with him in Tuscaloosa. This newspaper, along with several other news organizations, sued when the Bentleys tried to keep the terms of the divorce secret from the public.

The governor's denials came only hours after he fired Spencer Collier as the state's Secretary of Law Enforcement on Tuesday and Collier came forward with claims that he heard a recording that indicates the governor had an improper personal relationship that had cost him his marriage.

We wanted to be proud of the local politician who ran as a conservative only to enter office and then call for tax hikes. We wanted to be proud of the local politician who promised to clean up the shenanigans that had plagued the state's leadership only to become embroiled in those same scandals. We wanted to be proud of the local politician who promised to repair so much only to achieve so little.

Now, we want him to resign.

Bentley has been unable to prove himself a capable leader. Just two years ago, while fighting his own party over the education bill, the Senate chose to end the session with several key bills in the hopper yet to be considered in an effort to keep Bentley from getting his way. It was a clear sign that he didn't have the power or respect to lead his own party.

Now, with the current situation, any power or respect he had is gone.
Alabama Legislature

The Legislature has done its duty in passing an austere General Fund budget.

If Bentley vetoes our budget, we’ll override him

Sen. Cam Ward for AL.com

First, it established a sound financial precedent for future Alabama legislatures. Requiring each agency to make a rigorous, line-by-line, case for their budget means agencies must prove to lawmakers that the agency’s mission and programs are still an essential function of government. In other words, the pressure is now on the state agency to prove why it should continue to receive taxpayer money.

The reform and downsizing of government can only happen by focused intentionality. Left to its own devices, a state agency will drift from year to year, treating its budget request as a birthright owed instead of a case to be proven.

Second, the zero-based budgeting process has given the Legislature a more precise target of where to allocate taxpayer dollars. Some agencies, we realized, did not need an increase over last year’s budget and indeed some could make do with much less.

So, here are some details on the Legislature’s $1.8 billion General Fund budget. The budget slightly increases funding for Public Health, National Guard units, Corrections, and the Department of Human Resources. Most other state agencies were level funded, while the budgets for some, like the Department of Labor and the Department of Finance, were cut.

A massive outbreak of tuberculosis in rural west Alabama meant Public Health needed every bit of its $10 million increase.

Temporary additional money was needed for Corrections to implement the prison reform I led last year that will save millions of dollars over the next 10 years and stave off a federal takeover of Alabama’s prisons.

By far, the most difficult challenge for state lawmakers continues to be the behemoth of Medicaid, the federally mandated health insurance program for children, the elderly, the disabled, and the pregnant. More than 1 million Alabamians are on the Medicaid rolls, and the program consumes nearly 40 percent of the budget. For the upcoming fiscal year alone, the Legislature allocated $700 million for Medicaid, an increase of $15 million over last year.
Gov. Bentley has said Medicaid's funding should be increased to $785 million so Alabama can access additional federal matching dollars and finish implementing the reforms we passed a few years ago. Yet the options for increasing Medicaid's budget by an additional $85 million — via lottery/gaming, new taxes, or moving money from the education budget — are not palatable to most factions of the people or the Legislature.

The Legislature has done its duty in passing an austere General Fund budget that avoids new taxes and prioritizes funding for state agencies. The governor has said he will veto the budget, and, if he does, the Legislature will override his veto. Gov. Bentley may believe Medicaid needs more money, but, if so, he needs to present a detailed plan showing from where that money comes.

Ward is a Republican representing people in Shelby, Bibb, Chilton, Hale and Jefferson counties in the Alabama Senate and is chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.
Spencer Collier: Gov. Robert Bentley hurt me in a 'way that's unimaginable'

By: Carol Robinson

Spencer Collier, fired Alabama Secretary of Law Enforcement and whistle-blower to an alleged gubernatorial love affair, says he is hurt.

A hurt, he says, "that you can't create."

Not just because Gov. Robert Bentley fired him, but at the way he claims Bentley – who he considered a close friend and father figure – has sought to discredit him.

As the longtime friendship began to unravel in recent months amid a high-profile corruption case involving Alabama House Speaker Mike Hubbard, investigation into misuse of funds within the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency and allegations of Bentley's affair with top aide Rebekah Mason, those close to the governor and close to some top officials at ALEA say Collier has been acting erratically, though there has been no public sign of such. There have been whispers of drug use and mental illness, and it's that which has pained Collier to his core.

Collier's father struggled with paranoid schizophrenia most of Collier's life, and later developed dementia as well. Collier never confided that to anyone in Alabama's political circles, except Bentley. But when Bentley sought to protect his own relationship, Collier said, he turned on his friend. Following Collier's press conference last week, held after he went public with details of the governor's alleged affair, a reporter pulled Collier aside and asked him, basically, if he was mentally ill. "The only person I've ever told (about his father) was the governor," Collier said in a lengthy interview with AL.com. "So that had to come from him."

"My dad was mentally ill and suffered from it since I was 2. He was institutionalized quite a bit, but he loved us," Collier said, audibly upset. "I told the governor all of this, but no one else in politics knows. He knows it runs in my family, so for him to tell people that, it just hurts. You couldn't make up a way to hurt somebody more."

When Collier's father died three years ago, he said, it was Bentley who was there to comfort him. "We prayed together over the phone," Collier said.

Those days are over, and Collier said if anyone had told him a year ago that the friendship would come to this, he wouldn't have believed it. "Some of the things he had done and said, or allowed to be done and said, it's just hurt in a way that's unimaginable. My children worshipped him, and they're all in shell shock. It's almost like I keep waiting to wake up from an episode of House of Cards."

Collier, a former teacher, coach, state trooper and state legislator, didn't aim to be at center of a gubernatorial scandal. He said he just wanted to do what's best for those he loves and those he serves. "I've always tried to be the stable one for the governor," he said. "I think I've been a sturdy and strong cabinet member for him, and I've been incredibly loyal."
Those closest to him agree. "I know he's got to be stunned. I think everybody that knows him is stunned," said J.T. Jenkins, who was Collier's No. 2 man at ALEA. He also was fired. "Throughout his whole career, he has tried to make the state better. I've always trusted him. He's always done what he told me he was going to do. I hate this for him, and his family, and everybody else."

Collier's 'greatest decision'

Collier, who turns 43 today, grew up in south Mobile County. After graduating from Alba High School, which later became Alma Bryant, Collier went to UAB, where he was a member of the university's first Division 3 football team. "I thought I was a running back in high school but when I got there, Joe Cribbs said I was a defensive back," he said with a laugh. Collier said he saw little, if any, playing time.

In October of his freshman year at UAB, he and his now-wife Melissa, got married. They had been a couple since they were just 14. He then transferred to Troy, where he majored in criminal justice and political science. "I may not have been the best student in high school, but I graduated from Troy magna cum laude," he said.

After graduation, he went back to his high school alma mater where he taught for one year and coached football. He coached former Auburn fullback Brandon Johnson and former Alabama defensive end Antwan Odom when they were both in ninth grade. "I loved coaching, but I didn't love teaching and if you don't love it, you probably shouldn't do it," he said. "I always wanted to be in law enforcement."

Many of Collier's adjunct professors at Troy were law enforcement officers, and he would do ride-alongs with them. "I just developed a love for it," he said. "I got a burning desire to be in law enforcement, to be a public servant."

In 1995, he joined The Prichard Police Department. The first week on the job, an officer was killed and an officer killed someone. "That's where I learned how to police," he said. "It was absolutely the greatest decision I made."

After one year, Collier joined the Alabama State Troopers. After the mandatory time with a field training officer, Collier was assigned to overnight patrol in Baldwin County. Those duties often took him to neighboring Mobile County as well. "I worked alone a lot that first year," he said. He later transferred to Mobile County because that's where his home was and troopers had to live in the county to which they were assigned. Just three years later, at age 25, Collier was promoted to the rank of corporal, which is equivalent to a lieutenant in most law enforcement agencies. He was one of the youngest to ascend to that rank.

While in college, Collier had worked on a campaign for Fob James and, at age 28, he decided to launch his own bid for public office. The incumbent wasn't seeking re-election, but Collier did have to run against a well-financed lobbyist. "I didn't expect to win. My plan was to turn around and run for sheriff," he said.
But Collier did win, by 21 percent, and in 2002 he became a Republican member of the Alabama House of Representatives for the 105th District. At the time, he was the first active state trooper elected to the Legislature, and it was nothing short of a juggling act. When the Legislature was in session, Collier was in Montgomery on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and patrolled as a trooper Friday, Saturday and Sunday. "They kept my time to the quarter hour," he said. "We were going to do it right."

He did both jobs for three years. With a wife and four children, it was no easy task. He eventually became the Public Information Officer for 13 counties, but still worked in patrol to get in his 40 hours a week.

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit. "We had bought an old home on the bayou and had it six weeks and it was destroyed," Collier said. Collier and Jenkins, a Marine Resource Officer at the time, rescued more than 30 people from rooftops and treetops in a swift water rescue during Katrina. "It was surreal," Collier said. He and Jenkins won a Governor's Commendation for Valor and Service Upon Call of Duty for their actions that day.

"I was trying to juggle being the PIO during that, and a state representative to make sure my constituents were taken care of," he said. "I got to a point where I had to decide."

A job offer to be a legal investigator for Mobile law firm Cunningham and Bounds LLC came his way, and he took it. "It was one of the hardest decisions I ever made in my life," he said. "Everybody likes to give lawyers a hard time, but they were some of the hardest working guys I've ever been around."

Friendship with Bentley begins

Collier would go on to be re-elected to the House of Representatives in 2006 and again in 2010. But it was during his first year as a legislator that his friendship with Bentley began, who also was a freshman legislator. "We were ideologically aligned a lot, and we just got to be friends," Collier said. "He carried himself as very much a statesman. And he was an ally on some tough issues."

Their friendship seemed to be cemented over the issue of banning gill nets, of all things. Conservationists who supported the legislation said the long reach of the nets was destroying fish and wildlife in the bay; fishermen said the ban would end their way of life. "I represented 200 fishermen who were losing their jobs," Collier said. "He (Bentley) stood by me. He helped me fight that, and he wound up negotiating the compromised legislation that eventually passed. We stood shoulder to shoulder on that, and it took several years. That's something he didn't have to do because he didn't have a single gill netter in his district. It's things like that that drew us closer."

One day as they walked out of the statehouse together, Bentley told Collier he was going to run for governor. "I thought he was picking at me, and I chuckled," Collier said. Once he realized Bentley was serious, he told him, "If you run, I'm with you."

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Bentley's GOP rival in the primary was Bradley Byrne, also from the Mobile area. "I was the only elected official to endorse Bentley from the Mobile delegation," Collier said. "I got ridiculed a lot. I can remember being at public events and being laughed at for standing behind Robert, but Robert was my friend."

Shortly after Bentley was elected governor, and Collier to his third term in the House of Representatives, Bentley named Collier as director of Homeland Security. "At this time in our nation's history, the security of our citizens is our first responsibility," Bentley said at the time. "With Spencer Collier's experience and exemplary background, the safety and security of Alabamians will be in good hands."

In April 2013, Bentley named Collier as secretary of Law Enforcement, a cabinet position created by legislation to create the Alabama State Law Enforcement Agency in an effort to make government more efficient by consolidating a number of law enforcement and public safety entities. Collier would remain Homeland Security director during the Law Enforcement Agency's planning and implementation phase, which was set to last through January 2015. Collier's salary was $149,000 as Homeland Security director and would remain the same as secretary of Law Enforcement.

"We had 18 months to put it together and it took every bit of 18 months to put it together," Collier said. "Literally we had a war room and for 18 months we dealt with everything from law enforcement patches to pay classification. Every day things came up that no one thought about. It's still a work in progress."

It was an extremely difficult process, he said. Pride and identification with specific agencies or branches of law enforcement is strong, and to merge and change was no easy task. "It caused some splinters and I lost life-long friends over that," Collier said. "But we had to make the best decisions we could and I'm proud of what we've done over there. It was the largest consolidation in state history, and we made it work."

Collier's friendship with Bentley continued, but naturally some things changed with Bentley in the position as governor. "I could see pretty quickly he had so many people coming at him from different directions, and I stayed in my lane," Collier said.

**Problems arise**

The first sign of problems came in 2014 when Collier said evidence of an affair arose. Stan Stabler – who has now taken Collier's place as the head of ALEA – saw a text message from Mason on Bentley's cell phone, Collier said. Stabler has since denied Collier's claims. Collier said Stabler saw the message after the governor dropped his phone at a Business Council of Alabama conference at Point Clear. He said Stabler notified his then-boss, former Bentley security officer Ray Lewis, of the "sexual nature" of the text. Three days later, at 3 p.m. on Aug. 5, 2014, Lewis brought a laptop to Collier and played a recording of conversations between the governor and Mason, Collier said. The tape, purportedly created by a Bentley family member hoping for an "intervention," left no doubt about the relationship, he said. "If we're gonna do
what we did yesterday, we're going to have to lock that door," Bentley said on the recording. There were more improper comments about 'her breasts and behind."

Collier confronted Bentley, who he said promised to end things with Mason. "That day, he was contrite and the Robert Bentley I knew," Collier said. "The next morning is when he called and said, 'I can't do this. I can't let her go.'"

"Within a few days, he was just furious," Collier said. "He had me look up the statute of planting eavesdropping devices. I was confident no one had planted an eavesdropping device. We swept his office. It was clear it was done in a domestic manner. It was not criminal in nature."

Bentley has denied a physical relationship with Mason. His office did not respond to a request for comment on this article.

"He got angry at me and yelled at me at one point," Collier said. "He told me I couldn't make him stop and he was right. I left it alone. My job was not that of a marriage counselor. I never again pressured him to stop it or cut it off."

"I talked with members of the Bentley family and I hurt for them," Collier said. "At one point they wanted me to do an intervention, and I told them it was outside my role."

Collier thought things had calmed down, but then Dianne Bentley stunned everyone in August 2015. The governor's wife of 50 years filed for divorce, saying "their marriage has suffered an irretrievable breakdown." The couple, both 72, were married in 1965 and have four children.

"He was shocked, and upset and it was hard to watch him hurt," Collier said. "I sat with him for a while. I just tried to be his friend. He said, 'They just want Rebekah out of my life and it's not going to happen.'"

The divorce was ultimately finalized, and again things had calmed down for the most part. Both Bentley and Mason received anonymous letters that were unfavorable in nature, and Collier said Bentley and Mason wanted him to do something about it. "There was nothing we could do. They were not pleasant, but they were not criminal. No one was trying to solicit money from them."

**Things fall apart**

Then, everything began to quickly unravel. The governor announced he was putting Collier on a medical leave of absence soon after denouncing Collier's decision to defy a direct order. Collier's three-month medical leave of absence began Feb. 17, after Bentley had expressed his disapproval that Collier had provided an affidavit to the prosecutors in the public corruption case against Hubbard. The governor had previously ordered law enforcement officials, including Collier, to refuse the request.

"He was absolutely furious that we were involved and she (Mason) was furious that we had done our job," Collier said. "He had never berated me in front of people, so it was a side of him I hadn't seen. Then she (Mason) berated us, and he allowed it.

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Collier was fired March 22, effective immediately. Bentley said he had no choice but to act after possible misuse of funds was uncovered. Collier vehemently denies any wrongdoing. A Department of Examiners of Public Accounts report on ALEA released Feb. 19 found no discrepancies in an investigation into the agency's financial transactions and assets over a period of six years. "I want to be abundantly clear in saying that I have done absolutely nothing wrong," Collier said.

Collier said he wants to make it clear he didn't, and doesn't, judge Bentley or anyone else. "Everyone sins and falls short of the glory of God," he said.

**Collier's family issues**

He and his family aren't perfect, or even close, he says.

In 2008, Collier was involved in a fight with a man named Terry Wheat near the cafeteria at Faulkner State Community College in Bay Minette. Though there were reports that Collier got his ear bitten off in the skirmish, that wasn't the case. He was injured and sought medical attention. Collier and Wheat both had children attending Faulkner, and neither man pressed charges. "A guy put his hands on my son. At that point, I reacted as a dad," Collier said about the incident. "It's not the way to handle things. That's not a moment I'm proud of."

In 2013, Collier's oldest son and several other family members were arrested on fraud charges related to BP oil spill claims. The indictment filed in Mobile federal court accused Christopher Chance Collier of fraud related to a claim for lost wages in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. "I am aware of the indictments against my son, Christopher. As a parent, I love him unconditionally. However, he is an adult and like any other adult, he is responsible for his own actions. "Although this is a difficult time for my family, I fully respect the judicial process," Collier said in a statement at the time. His son earlier had been arrested on charges of distributing oxycodone.

Collier's son pleaded guilty Nov. 25, 2013 to mail fraud through a plea agreement with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Mobile, and was sentenced to serve five years on probation and ordered to make $34,538 restitution to the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Trust. He also was ordered to participate in the Location Monitoring Program for a period of 60 consecutive days. Following more arrests, his probation was revoked and ultimately he served a short stint in federal prison.

Collier said that, for the record, he is not mentally ill. He passed every mental evaluation he has undergone as part of routine law enforcement employment testing, and has never seen a psychiatrist or been treated by a psychiatrist.

As for allegations of drug use, Collier said he has never used illicit drugs. He has undergone multiple disc surgeries from injuries he sustained in an on-duty car accident years ago. "Any medication I take has been under the guidance of a doctor," he said. "I've spent my life combatting the drug trade. For them to say these things is just hurtful."
Looking toward future

Asked if he would consider a run for governor himself, Collier said, "I told Melissa last night, I just want a normal life."

Collier said his focus right now is on his wife and children, Chris, 26, Connor, 18, Colby, 13, and Caroline, 9, as well as his 3-year-old grandson Aidyn. He's also working to get his back healthy again. "I want to go back to work and I think I'm a good cop," he said. "I don't know if I'll ever lead another state law enforcement agency again but that's where my heart is. I know (with ALEA) I was an at-will employee and I don't think you can fire someone for doing their job, but I'll leave to my attorney."

Asked what he wants people to most know about him, he said this: "I'm just a guy who wants to take care of my family. I'm not perfect, I know I'm not," he said. "I've been a very good employee to Robert Bentley. The root of all of this was his actions, but the catalyst was him instructing me to break the law."

"He thought I would resign and go away quietly. I never considered that," Collier said. "My 18-year-old looked at me and said, 'Dad, do the right thing.' I want people to know I've committed my life to law enforcement and public service."
Kay Ivey waits in wings if Bentley resigns

By: Tim Lockette

Six years ago, Gene Howard says, Kay Ivey made a decision that may soon have a big impact on Alabama.

At the time — 2010 — Ivey was the state treasurer, and was in the running for governor. Gene Howard was the chairman of the Calhoun County Republican Party. Republicans seemed headed for a massive takeover of every major office in the state.

Except one. The GOP had few strong candidates interested in going up against Democrat Jim Folsom Jr., the sitting lieutenant governor. Howard says he and other GOP insiders approached two gubernatorial candidates, both near the bottom of the polls, and asked them to switch to the lieutenant governor’s race.

Candidate Robert Bentley refused the offer, Howard says. Kay Ivey said yes.

“It’s the smartest political decision anybody has made in Alabama in the past ten years,” Howard said.

Ivey, now in her second term as lieutenant governor, is the woman who would become governor if Bentley chooses to step down, or is removed from office.

The drumbeat for Bentley’s ouster began last week, after fired law enforcement secretary Spencer Collier alleged that Bentley and top adviser Rebekah Mason had engaged in an extramarital affair.

Bentley and Mason have both denied having a “physical affair.” (Both used the same phrase in their denials.) But Bentley did acknowledge and apologize for making inappropriate remarks after a tape of a sexually charged telephone conversation between the two was leaked to the press last week.

While the sexual side of the scandal has generated most of the attention, Bentley’s critics are also pointing to Mason’s source of income — she’s not on the state payroll, but is paid by Bentley’s campaign and a nonprofit that hasn’t revealed its donors — as a topic of possible investigation. Some within Bentley’s own party have called for the governor’s resignation, including a state GOP executive committee member, a handful of legislators and at least one county Republican executive committee. Attempts to reach Bentley’s staff for further comment Monday were unsuccessful.

Bentley has said he has no plan to resign, but it’s likely Ivey already has a transition plan in place if he does.

By the book
“Whatever role she plays, you can bet it will be done by the book,” said former U.S. Rep. Joe Bonner, who has known Ivey since he was a child in their mutual hometown of Camden, in Wilcox County.

Bonner said he wouldn’t speculate on the likelihood of Bentley stepping down. But succeeding the governor is part of the lieutenant governor’s job, he said, and Ivey almost certainly has a plan.

Attempts to reach Ivey for comment since Friday have been unsuccessful.

Bonner describes Ivey as a woman rooted in the civic traditions of Camden, a town of about 2,000 in one of Alabama’s poorest counties. A former civics and English teacher, she still sometimes instructs people in the proper way to say the Pledge of Allegiance, Bonner said, and hands out challenge coins to pages like a general rewarding troops headed home.

“She has fiercely loyal friends, because she’s a fiercely loyal friend,” Bonner said.

Ivey’s climb to power has been long, slow and far from flashy. After her time as a teacher, she made the transition to work as a bank officer.

By the late 1970s she was working in the Capitol, as an aide to then-Democratic Gov. Fob James. The headlines from that era are eerily similar to today’s — Medicaid was $75 million short and lawmakers were struggling to fill the gap — and Ivey seems to have been one of the people tasked with breaking the news to the press when the numbers were bad.

Later Ivey moved to the Alabama Development Office, a forerunner of the Alabama Department of Commerce, and served as the lobbyist for the Commission on Higher Education.

In 2002 she won election as state treasurer. Over the next four years, she promoted tax credits and other efforts to get parents and grandparents to save for their kids’ educations. But at the end of her second term, the Pre-Paid Affordable College Tuition program, overseen by the state treasurer, lost nearly half its value at one point in the wake of the 2008 recession.

The gap in PACT would become a contentious issue in her run for lieutenant governor in 2010, but voters ultimately picked Ivey over Folsom.

**Flexible**

The troubles of PACT are “a fly in the ointment” for Ivey, said William Stewart, a political science professor emeritus at the University of Alabama.

“That wasn’t a success,” Stewart said. “But other states were having the same trouble at the time, and there were lots of hands in that program.”

Stewart sees Ivey’s long career in state government as a plus, should she step into the governor’s office. He doesn’t foresee a lot of change in policy if the governor’s office does change hands.

“She’s a flexible person, not an ideologue,” Stewart said.

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Stewart said he’s heard Ivey speak against the use of earmarks in state budgeting, something Bentley has also criticized.

Early in her term, Ivey pledged to end proration — Alabama’s practice of cutting the budget in mid-year if revenues aren’t up to the budget planners’ early projections. Lawmakers in 2011 did set up a “rolling reserve” for the education budget that caps school spending and puts the savings aside for lean budget years. Democrats have criticized the spending caps as too low and Republicans have found ways to circumvent them, but the education budget hasn’t gone into proration since.

As president of the Senate, however, Ivey rarely has the chance to openly take sides on policy — particularly policy issues that divide the Republican supermajority. Howard, the former Calhoun County party official who supported Ivey in 2010, said that if Ivey becomes governor, her positions are likely to be clear.

“She’s a conservative, and she can talk straight,” Howard said.
Bentley, Mason likely to face legal trouble, experts say

Kent Faulk  kfaulk@al.com

With many questions and few answers about the alleged relationship between Gov. Robert Bentley and his senior political adviser, Rebekah Caldwell Mason, it's unclear exactly what legal trouble, if any, the two could face.

But there are civil and criminal complaints that agencies or individuals could explore depending on the facts, two law professors said last week.

"Nobody knows all of the facts," said John Carroll, professor at Cumberland School of Law.

"There are a lot of questions still out there," said University of Alabama law professor Jenny Carroll, who isn't related to John Carroll.

Bentley and Mason deny their relationship ever became physical. The governor also said there wasn't anything illegal or unethical about the circumstances of the relationship.

But both professors agree that at least one state agency — such as the attorney general's office, the legislature, Alabama Ethics Commission, or local district attorney's office — will eventually launch an investigation as a result of the allegations. State auditor Jim Zeigler has filed an ethics complaint against both Bentley and Mason.

What are the possible criminal charges that could be pursued, according to Carroll and Carroll?

＞ If any state resources — such as a state residence, cell phone, car, plane, or staff time — were used to facilitate or cover up the relationship, criminal ethics charges might apply.

＞ If Mason's salary was funded by a group that sought to use her position and/or relationship with Bentley to promote policy, public corruption charges could apply.

＞ If Bentley ever lied under oath in sworn statements within his divorce or other proceedings about the alleged relationship, he could be subject to sanctions or even possibly a perjury charge.

＞ If someone was found to have pressured a potential witness about not telling the truth in court or under oath, a criminal charge could be leveled.

＞ If there were allegations that Bentley, as Mason's supervisor, was involved in sexual harassment, the governor could face a possible civil suit.

＞ Spencer Collier, the former head of the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, could file a civil lawsuit claiming his firing by Bentley was retaliatory. It was Collier who offered the first on-the-record confirmation on the long-rumored relationship between Bentley and Mason.

John Carroll said he believes all or part of the allegations might end up being unveiled before a judge through either a civil or criminal action.

But does the public have a right to know about an alleged private relationship?

"It is disingenuous to claim that this is a purely private matter. It surely implicates private lives, but given the circumstances of the allegation, I do think its fair game for public scrutiny," Jenny Carroll said.

The end result might be good for Alabama, Jenny Carroll said.

"This could be a watershed moment for our state. It could signal a move toward more transparency in our state government and a call for greater accountability from elected officials," she said.
Rebekah Caldwell Mason's husband defends $91,400 salary to run an agency for Gov. Bentley

By: Connor Sheets

Allegations that Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley had an affair with top advisor Rebekah Caldwell Mason have dominated political headlines for the past few days.

Mason's high-level position in the Bentley administration, her alleged intimate relationship with the governor, and her alleged ability to influence him on key issues of state concern have raised questions about whether Bentley misused state funds in connection with their personal relationship.

Mason's husband, Jonathan P. Mason, has remained at his wife's side throughout the scandal, which first emerged last year and resurfaced earlier this week when Spencer Collier, Bentley's former Alabama State Law Enforcement Agency director, publicly accused the governor of having a sexual relationship with Ms. Mason.

But Jon Mason also collects a state paycheck, serving as executive director of the governor's Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives, also known as Serve Alabama.

The scandal currently rocking Montgomery has generated serious concerns about Rebekah Mason's high-power position in the Bentley administration and about hundreds of thousands of dollars Bentley's campaign paid to a company owned by the couple, RCM Communications, during the 2014 campaign.

It also raises the question of why Jon Mason, who worked as a weatherman before joining the Bentley administration, was chosen to head up an important taxpayer-funded state agency that controls millions of dollars and is overseen by the governor's office.

Jon Mason spoke with AL.com via email Saturday about his qualifications for the position and how he was selected to head a major state agency despite having no government experience.

Prior to his hiring by the state in January 2011, Jon Mason served as a weatherman for Tuscaloosa-based local news station, WVUA. He had 18 years' experience — only 12 of which he says were full-time — as a meteorologist in Tuscaloosa and Birmingham, according to a professional profile posted on Auburn University's website. He has a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Alabama and received a meteorology certificate from Mississippi State University, according to the profile.

"The qualifications that led to my selection as director of Serve Alabama included my 12 year career as meteorologist with local television stations in Birmingham and Tuscaloosa," Jon Mason told AL.com via email Saturday evening.

He wrote that his experience in meteorology "included delivering disaster preparedness messaging" and "working with local Emergency Management officials in our market area and
communicating with the National Weather Service on disaster prep and occasionally response situations."

As for how he came to be approached about the position, Jon Mason wrote that "[a]s the transition to the new Bentley administration was unfolding in late 2010, early 2011 ... I was approached by administration officials about this position because of my work in meteorology and the disaster prep/response field."

The state paid Jon Mason an annual salary of $91,400.08 in fiscal years 2014 and 2015 for his service as head of Serve Alabama, according to the state Department of Finance. He received an 18.7 percent raise between fiscal 2013 – when he was paid a salary of $76,999.92 – and fiscal 2014. He also received $76,999.92 in fiscal 2012, his first full fiscal year working for the state.

"The Serve Alabama Director salary of $77,000 in January 2011 was the lowest at the time of cabinet/agency heads," he wrote. "As Serve Alabama began long term recovery work post April 2011 tornadoes and began administering the nation's largest FEMA disaster case management program (at the time), doubling the size of our staff in 2012/13, the administration brought the Director of Serve Alabama salary in-line with the standard base salary of a cabinet director ($91,000)."

Serve Alabama "works to increase an ethic of service and volunteerism in the State of Alabama, strengthen the capacity of Alabama's faith and community-based organizations, and promote collaboration among individuals and organizations striving to meet some of the greatest needs in our state," according to its website.

It "serve[s] as the Alabama State Service Commission, granting and administering (10) State AmeriCorps Programs across Alabama," is "the state's lead agency for Volunteer and Donations Management after disasters," which in recent years has seen the agency respond to Hurricanes Ivan and Katrina, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and the devastating tornadoes of April 2011 – just three months after Mason took over as head of the agency. Serve Alabama also administers the Governor's Emergency Relief Fund and the state's disaster preparedness campaign, ReadyAlabama.gov.

Two former Serve Alabama employees agreed to speak with AL.com about Jon Mason's performance as head of Serve Alabama. Both said he was a competent and kind boss who seemed to be a good fit for the position.

Northport resident Charlotte Allen worked under Mr. Mason as a public policy intern for Serve Alabama in either 2012 or 2013. She told AL.com via phone Thursday that "[h]e was a very nice man. There was nothing wrong, I couldn't see anything," adding that she was not aware of any problems related to his service as director of the agency.

Allen said she also never heard anything about an affair between Rebekah Mason and Bentley or any other scandal involving the Masons during her time at Serve Alabama.
"He was very Christian faith – I mean, a very nice man," she said. "I didn't see any of this, I just think something went wrong down the windpipe. He was very nice but something went wrong on the other end. Hey, people make bad choices."

Another former Serve Alabama employee who declined to be identified speaking about the agency, said that Jon Mason "was always great to me; never heard anything like that when I was there," speaking in reference to the allegations that Rebekah Mason and Bentley had an affair. "He was a good boss, I'd say," the former employee added.

Serve Alabama's budget in 2011 was about $4 million, with "about 97 percent of that coming from the federal government," The Tuscaloosa News reported in January of that year.

"AmeriCorps is probably the biggest program we administer," Jon Mason told the newspaper at the time, "I don't know how many volunteers we have in the state — you'll have to bear with me, I'm still learning — but they are dozens of them."

He also told The Tuscaloosa News at the time that Bentley's office was setting up an office in Tuscaloosa that he would be able to use once it was in operation, though he expected to mainly work in Montgomery.

The Masons have owned and operated a communications and marketing business in Tuscaloosa since at least March 2006, when the first archived version of the website www.caldwellmason.com is available via The Wayback Machine web archive service. The 2006 version of the site listed their business name as Caldwell Mason Marketing & Design, and listed a range of clients it had worked with "[o]ver the past few years," including the University of Alabama, the city of Tuscaloosa and creditbureau.com.

Caldwell Mason's website was down Saturday afternoon and earlier this week appeared not to have otherwise been updated since 2009. Rebekah Mason is listed in official filings as the lone officer of RCM Communications, which was paid more than $400,000 by the Bentley campaign between RCM's formation in July 2013 and November 2014 for consulting and polling work, according to state campaign finance records.

Jon Mason has stood by his wife throughout the ongoing scandal over Collier's allegations that she and Bentley engaged in a sexual relationship. On Friday, he described Rebekah Mason as "my amazing wife of nearly 20 years, a loving and dedicated mom, a sweet compassionate daughter, a gifted 27-year communications professional, and friend" in a Facebook post.

"I wanted to share that I long ago resolved the personal issue playing out now for everyone this week," Mason wrote in the post, as reported by WAFF. "Please continue to support families, the governor, and our state with prayers as we all move forward."
STATE GOVERNMENT

Bentley's political adviser discloses pay from nonprofit

By Kim Chandler
The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY — State Auditor Jim Zeigler on Friday said he was asking the state ethics commission to review how Gov. Robert Bentley's senior political adviser — whom Bentley admitted making inappropriate remarks to — is paid.

Bentley senior political adviser Rebekah Caldwell Mason is not on state payroll although she plays a key adviser role in Bentley's administration.

"This is not about his personal peccadillos; it is about the improper use of state funds and the right of the people to know who is paying the advisers to our public officials," Zeigler said in a statement.

Mason on Friday released a summary of payments after questions about how she is paid. Mason said her company was paid a total of $91,000 last year — mostly through campaign funds — for her work for Bentley and a nonprofit organization formed to advance his agenda.

Mason, who previously worked for Bentley's campaign for governor and as his

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communications director in the governor’s office, was named his senior political adviser on Jan. 1, 2015.

Mason says Bentley’s campaign paid her company, RCM Communications, $70,500 in 2015 for consulting and travel reimbursement. She said the Alabama Council for Government Excellence, a nonprofit formed to promote Bentley’s agenda, also paid her company $15,000 for consulting work. However, she said, that was separate to her work as the governor’s direct adviser.

As a nonprofit, the group does not have to report donors. The state auditor called the group a “dark money” organization.

“I have disclosed every dime RCM Communications Inc. has received, including fees paid to the company by a nonprofit which is not even required to disclose that information. If there’s a perception this is ‘dark money’ I believe my disclosure flips the light switch on,” Mason said in a statement.

Mason served as Bentley’s communications adviser in the governor’s office in 2012 and 2013 before shifting to work on his re-election campaign in July 2013. She said that between July 2013 and November 2014, her company had a gross income of $273,278 from Bentley’s campaign for work on the re-election.

Former Alabama Law Enforcement Secretary Spencer Collier — a day after Bentley fired him — accused the governor of having an inappropriate relationship with Mason. Collier disclosed the contents of a recorded conversation in which Bentley made sexually charged remarks to a woman, although the person on the other end of the conversation could not be heard.

Zeigler asked the commission to investigate whether any state resources were improperly used to further an improper relationship and other allegations made by Collier.

Bentley said he never had a physical relationship with Mason but admitted making remarks that caused him to apologize to his family and to Mason and her family.

The governor in a statement responding to Zeigler’s accusation said he has, “always complied with the ethics laws of the state.”

“In fact, I voluntarily release my tax returns to the public every year in a spirit of openness and transparency. I have always and will continue to cooperate with the Alabama Ethics Commission,” Bentley said.
Experts disagree on fallout for Bentley

Disclosures could affect governor’s ability to lead

By Stephen Dethrage
Staff Writer

Two political science experts at the University of Alabama disagree on the likely ramifications for Gov. Robert Bentley after he admitted making inappropriate remarks to a top-level staffer.

Bill Stewart, a professor emeritus of the University of Alabama’s Department of Political Science, said if the second-term governor has broken no laws, his relationship with senior political adviser Rebekah Mason should not have significant legal or political implications.

“I personally don’t think it ought to affect his ability to serve as governor of Alabama,” Stewart said. “Those things that go on in his private life, we as citizens might say we don’t like it or we don’t mind, but he has the right to have his own behavior.”

But Stewart said that Bentley, a little-known Tuscaloosa legislator and dermatologist before becoming governor in 2010, has squandered his greatest political asset: his reputation for honesty.

“Now he’s in the thick of it himself. It pretty much decimates the reputation that he was elected on, as the doctor that could cure Alabama’s ills, financial and moral,” Stewart said.

Richard Fording, a political science professor and chair of the department, said Bentley may be safe legally, but that he can forget accomplishing anything politically for the remainder of his term, which ends in 2019.

“I can’t imagine that Governor Bentley is going to survive this,” Fording said. “The public reaction is going to be so strong and so negative that he could probably stay and not resign, but I think a lot of people in his position would think they’re doing a disservice to the state.”

Bentley said in a press conference Wednesday afternoon that he had communicated inappropriately with Mason, a

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former anchor for WVUA in Tuscaloosa, in 2014. He also said that their relationship was never physical, and that he had done nothing illegal.

The governor’s admission followed a press conference held by Spencer Collier, the former chief of the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency. Collier was fired from the position Tuesday, and on Wednesday afternoon accused the governor of an inappropriate relationship with Mason.

Bentley said Collier’s allegations were false, and Mason said in a statement that his accusation was indicative of “clear, demonstrated gender bias.”

Stewart, though, said Collier was hardly alone in his belief that Bentley and Mason had a relationship beyond their professional acquaintance.

“I don’t know Mr. Collier so I can’t vouch for his character or lack of it, but other people were aware or were of the belief that there was an affair in progress,” Stewart said. “He wasn’t unusual in having that view.”

Stewart said it’s possible other sources may come forward to lend credibility to Collier’s claims.

“I don’t know who knows what,” he said, “but I thought it was pretty much common knowledge that when Mrs. Dianne Bentley announced that she was indeed divorcing her husband that it was for cause, not because all of a sudden they were just incompatible, not after 50 years.”

Fording said Bentley may choose to leave office to decrease the likelihood of legal investigations into whether he misused state funds in connection with his relationship with Mason or if he punished Collier for refusing to cover up an inappropriate relationship or being a whistleblower.

“There are laws that prohibit someone being punished ... under these kinds of circumstances, if Collier is telling the truth,” Fording said. “The governor may wish to avoid all that and resign.”

Democrats in the Alabama House of Representatives on Thursday asked the attorney general’s office to investigate Collier’s accusations, including that Bentley interfered with law enforcement investigations.

“The governor’s personal affairs are personal business, the duties of the Office of the Governor are the people’s business,” their statement said.

Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange said in a statement that his office takes all accusations of wrongdoing seriously but does not comment on pending or possible investigations.

—Material from the Associated Press was included in this report.

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APRIL 1, 2016

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Population

Census reports: Huntsville leads state growth

Metro added 4,000 people from 2014 to 2015, 25,000 since 2010

Challen Stephens cstephens@al.com

Huntsville and Baldwin County continue to expand rapidly, leading the growth across Alabama, while many of the state’s other urban areas remain stagnant or shrinking.

Birmingham-Hoover, a sprawling metro across seven counties, grew slightly from 2014 to 2015 to reach nearly 1.15 million residents. But Mobile and Montgomery were nearly unchanged. Gadsden and Florence and other smaller metros lost people.

That’s according to the latest Census estimates for changes in metro populations from July of 2014 to July of 2015. Huntsville added more than 4,000 people over that one-year span, most in the state, according to the estimates released last week.

That pushed Huntsville — the state’s second largest metro area — to just under 445,000 residents.

The combined towns of Baldwin County in south Alabama added almost as many new residents as Huntsville. But what made about a 1 percent gain for Huntsville is a 2 percent climb for the recently designated Daphne-Fairhope-Foley metro. That’s the fastest rate of growth in the state from 2014-2015.

The beachside metro, which includes all of Baldwin County, reached nearly 204,000 people.

Auburn-Opelika metro also added about 2,600 people, for the second fastest rate of growth in the state at 1.7 percent.

Meanwhile, a third of the state’s metros lost population. Those were Gadsden, Florence-Muscle Shoals, Anniston-Oxford-Jacksonville and Decatur.

Alabama also contains a portion of the Columbus, Ga., metro area, which reversed course after years of rapid growth and lost population in 2015.

The latest figures largely continue recent trends in Alabama. Since 2010, Huntsville metro has added more than 25,000 residents, most in the state. Baldwin County added more than 20,000 over the last five years, second most in the state.

Birmingham-Hoover metro has maintained steady growth for the last five years, while Montgomery metro had been shrinking until this latest report.

The latest Census report also shows that most of the increase in Huntsville and Baldwin County is explained by new residents moving in.

Meanwhile, Birmingham sees little net effect from new arrivals, but experienced overall growth thanks to far more births than deaths. Mobile overall lost almost 1,000 residents to people moving away from 2014 to 2015, but offset that loss with births. Same applies to Montgomery.

Metropolitan statistical areas are defined by the federal government based on economic ties and commutes. For example, the Huntsville metro area includes Madison and Limestone counties, while Birmingham-Hoover spans seven counties and metro Montgomery includes five counties. Mobile metro is Mobile County alone.

The U.S. Census Bureau has not yet released the 2015 estimates for individual cities.
Onward and upward: 
A city earns its wings

George Talbot  For AL.com

It happens thousands of times a day, in cities all around the world. A plane rolls down a runway, tips its nose toward the sky and lifts its wheels away from the earth.

This flight was no different. This past Monday, shortly after 9:30 a.m., a passenger jet ascended from the Mobile Aeroplex at Brookley, soared above Mobile Bay and banked its wings southward toward the Gulf of Mexico.

What may have looked routine to some onlookers was nothing short of magical for those who'd toiled to make it happen. For them, and for countless others across Mobile who turned their eyes to the sky that morning, it was the sweet moment that real flight and dreams of flight merged together in the crisp March air.

Three hours and 26 minutes later, the Airbus A321 returned from the blue yonder and coasted to a stop at Brookley.

SEE AIRBUS, AS

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AIRBUS
FROM A1.

History was made. The twin-engine, 185-passenger jet, smartly dressed in JetBlue livery, is the first plane assembled by Airbus on U.S. soil and the first plane turned out by its new, $600 million final assembly plant in Mobile.

The plane is a tribute to the Alabama workers who crafted it; the plant is a tribute to a city that simply refused to quit chasing its dreams.

Mobile’s journey to that moment was more than a decade in the making, with the 2005 decision by Airbus’ then-parent company, the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Co., to select Mobile as a potential site for aircraft production.

It was my privilege to cover that journey as a reporter for the Press-Register in Mobile. The newspaper’s editors, led by Mike Marshall and Dewey English, gave me incredible latitude to pursue the story, which steadily grew from the back of the business section to an international saga that played out on the front pages of The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal, among others.

It will take a book to recount it all, but here are the highlights:

› EADS proposed to build a 1,000-worker assembly plant at Brookley contingent on winning a Pentagon contract to deliver refueling tankers to the U.S. Air Force. The city and EADS spent the next five years in a tough, politically charged battle with Boeing Co. for the $40 billion contract — winning the award in 2008.

› The victory was short-lived. Chicago-based Boeing successfully challenged the award, forcing a second competition. The Air Force announced in 2011 that it was picking Boeing for the contract, dealing heartbreaking to Mobile. But city and state officials never gave up on Airbus, continuing to recruit the company under the code name “Project Hope.”

› “Hope” turned to reality in 2012, when Airbus struck an agreement to establish production of aircraft in Mobile. Construction was completed in the fall of 2015, and the first Alabama-made airplane rolled out of the paint shop in February.

On Monday afternoon, I joined Mayor Sandy Stimpson and other local dignitaries at a reception inside the cavernous Airbus assembly bay at Brookley. Before us stood the 300 or so employees who make up the Mobile workforce. Behind us was a glistening, $115 million airplane and a jubilant crew of test pilots.

Barry Eccleston, the president of Airbus Americas, informed us that the narrow body jet passed its evaluation with flying colors — remarkable for a maiden flight. The goal of every aircraft, he quipped, is to maintain an equal number of takeoffs and landings.

“In Mobile,” Eccleston said, “we are one for one.” As we surveyed the celebration, I thought of the many individuals who’d played a part in making the day possible. Some have retired or moved on to new careers; only a few remained who’d been there for the initial announcement back in 2005. Even fewer had witnessed Mobile’s previous pursuit of aircraft manufacturers, including near-misses with Boeing; McDonnell-Douglas and an Indonesian firm known as IPTN.

Early Monday, a handful of those trailblazers gathered on the field at Brookley. Away from the hoopla and the news cameras, they raised a champagne toast as the Airbus jet hit the cloudless skies above.

“It was an emotional moment, for sure,” said Bay Haas, who served as Mobile Port Authority executive director from 1982-2008. “It was a day that many people thought would never come.”

Perhaps no one enjoyed Monday’s milestone more those veterans of the Great Tanker War. It was overshadowed by the coverage of Airbus, but later that day a short news story slipped out of Washington, D.C., that should be lost on no one in Mobile. Boeing, according to the Pentagon, was likely to miss an upcoming deadline for delivering its tankers to the Air Force, and the Defense Department expressed “low confidence” in Boeing’s ability to meet its future requirements.

The prized tanker contract has become an albatross for Boeing in Seattle, weighing down its profits, frustrating its engineers and serving as a drag on its share prices.

In Mobile, by contrast, the A321 that took flight Monday did so on time, on budget and with a quality that Airbus officials described as “second to none.”

Two programs, and two communities, moving in distinctly different directions.

As we watched the upward sweep of that airplane on Monday, it was apparent that Mobile had conquered more than just gravity. As the flight made its arc toward the sun, it lifted a city closer to its destiny, high in the heavens.

Ulrich Weber, Project Head at the Airbus U.S. Manufacturing Facility, speaks after the first Airbus A-321 aircraft assembled in Mobile made its first test flight on Monday in Mobile. Sharron Steinmann / ssteinmann@al.com
We said we could build big planes in Mobile, and we’ve done it

Frances Coleman
fcoleman1953@gmail.com

How many ways can we say, "We told you so"? Hundreds. We can write it, we can shout it, we can sing it or sign it. We can use a few words, we can use dozens of words, we can keep it clean or throw in a little profanity. We can even illustrate it with photographs, videos, drawings or cartoons.

The essence of the message would be the same, however.

We.
Told.
You.
So.

We told everybody — Congress, the White House, the Pentagon, the news media and, especially, our old friends at Boeing — that, if given the opportunity, Mobilians could build beautiful airplanes.

And now we’ve done it. The men and women who work at Airbus’ first assembly plant on U.S. soil have produced the plant’s first A321, which they turned over to Airbus test pilots a few days ago for a maiden flight of 3½ hours.

If we’re exultant, exuberant or otherwise giddy, bear with us. From the early years of competing with Boeing for the right to build Air Force refueling tankers in Mobile, to then deciding it would build commercial jetliners here, Airbus’ accomplishment has been a grueling 10 years in the making.

Mobile was there for every blow to the face, every knife in the back, every hit below the belt and every derogatory remark. In 2008, Airbus and its owner, EADS, won the Pentagon contract for the refueling tanker. After much skillful lobbying, old-fashioned arm-twisting and targeted denigration on the part of Boeing, however, the Pentagon changed its mind and awarded the tanker contract to — surprise! — Boeing.

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Mobile could’ve given up. Airbus could’ve given up. The state of Alabama could’ve withdrawn its incentive package and thrown in the towel. After all, they had suffered the slings and arrows of some pretty outrageous fortune. But they didn’t give up. Airbus leaders were determined to get a toehold in the United States, and local and state leaders were determined that Mobile would be the place where Airbus landed its U.S. operations.

Outrageous or otherwise, fortune has a way of changing, however, and in 2012 it changed on behalf of Mobile. That’s the year Airbus announced it would assemble commercial jetliners in the Port City. Within three years, it had built its factory, and in March 2016 the first A321—built by Mobilians—rolled out the door.

As for Mobile’s chief detractors—namely, Boeing and its supporters in Seattle and Congress—fortune has been alternately kind yet capricious to them.

Boeing won that big fat contract (which has blossomed from $35 billion to an estimated $51 billion) and happily began working on the first 18 planes, which are due to the Air Force by August 2017. But alas, the Defense Contract Management Agency is predicting that those refueling tankers will be at least seven months late and possibly more. (The Defense Contract Management Agency is the government agency responsible for performing contract administration services for the Defense Department.)

According to it, Boeing’s challenges have included wiring issues, development problems and test flight scheduling delays. If the company is late with its first batch of planes, it will incur financial penalties that will cost it millions of dollars.

Why should anybody in Mobile care about Boeing’s problems with the refueling tanker?

We probably wouldn’t, if it weren’t for the insults we endured when Boeing and EADS were battling for the tanker contract. Boeing executives told anyone who would listen, including Congress and the news media, that workers in Mobile weren’t capable of building sophisticated airplanes.

Oh, the irony of watching Airbus’ first A321 take its first test flight in the skies over Mobile as, out on the West Coast, Boeing was trying to hurry its refueling tankers along so they can eventually take their first test flights.

Meanwhile, down in Mobile, we told you we could do it and we’ve done it.

Congratulations, and enough said.
He detailed civil rights fight in words ...

Greg Garrison garrison@al.com

Civil rights historian and author Frank Sikora worked as a reporter for The Birmingham News for more than three decades.

The tall, gray-bearded reporter known for his kind, soft-spoken mild manner and elegant writing style died Monday, according to his family. He was 80.


His first book, "Selma, Lord, Selma," published in 1980 and reprinted in 1997, was turned into a TV movie by Disney. It's an account of two young girls in 1965 Selma in the days leading up to Bloody Sunday, when law enforcement officers beat civil rights marchers.

Sikora was from Byesville, Ohio, but spent most of his life in Alabama.

"He was really from Birmingham," said his granddaughter, SchaScha Smith. "He was very humble, very humble. He didn't care who you were, or what you did. If you needed help, he'd be there. He'd always show a sense of humor and make you smile, even in a sad situation.


In 2014, Sikora received the Clarence Cason Award in non-fiction writing from the University of Alabama.

Sikora also co-wrote a 2006 novel, "The Visitor at Winter Chapel," and a 2007 biography, "Hear the Bugles Calling: My Three Wars as a Combat Infantryman."

A funeral service will be held Monday at Gray Brown-Servis Mortuary in Anniston. Burial will be at Bethlehem Baptist Cemetery in Oxford.

Sikora, who had six children, moved from Birmingham to the Anniston area about four months ago to live with his oldest daughter as his health declined, Smith said.

Sikora had just turned 80 on March 18. He died of natural causes.

"He was just tired and worn out and ready to go," Smith said.
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Van will help reach rural workers

Unit will bring technology to applicants

By Stephen Dethrage
Staff Writer

Members of the business and education sectors have joined forces on two initiatives to improve the workforce of West Alabama, community leaders said Friday morning.

The first initiative is the official deployment of the Mobile Workforce Unit, a large Mercedes Sprinter van that will be driven to rural areas of West Alabama, where unemployment is high and job training is low.

The van is outfitted with 25 laptops and a built-in Wi-Fi, bringing computer technology and Internet access to areas that lack these services.

The Workforce Unit is the brainchild of Shelton State Community College, West Alabama Works and the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama.

Gary Nichols, the president of McAbee Construction and chairman of West Alabama Works, said that business leaders throughout history have been plagued by the question of how to get applicants in need of training to places where they could get help.

SEE WORKERS, B3
"Now, with this Mobile Unit, we'll be able to transport training to the applicant, to the needy person throughout our rural community and throughout our seven-county region," Nichols said.

The Workforce Unit brings training materials designed to aid job seekers of any level of training or education, whether they need GED preparation, resume-writing help or advanced, specific skill sets.

Cynthia Anthony, the interim president of Shelton State Community College, said the Mobile Workforce Unit has already been in action at events in Sawyerville, Newbern and other parts of Hale County, where 10 more outreach events are scheduled in the next two months.

"We look forward to seeing the great things the people in this region can accomplish by being connected to the right resources," she said. "It's all about connection."

The community leaders also announced an initiative with ACT, known for their standardized tests, to have Tuscaloosa certified as a Work Ready Community.

"This aligns training programs with the economic development needs of the communities in West Alabama and also matches applicants to jobs," Chamber chief operating officer Donny Jones said. "A certified Work Ready Community helps workers understand what skills are required by employers and helps businesses communicate their workforce needs."

Jones said the people who seek employment at job fairs, online and elsewhere are added to a database where their resumes, contact information and more are stored and passed on to potential employers. He said more than 2,800 people are in the system already, including job seekers from each of the seven counties the Chamber serves.
Sessions will chair foreign policy team

Philip Rucker and Robert Costa
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump revealed part of his foreign policy advisory team and outlined an unabashedly non-interventionist approach to world affairs during a wide-ranging meeting Monday with The Washington Post’s editorial board.

The Republican presidential front-runner, for the first time, listed five of the people who are part of a team, chaired by Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., counseling him on foreign affairs and helping to shape his policies. They are Keith Kellogg, Carter Page, George Papadopoulos, Walid Phares and Joseph Schmitz.

Trump’s meeting with members of The Washington Post’s editorial board covered a range of issues, including media libel laws, violence at his rallies, climate change, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the U.S. presence in Asia.

Trump said in his meeting at The Washington Post that he advocates an aggressive U.S. posture in the world with a light footprint. In spite of unrest abroad, especially in the Middle East, Trump insisted that the United States must look inward and steer its resources toward rebuilding domestic infrastructure.

“I do think it’s a different world today, and I don’t think we should be nation-building anymore,” Trump said. “I think it’s proven not to work, and we have a different country than we did then. We have $19 trillion in debt. We’re sitting, probably, on a bubble. And it’s a bubble that if it breaks, it’s going to be very nasty. I just think we have to rebuild our country.”

Trump praised George Shultz, who served as President Ronald Reagan’s secretary of state, as a model and was harshly critical of the current secretary of state, John Kerry.

He questioned the United States’ continued involvement in NATO and, on the subject of Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, charged that America’s allies are “not doing anything.”

“Ukraine is a country that affects us far less than it affects other countries in NATO, and yet we’re doing all of the lifting,” Trump said. “They’re not doing anything. And I say, ‘Why is it that Germany’s not dealing with NATO on Ukraine? Why is it that other countries that are in the vicinity of Ukraine, why aren’t they dealing? Why are we always the one that’s leading, potentially the third world war with Russia?’

Trump declared U.S. involvement in NATO may need to be significantly diminished in the coming years, breaking with nearly seven decades of consensus in Washington.

“We certainly can’t afford to do this anymore,” Trump said, adding later, “NATO is costing us a fortune, and yes, we’re protecting Europe with NATO, but we’re spending a lot of money.”

Trump sounded a similar note in discussing the U.S. presence in the Pacific. He questioned the value of massive military investments in Asia and wondered aloud whether the United States still was capable of being an effective peacekeeping force there.

“South Korea is very rich, great industrial country, and yet we’re not reimbursed fairly for what we do,” Trump said.
MEDICAID

Alabama legislature approves General Fund budget

The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY — The Alabama legislature on Wednesday gave final approval to a General Fund budget that Gov. Robert Bentley has vowed to veto over what he says is inadequate Medicaid funding.

Senators voted 20-13 in favor of the $1.85 billion budget, which allocates $700 million to Medicaid. Bentley has said that is $85 million less than what is needed to adequately fund the state's Medicaid program. Legislators say they can't further fund Medicaid without cannibalizing other state programs.

"You've got to live within the means, and that's what we're doing," Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh said Wednesday.

On Monday, Bentley called the current budget "unacceptable," and said he would call a special session if lawmakers override his veto, which would enact the spending plan with a majority vote of both legislature chambers.

Sen. Rodger Smitherman, D-Birmingham, voted against the budget Wednesday, saying he takes issue with spending on construction projects when the legislature won't fully fund Medicaid.

"We need to have a commitment and moratorium against spending any dime on brick and mortar projects until we adequately fund the projects that affect people," Smitherman said.

Bentley on Monday said a lottery might be the only way to raise funds for the Medicaid shortfall. He said he believes

MEDICAID

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voters would overwhelmingly approve a lottery if given the chance.

Several lottery bills have been floated during the 2016 session, including one that would allow participation in multistate games. None has made it to a floor vote.

House Speaker Mike Hubbard said he personally opposes any lottery legislation and he's doubtful any lottery bills will pass this session.

"I don't think it's good public policy when we depend on revenues based off of a scam on the people of the state," Hubbard said.
Bentley says a lottery could save Medicaid

Mike Cason  mcason@al.com

Gov. Robert Bentley told doctors and other employees at Monroe County Hospital on Monday that a lottery is probably the only realistic option for raising more money for Medicaid.

The governor said he thought voters would approve a lottery overwhelmingly — by 70 percent — if it made its way to the ballot.

Bentley toured the hospital on his visit to the southwest Alabama county to promote rural initiatives he announced during his State of the State address Feb. 2.

The governor said the 94-bed hospital is an example of a strong and vital rural facility that could take a hit if Medicaid's funding request is not met.

The Medicaid Agency has said it would have to cut payments to doctors and trim optional programs. Bentley said rural doctors would be affected.

"People think they make a lot of money," Bentley said. "They don't make a lot of money. And they serve because they're called to serve and they love living in a rural area and they love taking care of people.

"But they have to make a living. And they have to pay their staff, and they have to pay their electric bill, and they have to pay all the things that everyone else has to pay to run a small business."

Bentley and hospital CEO Jeff Brannon urged doctors and others to call and write legislators and ask them to meet Medicaid's funding request.

Brannon said he's concerned about patients losing access to care.

"If the providers are hit, and we are a provider, and we have cuts in payments, then we have to consider potential cuts in services," Brannon said. "And I think the same thing is true for physicians and the dentists who were in the room today. They've got to be able to be funded in order to continue to provide the services.

"That's the scary part of all of this, is what's going to happen to the patient."

Bentley requested a $100 million increase in Medicaid's General Fund appropriation, to $785 million. The budget passed by the House last week would provide $700 million.
ALABAMA

Career Center serves as model

The Associated Press

OZARK — A career technical education program in southeast Alabama that simulates workplace environments in seven different industries has been selected as the model throughout the state.

Amanda Campbell, the simulated workplace coordinator for Carroll High School’s Career Center, said the career center was recently selected as the model for 85 similar simulated workforce programs throughout the state, the Dothan Eagle reported. Campbell says seven of the career center’s 10 CTE programs have converted their classrooms into simulated businesses that reflect services offered within the community.

In its full implementation across all of the programs next school year, the career center courses are expected to involve industry-indicative uniforms for the students, time entry for them to clock in and out of class, leadership positions — such as managers — for which the students can apply and interview, and soft skills development.

The students are expected to use employee manuals as their textbooks, and are typically paid with school credit or industry supplies they can use within the courses.

The teachers for each industry will serve as the
CAREER
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Chief executive officer of each of the businesses, said CHS Career Center Director Dana Griggs. "The way they're learning, they're being taught critical thinking skills and problem solving and conflict resolution from each other, some of which a teacher wouldn't normally teach or that you just can't teach," she said.

Each program has a board of directors made up of area business leaders who provide input on the courses and opportunities for the students to intern.

Philip Cleveland, the Alabama Department of Education director of career technical education, said simulated workplace environments in Alabama are modeled closely to those in West Virginia, which he said was the first state to implement simulated workforce environments at the high school level statewide.

In Alabama, Cleveland said the programs are designed with business and industry workplace needs in mind. He said the programs' formats are embedded with industry certification requirements and some state and federal employment training programs. He said the state department has partnered with AIDT for its Ready to Work Program.
The city that fought for diversity must welcome it today

Mayor William Bell for AL.com

Understanding the lasting impact of the Civil Rights Movement on the City of Birmingham is a complicated thing. It is not just the imagery of the black and white footage of the dogs and hoses. It is not just the idea that we are playing catch-up as a city and people following years of strife. It is the deeply embedded scars of mistrust and fear that impacted the mindset of citizens. It is the idea that change is hard and struggles can last generations before advances are noted and felt. It is the anxiety, suspicion and uneasiness that comes when the scars are pricked and reopened.

Birmingham carries the weight of these scars and it impacts decisions and public sentiment even today. Unfortunately, it is an easy thing to prey on those weaknesses and manipulate using fear and misinformation. This week, I attended a public meeting on the proposed changes to the Mayor-Council act. For or against it, the information itself was predictable and in some cases factual. The meeting itself was lengthy and contentious. However, the proposed changes are in the hands of the Alabama state legislators and it is up to them to provide clarity as to the administrative and legislative roles and the overall function of city government.

During the meeting, the discussion broke down on a racial level that was not just hurtful but harmful to our city.

We are one people. I am the mayor to everyone in this city from the city councilors themselves to the grade schooler to the person singing in the church choir on Sunday.

Advancements in the development of the downtown area do not take precedence over the advancement of Woodlawn, Avondale, East Lake and Collegeville or the needs in Hooper City, Tarpley City or Wylam. There are many needs throughout the city and they are all significant and critical to a successful future for Birmingham.

We have seen unprecedented growth with a population uptick for the first time in generations, extraordinary development with over $1 billion in capital projects and unparalleled teamwork between public and private partnerships. We are attacking the blight issue in our neighborhoods by tearing down abandoned and dilapidated homes, tackling the overgrown lots with an aggressive cutting and clean-up schedule and engaging every federal and national foundation dollar that we can capture to help further those efforts. We have a diverse team of department heads and employees who are committed to tearing down barriers, looking for innovative solutions and working together to advance Birmingham.

Our common thread is that we all love this city. Where else can you find a people so loving and generous just 50 short years after some of the most vicious and hateful Civil Rights struggles of the modern era? Just over 50 years ago, in this very city, four little girls were murdered in an act that would today be classified as an act of domestic terrorism.

We are Birmingham and we will never forget, but we are embracing that history to build our future and that means embracing the new residents of our city, cherishing and taking care of the life-long residents and together proving to the world that there are only two types of people, those who are from Birmingham and those who wish they were.

Bell has been mayor of Birmingham since 2010.
GULF SHORES

Work begins on beachfront hotel using BP money

By JAY REEVES
The Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM — After a court fight and years of trying to rebuild a beachfront lodge destroyed by Hurricane Ivan in 2004, Alabama has begun construction on a multimillion-dollar hotel and conference center that will partially funded by money from another Gulf Coast disaster: the BP oil spill.

Initial work has started on the new conference center at Gulf State Park just weeks after a federal judge blocked the state from paying for the work with money from BP, the director of the project, Cooper Shattuck, said Thursday.

Shattuck said the work is legal because the judge only shut the lid on one pot of BP money and the project is being funded from another pile of BP money.

A group that sued over the project, the Gulf Restoration Network, conceded that the funding mechanism is legal but called the move disappointing nonetheless.

“As we said before, there were no hotels or conference centers damaged by the BP oil disaster,” said Cyn Sarthou, executive director of the Gulf Restoration Network.

The state is building a 350-room hotel and conference center beside the Gulf of Mexico, where oil and tar balls washed ashore after a BP oil well exploded off the coast of Louisiana six years ago, dumping about 134 million gallons of crude into the sea. Combined with other work, the total cost is projected at $135 million.

The new hotel — which will

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include conference space to accommodate 1,500 people — will replace an old state lodge that was destroyed by Hurricane Ivan in 2004 and demolished years before the oil spill occurred.

Shattuck, a University of Alabama attorney tapped by Gov. Robert Bentley to direct the project, said workers recently started restoring sand dunes and working on the foundation for the new hotel, located between the tourist towns of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach. The cities have lacked adequate beachfront meeting space for years.

While U.S. District Judge Charles Butler ruled in February that $58.5 million in BP funds for early restoration could not be used for a lodge without additional environmental analysis, Shattuck said the court didn't block the entire project.

"We are complying with the court's order and those funds are not being used for the lodge," Shattuck said in an interview conducted by email. "The current work on the lodge is being funded with monies awarded the project last year from grant funds provided by BP in 2010."

In a statement, Sarthou said the state should use BP money for something other than a hotel.

"We hoped that as Alabama considered the alternatives - as required by the court's order - they would decide to use the funds on a project that actually restored state resources and restored them in a way that would benefit all the public, not just those who can afford to stay in the lodge," she said.

Alabama leaders, including Bentley, have been trying to build a replacement for the old lodge since shortly after Ivan struck 12 years ago. The project should be done by summer 2018, Shattuck said.
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA SCHOOL OF LAW

Experts to discuss police reform

Free lecture focuses on rights after Ferguson

By Nick Privitera
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Calls for law enforcement reform have proliferated since the death of Michael Brown on Aug. 9, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, along with other subsequent allegations of police brutality.

On Friday, the Alabama Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Law Review in conjunction with the University of Alabama School of Law will host a symposium, "Redefining Clearly Established Rights After Ferguson."

The symposium will begin at 9 a.m. in the Hesdale Moot Courtroom of the law school and will end at 4:30 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.

The symposium will feature speakers with legal and law enforcement backgrounds who will offer their expertise on issues related to civil rights, reform and other related topics. The symposium will be broken down into five sessions throughout the day.

Bryan Adamson, an associate professor at the University of Seattle School of Law, will be the featured speaker for the first session. He will discuss the effects of media coverage of Ferguson and other related cases and how media coverage can impact a grand jury's decision-making.

"My main perspective that I am hoping to bring to this is looking at the way in which these major, very visible events in Ferguson and more specifically for my research, the Tamir Rice shooting in Cleveland, looking at the way in which the news media constructed narratives around those deaths and the subsequent demonstrations and protests," Adamson said.

One session will feature a panel of speakers with extensive law enforcement backgrounds, including Tuscaloosa Police Chief Steve Anderson and Tuscaloosa County District Attorney Lyn Head.

"(The speakers) are all going to be on a panel that is moderated by professor Steve Rushin, and that panel is going to discuss the implications of changing the laws to reflect what has been happening across the country, not just in Ferguson, but a lot of other places," said Shalyn Smith, editor-in-chief of the Alabama Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Law Review.

Praveen Krishna, an assistant U.S. attorney for the Department of Justice, will also participate in the panel discussion.

"I'll be talking about a few things. One would be our office's focus on enforcing civil rights. We often bring criminal prosecutions against police officers who willfully deprive the civil rights of other people," Krishna said.

Other symposium panelists will include professors from the University of Alabama, the University of Washington and the University of California, Irvine.

"The symposium is a really good opportunity for the law school to bring in some well-recognized or nationally recognized experts in police behavior, police misconduct, etc., who are going to come in and give talks about their research," Rushin said.

"This is a really important time for people to be talking about the issue of police misconduct, legal standards in place to address that and other legal mechanisms by which we can incentivize departments to reduce the level of police misconduct."
UA student recalls terror in Brussels

She was on her way to the airport when terrorists attacked

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

Katie Godfrey and her boyfriend Florent Verbeke were running late and rushing to the Brussels Airport in Belgium the morning of March 22 when she received an urgent call from a friend.

She soon learned that two bombs had been detonated at the airport, in what turned out to be the terminal of her flight from Brussels to Atlanta.

“At first she (Godfrey’s friend) didn’t want to tell us what happened, so we wouldn’t panic. She just kept saying ‘are you OK, are you OK?’” said Godfrey, a 22-year-old University of Alabama student from Spanish Fort.

“We looked on our phones and read about what was happening. We just sat down on the stairs for a minute and took it all in.”

Transportation officials announced that there would be just one more train out of Brussels that day, but didn’t announce what had happened at a metro station less than a mile away.

“Everyone was laughing and acting normal. I think we were the only ones who knew what had happened,” she said.

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Godfrey had arrived in Europe to visit her boyfriend on March 12. They met last year when he spent a semester studying in an exchange program at UA.

The couple spent her spring break touring Europe. They saw the Louvre, visited Notre Dame, the palace at Versailles and the Eiffel Tower in Paris and the Coliseum in Rome. Verbeke was accompanying Godfrey to the airport that morning, and responsible for their delay, she said.

“I’ll never complain about him making me late again,” she said. “I got really lucky and should have already been there. Other passengers on my flight were already there.”

The attacks that killed 32 victims and three suicide bombers were the deadliest in the country’s history. Godfrey said that she returned to Verbeke’s home about 20 minutes outside of Brussels before they drove to Amsterdam before the borders were closed that night.

She caught a flight back to the U.S. the next afternoon.

“I have never, ever felt more grateful,” she said. “I feel really lucky, I guess, but really lucky and guilty at the same time.”

She watched news coverage of the bombings and the aftermath for about a day, but has avoided it since. She’s haunted by the graphic images of injured people walking through the subway tunnels after the bomb at the metro station.

“Everywhere I go now, I’m worried, knowing that anything can happen,” she said. “I’m more nervous and more paranoid. A laptop fell off the counter and it scared me for a second. I heard sirens another day and my heart stopped for a second.”

Godfrey is a senior majoring in biology at UA. She’s planning to study global change ecology and research at the Ghent University in Belgium before applying for vet school.

She works as a vet tech at Shamblin Veterinary Clinic in Northport.

—Reach Stephanie Taylor
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UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Lecture series focuses on
Civil War history

Free event will be Saturday on UA campus

By Ken Roberts
City Editor

People can learn more about the history of the Civil War during a lecture series this weekend on the University of Alabama campus.

The annual John Caldwell Calhoun Sanders Lecture Series will be from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday in the Grand Gallery of the Alabama Museum of Natural History, 427 Sixth Ave.

William Boman, executive director of University Museums, said the series will present a top-notch lineup of scholars with analysis of military battles, the politics of the war and descriptions of the key personalities that shaped the Civil War era.

"The lecture provides the general public the opportunity to hear scholarly authors present their research in a way that is educational and entertaining for everyone," Boman said.

Admission to the lecture is free, but advance registration is requested. For more information, call 348-7510 or e-mail ajones@ua.edu.

Christopher McIlwain, a Tuscaloosa attorney and president of Hubbard, McIlwain & Brakefield P.C., will speak on "Civil War Alabama." He has spent that past 25 years studying 19th century Alabama.

McIlwain earned an undergraduate degree in political science and sociology from UA, and then graduated from UA's School of Law in 1980.

George Rable, the Charles G. Summersell Chair in Southern History in UA's department of history, will discuss "The Universal Yankee Nation," based on his recent book "Damn Yankees! Demonization and Defiance in the Confederate South."

Rable, a professor in UA's College of Arts and Sciences, earned his doctorate from Louisiana State University in 1978. His research interests include Southern history and the American Civil War.

Earl Hess, who holds the Stewart W. McClelland Chair in History at Lincoln Memorial University, will discuss "Braxton Bragg: The Best-Hated Man of the Confederacy." Hess completed his doctorate at Purdue University.

He has published nearly 20 books, more than 20 articles and more than 100 book reviews. Among his recent Civil War publications are "The Battle of Ezra Church and the Struggle for Atlanta," "Civil War Infantry Tactics: Training, Combat, and Small-Unit Effectiveness" and "Kennesaw Mountain -- Sherman, Johnson, and the Atlanta Campaign."

In addition to the lectures, there will be several special exhibits on display, including a collection of Civil War cannonballs that were discovered last summer on the UA campus. The cannonballs will be displayed at the Alabama Museum of Natural History during the Sanders Lecture and will be moved to the Gorgas House the following week.
SEC honors UA theater professor

Seth Panitch, a theater professor at the University of Alabama, was chosen Wednesday as the 2016 SEC Faculty Achievement Award winner for UA.

Faculty members at all 14 SEC institutions were chosen for the award, which honors academic achievements in research and scholarship.

Panitch serves as director of the master of fine arts and undergraduate acting programs at UA. He’s directed five international stage productions in Cuba, four off-Broadway shows in New York City, five regional theater productions, a feature film and numerous university productions. He’s also written international, off-Broadway and regional productions as well as several feature films.

All 14 SEC Faculty Achievement Award winners will receive a $5,000 honorarium and become their university’s nominee for the SEC Professor of the Year Award, which is the overall winner and will be announced in April. The SEC Professor of the Year Award winner will receive an additional $15,000 honorarium and will be recognized at the annual SEC awards dinner.
Teachers can apply to art program

By Drew Taylor
Staff Writer

Teachers working in the Tuscaloosa City school system have an opportunity to expose their students to the finer points of art through a partnership with the University of Alabama. Applications will be taken for teachers to be part of the university’s Paul R. Jones Collection of American Art K-12 Fellows program, which will be pair teachers with college students to lead K-12 students in learning more about the collection of nearly 2,000 pieces housed in the UA College of Arts and Sciences.

"From the point of view of the teacher, they learn about community engagement," said Wendy Castenell, assistant professor of African American art at the University. "They get to introduce their students to the different ideas of African American art and have them be aware of the public display of art."

Through the program, UA fellows will visit with selected classes once a week to discuss themes in African American art in the collection, including works by artists Elizabeth Catlett, Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence.

Two classes will be selected to take part in the semester-long program, which will begin in October.

Throughout the first few weeks of the programs, teachers and fellows will be required to attend a seminar to learn about community engagement. Classes will also have the opportunity to take field trips to Paul R. Jones Gallery on Sixth Street.


"He has a really diverse collection and it speaks to the diversity of African American art in the post-modern age," Castenell said. "As you look at it closely, you see themes that occupied artists and see the point of view of black people."

In addition, students will have the opportunity to design their own art inspired by the collection, which will be displayed in the gallery this December.

"The students are usually pretty excited about that," she said.

Applications deadlines are April 20 for students and April 8 for teachers. Teachers interested in applying for the program can do so online at pauljonescollection.as.ua.edu/apply.

— Reach Drew Taylor at drew.taylor@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0204.
Campus leader hopes to leave legacy

By: Laura Testino

Elliot Spillers ends his term as the University of Alabama Student Government Association president hopeful that he has laid the groundwork for a more united and diverse campus.

"Because I love this campus, I have to be very critical of it," said Spillers, a Pelham native, who will leave office April 5. "And I know its potential, and I won’t be satisfied until we fully tap into that potential."

During Spillers’ year in office, he faced obstacles, such as the SGA Senate’s refusal to confirm his chief of staff, but he also successfully launched campus initiatives and institutional changes addressing diversity and inclusivity. A testament to his legacy will be whether those developments continue to progress as new officials are elected to the SGA by a student body that grows more geographically diverse each year.

Spillers became the first independent candidate to earn the SGA presidency at UA since 1986. Spillers’ opponent was supported by the Machine, a bloc of sororities and fraternities that have heavily influenced campus politics since the SGA formed in 1914. Only eight times in UA’s history has a candidate become SGA president without the backing of the Machine. Spillers is also the second black person in UA’s history to serve as SGA president.

Spillers said he made an effort during his presidency to reach out to all students on campus, as his goal of working toward a more inclusive campus comes as the student body at UA becomes more diverse: Out-of-state students make up 51 percent of the student body, and international students account for 3 percent, leaving only 46 percent of students enrolling from in-state.

Cleo Thomas, UA’s first black SGA president, said Spillers is exactly the type of leader the campus needed.

“To the extent that the student body remains a geographically diverse, very bright student body, I think you’re likely to have a constituency that calls for progressive policies, thoughtful responses, and consequently, we are hopeful that we’ll continue to see policies that serve a majority of the students,” said Thomas, who was elected to office in 1976.

Spillers was elected on a platform that emphasized wellness for the entire Alabama campus, focusing specifically on sexual assault awareness and mental health.

While Spillers said progress was made on these issues, he and his executive board have pledged to work with the seven newly elected SGA officers throughout the transition this spring in order to offer advice and guidance in hopes that those advances can be sustained.

He will be succeeded as SGA president by Lillian Roth, who has declined to comment on her association to the Machine when asked by the student newspaper, the Crimson White. Both openly non-Machine presidential candidates were defeated.

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The SGA elections in March this spring was the first time in several years that the ballot featured numerous contested races, with Greek and independent candidates vying for the executive positions, rather than only students in the Greek organizations that Machine candidates often catered to.

Only one of the seven executive positions, the vice president of external affairs, was uncontested, although in that uncontested race there was strong support for a second write-in candidate. Previously, only half of the races have been contested, and as recently as 2013, less than 20 percent of the student body voted in SGA elections.

Mark Hammontree, who served with Spillers’ campaign staff, believes it is part of his friend’s legacy in campus politics.

“That’s good, that there are multiple people running, and that multiple people feel that they have a chance, and there are multiple people who want to get involved in being part of the SGA, regardless of the politics, the political strategy of it,” Hammontree said. “That’s no coincidence that that’s happened the year after [Spillers’] successful run.”

Spillers also served on the university’s Strategic Planning Council. As SGA president, he became a representative for the council’s Subcommittee on Diversity and Inclusion, a committee that began meeting in February. Among the goals of the committee is to make the Alabama family more inclusive, said UA President Stuart Bell, who was complimentary of Spillers’ character and accomplishments as student body president.

“There have been a lot of initiatives that the SGA has had at the university over the past eight months, and he’s not tired of continuing to move those things forward, so I think he has a lot of resiliency and a lot of energy that has served our students and our campus well,” Bell said. “I think we’ve been fortunate with (Spillers’) tenure.”
Corks recognized as Family of the Year

Award honors community service
Staff report

Susan and Brad Cork have been named the recipients of the United Way of West Alabama’s Alexis de Tocqueville Society’s annual Family of the Year honor.

"I am still in shock. I cannot believe they chose us to be Family of the Year," Susan Cork said, noting the contributions of many other fellow society members. "I love the Alexis de Tocqueville Society and the United Way. It is an honor to be able to be part of the organization."

The Corks will be presented the award during the Alexis de Tocqueville Society’s spring dinner on April 26.

Nominees for the award must have made significant contributions in improving health, education or financial stability for residents of West Alabama, according to the award’s announcement. The society, which was founded to recognize and foster voluntary community service and personal giving at an exceptional level, is comprised of donors who make an investment of $10,000 or more annually to United Way of West Alabama.

"Brad and Susan’s lives are outstanding examples of giving of one’s talents and resources to benefit others. United Way is proud to recognize them as our Family of the Year, and we are honored to be associated with their service to our community," said Jackie Wuska, president and CEO of United Way of West Alabama, in a released statement.

The Corks, through personal gifts and donations from Phifer Inc. and the Reese Phifer Jr. Memorial Foundation, have funded charitable, educational and literacy projects, according to the announcement. Susan Cork recently finished serving her third term as chairwoman of the society’s executive committee.

Susan and Brad Cork have funded charitable, educational and literacy projects through personal gifts and donations from Phifer Inc. and the Reese Phifer Jr. Memorial Foundation.
Coping with a child's cancer

Research looks at parents' daily stress, changes

By Angel Coker
Staff Writer

Daniel-Logan Allen is like any other 5-year-old. He loves to play, run around in his front yard and climb from his plastic, battery-powered police car into his red fire truck.

Watching him play, full of energy, it’s hard to believe that Daniel-Logan was once hospitalized for weeks at a time with a port in his chest to receive chemotherapy treatments.

Daniel-Logan, now in remission, was diagnosed with leukemia when he was 3 years old on the day his mother took him to the pediatrician to treat an ongoing cold.

That same day, on Aug. 27, 2014, he was admitted to Children's of Alabama hospital in Birmingham and began chemo treatments two days later. His mother, Christi Allen, said the family’s life changed drastically in that short amount of time.

"Everything changed," Allen said. "From going to the pediatrician for a cold and being told he had leukemia, it's like your world just stops because nothing else mattered except what we were going to do to fix him."

Sherwood Burns-Nader, an assistant professor in the University of Alabama's College of Human Environmental Sciences' department of human development and family studies, is studying what day-to-day life is like for parents of children who have been diagnosed with cancer within the past six months.

The study consists of a seven-day survey where the parent completes an online journal detailing what happened that day and how factors like satisfaction with medical care, being off work, travel, transportation costs and more affected their ability to cope with their child's condition.

"I'm looking to see what the daily experience is like for these parents," Burns-Nader said. "It's just a whirlwind when a child is newly diagnosed with cancer."

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Allen said the six months in which Daniel-Logan was hospitalized were hard. She and her husband spent their time worrying, traveling from their home in Tuscaloosa to Birmingham, and sleeping very little on the couch in his hospital room, she said.

Burns-Nader said the goal of the study is to shed light on how pediatric cancer affects families while in the process of treatment, not after the fact, because parents may not remember small details looking back on the experience.

"There hasn't really been a study that has looked at these day-to-day changes. The studies that have been out there are more retrospective," Burns-Nader said.

Once the study is complete, she said she will publish the information in professional journals related to the topic and present it at conferences so professionals in that field can use the information to better help parents cope in such situations.

Burns-Nader said participating in the study "is a great way for families, if this is impacting them, to get involved...so we can educate others."

She said she needs 60 families to participate but has fewer than 10.

Requirements include access to Internet and an email address and 15 to 30 minutes a day for seven days. Parents must be 18 years old or older, and their child must have been diagnosed with cancer within the past six months.

Participants will receive a $10 electronic gift card emailed to them for each day they participate.

To participate, email parentstudy.ua@gmail.com.
Spring events will boost economy

City could see $12-15 million in revenue

By Caroline Gazzara
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Football season may be the most-talked about season in Tuscaloosa, but the next six weeks hold a multitude of sporting events in the city and nearby area. From the University of Alabama's annual A-Day Game to the Tour de Tuscaloosa cycling event, West Alabama will be home to many major athletic activities and collegiate events.

SEE EVENTS, A4

Upcoming Sporting Events

Saturday: NCAA gymnastics regional, Coleman Coliseum
April 9-10: Tour de Tuscaloosa, Government Plaza
April 16: A-Day Game, Bryant-Denny Stadium
April 15-17: SEC Women's Golf Championship, Greystone Golf and Country Club, Birmingham
May 5-7: NCAA women's golf regional, Shoal Creek, Birmingham area
May 12-14: SEC Track and Field Championship, Sam Bailey Stadium
May 12-14: AHSAA softball regional, Sokol Park
May 16-18: NCAA men's golf regional, Ol' Colony Golf Course

University of Alabama gymnast Kiana Winston competes on the balance beam during competition with the University of Arkansas in Coleman Coliseum on Jan. 22. More than 7,000 fans are expected to attend the NCAA Regional Gymnastics meet Saturday, which, in addition to UA, will include teams from the University of California, Boise State, West Virginia, Kentucky and Bowling Green. STAFF PHOTO BY GARY COSBY JR.

See next page
Myers, race director and owner of Velocity Pro Cycle, said the race is for all ages and most experience levels but there will be a lot of fun events for families as well. The first day’s " criterium" course will be spectator-friendly, with the course winding through the downtown area, past many bars, restaurants and other businesses. The second part of the race will take place the next day near Sipsey Valley High School in Selma. Myers said the race will be from out of town," Myers said. "A lot of them will bring their families, eat out in restaurants in town and while they’re here attend the (Druid City) Arts Festival, so it definitely can have a boost to the economy." Alabama’s annual A-Day Game is expected to bring more than 85,000 people to the city and generate more than $10 million in revenue. Kasten said UA football brings $50 million in revenue each fall. The spring game will kick off on April 10 at 2 p.m. and will be televised nationally by ESPN. With Alabama coming off another national championship, Kasten said there is usually a boost in attendance. Last year’s A-Day Game drew a crowd of 66,175. The UA women’s golf team will be part of two major events in the Birmingham area: the SEC Women’s Golf Championship at the Greystone Golf and Country Club on April 15-17 and an NCAA regional at Shoal Creek three weeks later. “When the event was over at the Founder’s Course, we had a lot of people turn out,” Alabama women’s golf coach Mic Potter said. “And that was in 2013 and there were a ton of people there. I think people are aware of the event. Hopefully we can get some fan interest.” After the university’s spring semester ends, two more big events will take place in Tuscaloosa: the SEC Track and Field Championships at the Sam Bailey Stadium and an ASHAA high school softball regional at Selma Park. Both events will be held May 12-14. The SEC Track and Field Championship in recent years has brought in record numbers of fans. The stadium seats 2,400 people, but on average, 3,500 tickets are sold for the SEC meet. UA coach Don Days says he expects this year’s championship to be a complete sellout. “Obviously for the community, some of the world’s greatest track and field athletes will be in town,” Waterhouse said. “This is an Olympic year, so this is kind of the process for a lot of athletes follow their dreams and make it to Rio at the end of the summer. It’ll be the world’s greatest track and field meet to that date on this calendar year. The whole track and field world will turn their eyes to Tuscaloosa to see the results and the competition, so it’s a very special day for us.” The high school softball regional will bring a total of 50 teams and their families, generating more than $1 million in revenue by Kasten’s estimate. Many Tuscaloosa-area teams will be competing in another regional in Troy, so many of the teams will be coming from out of the area. Kasten said more than 2,500 fans will be in town for the regional. “This event may not be as big as A-Day but it is a multi-million dollar impact because all those teams and their parents and their grandparents have to go to eat somewhere that night,” he said. The last big event before the summer heat sets in will be an NCAA men’s golf regional at Oak Ridge Golf Complex on May 10-18. This will be the first time for Oak Ridge to host an event of this caliber. “We’re really excited,” Alabama coach Jay Seawell said. “It really gives us the opportunity to bring college golf to Tuscaloosa.” College golf gets played away from campuses all over the country and so we’ve done some nice things, but most people haven’t had the chance to watch us play, especially locally. It’ll be great to bring big-time college golf to Tuscaloosa — especially at Oak Ridge, which we’ve worked really hard to turn into a championship venue.”
Full day of activities planned for A-Day

By: Tommy Deas

University of Alabama football fans will once again be able to take the field at Bryant-Denny Stadium at the conclusion of this year’s annual A-Day Game, which will take place April 16.

The 2 p.m. spring game, which will be televised by ESPN, concludes a day of festivities that will start at 8 a.m. with a Fan Fest outside the north end zone on the corner of University Boulevard and Wallace Wade Drive. The fan fest will feature inflatables, giveaways and games.

Gates at the stadium will open at 11 a.m. Admission is free.

A free autograph session with former UA running back Kenyan Drake will take place from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Fan Photo tent outside of Gate 5, with other former players being available for pictures starting at 10 a.m.

An alumni flag football game will begin at 11:30 a.m. featuring former UA players. The flag game will consist of two 20-minute halves and is expected to end by 12:15 p.m.

The Walk of Fame ceremony at Denny Chimes, enshrining the hand and cleat prints of 2015 team captains Jake Coker, Derrick Henry, Ryan Kelly and Reggie Ragland in the concrete surrounding Denny Chimes, will start at 12:15 p.m. UA head coach Nick Saban and the captains will address the crowd.

The Walk of Champions, marking the arrival of players and coaches at the north end of the stadium off University Boulevard, will take place at 12:50 p.m.

Alabama’s two Heisman Trophy winners, Henry and Mark Ingram, will be on hand for the game. The Heisman Trophy Trust will present Alabama with the school’s copy of Henry’s 2015 Heisman Trophy, and Ingram will receive his 2009 Heisman Trophy ring.

Former Crimson Tide quarterbacks from the last 10 years will participate in the Alabama Quarterback Challenge at halftime. Participants will be announced Friday on www.rollingtide.com and on Twitter @AlabamaFTBL. Former UA quarterbacks will make nine throws from various distances to moving targets and will be awarded points, with the final throw for distance earning two points for every yard the ball travels.

Players will be presented with spring awards at midfield following the game. Once the team clears the field, fans will have post-game access and can enter through any of the four corner gates.

This will be UA’s 10th A-Day Game since the arrival of Saban as head coach. Former Alabama standouts and captains, including current National Football League stars, from the Saban era will be recognized during the game.

A-Day posters featuring Saban and 10 Alabama players from the last 10 years will be given away at entrance gates to the first 12,500 fans who arrive.
UA is selling upgraded fan experiences at www.rolltide.expapp.com. Upgrades include a tour of the locker room, pregame field access for the alumni flag game, suite seats and early-access fast passes.

Public parking is free for A-Day. Crimson Ride shuttles will be offered from the east side of campus to the Quad. Go to www.UAGameday.com for more information.
UA center to eliminate program

65 positions to be replaced by 17 positions

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

Brewer-Porch Children's Center will no longer provide services to autistic students enrolled in the Tuscaloosa city and county school systems, as part of a restructuring plan announced Friday that also includes 65 job cuts.

The University of Alabama-run mental health treatment center is for children with emotional and mental disturbances. The facility provides both long-term residential and outpatient day treatment for children and teenagers.

Administrators decided to eliminate a program that sent staff into the city and county schools to work one-on-one with approximately 35 autistic students. The decision came after an in-depth analysis of Brewer-Porch's operations over several years, Executive Director Rick Gray said Friday.

"A great deal of thought and deliberation was given to this," he said. "We've had discussions with the county and city school systems and they've assured me that they have plans in place and will continue to provide appropriate services."

The plan includes the elimination of 65 positions, Gray said, but creates 17 new ones. Staff members whose jobs end on May 31 have been encouraged to apply for the 17 new jobs, he said.

Brewer-Porch will continue to offer its other programs, including the on-campus program designed to serve pre-school children with autism.

The logistics and administrative challenges of the school-based program led to the joint decision to end program, Gray said. The decision Gray wasn't made lightly.

"Our clients and their families come first. That's why we're in this field," he said. "We care. We want to help people, especially children, who are vulnerable. This has been very difficult, but we believe in what we're doing and we believe it will produce good outcomes."

See Program, A8
Representatives of both local school systems said that services to special needs students will continue. Tuscaloosa County Schools Superintendent Walter Davie said that the changes will occur with the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year.

"Where services to our students are no longer available through Brewer-Porch, our administrators and teachers will work with each family to address those needs," he said. "Working with students and parents, individualized education plans will be adjusted so that there is a smooth transition and each child's education continues appropriately."

Tuscaloosa City Schools staff will work with their students to continue their services, system spokeswoman Lesley Bruinton said.

"We will work to ensure the needs of our students continue to be met in light of today's announcement," she said.

Gray said that the main goal of the restructuring plan was to reduce administrative overhead. Brewer-Porch had a $10 million budget during the 2015 fiscal year. It's unclear now how much money the program elimination and job cuts will save, Gray said.

The center was established in 1969 to provide mental health and educational services to children and teenagers with emotional and mental disturbances and their families.

The center includes a 56-bed residential program as well as day programs and therapeutic foster care. The staff of 250 includes clinical, administrative and support personnel, and the clinical staff work in treatment teams, which include consulting psychiatrists, dietitians and speech therapists as well as nurses, social workers, counselors, special education teachers, psychologists and mental health workers.

The center also is a clinical teaching and learning site for undergraduate and graduate students from UA and other colleges and universities.

"Our goal is to become better stewards of our scarce resources," Gray said of the restructuring. "We feel very confident that this will produce improvements."

—Reach Stephanie Taylor at stephanie.taylor@ tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0210.
Saban rated 11th best leader in world

Pope, Apple CEO join Alabama coach on list

Released Thursday with the inclusion of University of Alabama head football coach Nick Saban at No. 11. Saban is listed behind Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos, who came in at No. 1, as well as Pope Francis (No. 4), Apple CEO Tim Cook (No. 5) and Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (No. 9).

Saban is listed ahead of such notables as U2 lead singer Bono (No. 14), Stephen Curry and Steve Kerr of the Golden State Warriors (who share honors at No. 15), Argentina President Mauricio Macri (No. 26) and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (No. 48). Saban was also listed ahead of the governors of Rhode Island and South Carolina.

President Obama did not make the list, nor did Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump.

Fortune cited Saban, 64, for winning his fourth national championship at Alabama and his fifth overall (including a previous title win at LSU) by rallying the Crimson Tide after an early-season loss to Ole Miss.

"The dynasty was over," Fortune wrote. "...Saban challenged his team: 'How are you going to respond?' When Alabama defeated Clemson 45-40 for another title on Jan. 11, 2016, he had his answer, and the dynasty — and Saban's legacy as a leader — remained intact."
University of Alabama freshman Bryce Martinez puts a pie in senior Alex Cruz’s face as Alden Claros, a sophomore, sprays him on the head with whipped cream in the Ferguson Center on Thursday. Members of Sigma Lambda Beta raised money for their multi-cultural fraternity by offering to be hit with a pie in the face. Proceeds will help fund future fraternity events. MICHÈLE LEPANKA CARTER/STAFF PHOTO
Verner Elementary students sit with University of Alabama mascot Big AL as they listen to the story of “Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes” during a ReadBAMARead celebration at the school Thursday. ReadBAMARead is a nonprofit organization founded by UA gymnastics coach Dana Duckworth and Donna Benjamin. It has partnered with the UA College of Education Literacy Center to create the ReadBAMARead Express, which is visiting Tuscaloosa area schools to promote reading. The program, through donations from sponsors, gave books to Verner students in pre-kindergarten through second grade Thursday. ReadBAMARead’s goal is to visit schools across West Alabama encourage children’s interest in reading and to provide them with books. MICHELLE LEPIANKA CARTER/STAFF PHOTOS
ReadBAMARead, a nonprofit founded by University of Alabama gymnastics coach Dana Duckworth and Donna Benjamin, has partnered with the UA College of Education, through the Belser-Parton Literacy Center, to create the ReadBamaRead Express literacy program.

ReadBAMARead was started as a response to the April 27, 2011 tornado. They worked to restock the libraries in Tuscaloosa elementary schools destroyed by the tornado. By 2015 they met their goal of providing 1,500 library books to each school.

ReadBAMARead Express is the next chapter in spreading literacy through Alabama.

The program is visiting Tuscaloosa area schools to promote reading. Each student in pre-k through second grade received books from ReadBAMARead Express at Verner Elementary School Thursday. It is their goal to continue in schools across Alabama building up the younger children’s interest in reading and providing them the books to stay interested even when they go home. Additionally, ReadBAMARead presented a $5,000 check to Verner to continue literacy efforts in the West Alabama community.
BLACK BELT

Book donations needed for rural schools

Campaign will benefit 42,000 students

By Nick Privitera
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Students in Black Belt schools desperately need quality books. To help, the University of Alabama Center for Economic Development is conducting a Books for the Alabama Black Belt campaign on the UA campus now through April 1. The book drive will benefit more than 42,000 students in the Black Belt, which includes Bullock, Butler, Choctaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Pickens, Perry, Sumter and Wilcox counties.

The ultimate goal is to accumulate enough books for every student, from kindergarteners to high school seniors. The center requests donations of new or lightly used classic pieces of fiction and nonfiction, as well as books that have won awards and honors.

"What better way to give back as a gift to these places where reading is a necessary skill but perhaps they don't have sufficient funds to stock their libraries with interesting books," said Nisa Miranda, the director for the center of economic development.

SEE BOOKS, B8

How to help

• Books needed include any classic literature texts and other award-winning schoolbooks (fiction and non-fiction) often available on public school library shelves and included on recognized reading lists, including the Accelerated Reader program.

• Donation boxes will be placed in Bidgood Hall, the Amelia Gayle Gorgas Library, Nott Hall and Smith Hall on the University of Alabama campus.

• To make financial donations, send checks payable to: "The University of Alabama" and mail to The University of Alabama Center for Economic Development - Attention: Ms. Sally Brown - Box 870138 – Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0138, or call 205-348-8344 for more information.

BOOKS

From Page B1

A news release from the center states that the Black Belt counties are among the poorest in the nation. Accordingly, the school systems are also poor because the tax base is significantly smaller. This makes it difficult for schools to afford basic materials such as books.

With a shortage of books in the poorer, rural communities such as the Black Belt, literacy becomes critical.

"Literacy is a big need across the country, especially in pockets where you have poorer communities. Usually the schools are small, and usually whatever money they have is going to pay the utilities," Miranda said.

The center has already received donations from a few groups and individuals across the state. Liberty Middle School, located in Madison, is donating around 2,800 books from its library.

"Books are such a great equalizer, because it doesn't matter where you're from, what your background is, what you've got going on in your life. Books are a great escape from that. They open up your imagination," said Sandy Brand, the library media specialist at Liberty Middle School. "It's just so important that every student, regardless of their background or where they live ought to be able to have these resources."

People who want to give books can find donation boxes on campus at Bidgood, Nott and Smith halls and the Amelia Gayle Gorgas Library.
TUSCALOOSA ON TV

C-SPAN in town to film shows

April broadcast will show city’s history, literary legacy

By Mark Hughes Cobb
Staff Writer

When national media trucks roll into Tuscaloosa, it’s usually following a natural disaster or to cover a Crimson Tide game, which usually is tragic for opponents only.

This week a more celebratory visit will examine Tuscaloosa’s history and literature, as part of C-SPAN’s Cities Tour. Video stories shot here will be broadcast in two blocks, April 16-17, on Book TV and American History TV, weekend broadcasting faces of C-SPAN2 and C-SPAN3.

SEE C-SPAN, A5

A C-SPAN crew films the ruins of the state capitol building for an upcoming story on the Murphy-Collins House, in which materials from the old building, such as bricks and window sills, were salvaged used in the house’s construction.
"The cities tour is an ongoing project," said Ashley Hill, producer and community relations representative, who'll be with one of three units working here. "It's our mission to get out of Washington, D.C., where we're based, and highlight cities that wouldn't be otherwise featured."

Because of the roles of weekend C-SPAN2 and 3, producers seek strong literary scenes and rich history, and Tuscaloosa fits, Hill said. The University of Alabama presence was significant, not just for its own history and architecture, but for the rich legacy of its writing programs and writers.

"And a favorite thing of mine, when I travel down South, there are all of these beautiful old homes; and they all have a story to tell," she said.

A kickoff event Monday at the Jemison-Van de Graaff Mansion will include remarks from Mayor Walt Maddox, Hill, a representative from Comcast, which helps sponsor the tour, and Ian Crawford, executive director of the Tuscaloosa County Preservation Society. Crawford's been working with C-SPAN for a few weeks, helping find local contacts, places and stories.

"We were elated to hear from them, because when you look up Tuscaloosa, you're going to get football, the university, maybe a small footnote for history," Crawford said. "I think so often people can get caught up in virtual tours...but Googling Tuscaloosa and looking at images doesn't give you a hint of what it's like to be here. I think it's important for the country to see, but also for us. For our citizens, (our heritage) is just the B-roll, what they see out of the sides of their eyes."

A pair of landmarks will help tell the story: the Jemison-Van de Graaff mansion, built mid-19th century by Sen. Robert Jemison Jr. as a town house, using the same architects who designed Bryce Hospital; and the Murphy-Collins House, constructed in the early 1920s by Will J. Murphy, West Alabama's first licensed black mortician.

"We can talk about the unfathomable decadence of the 19th century; about Sen. Jemison, his connection to mental health reform" in pushing the state Legislature to build the then-Alabama State Hospital for the Insane.
in Tuscaloosa, Crawford said. Jemison was also a slave owner, using his riches to create one of the most technologically-sophisticated buildings of the era. One of his most famous descendants, and the home's co-namesake, Robert Jemison Van de Graaff, became a renowned physicist, teaching at Princeton University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and designing and building the high-voltage Van de Graaff generators.

Murphy's story as the first black mortician, and consequently a wealthy man, will be bolstered by the history of his two-story Craftsman bungalow, constructed using salvaged stones and rubble from the 19th century state capitol building, which burned in 1923.

Crawford and staff don't always get exercised about media visits. Months back, a hit ghost-hunting show wanted to visit, "...and we were like, 'not interested.' But C-SPAN, that gets the red carpet out," he said, laughing.

C-SPAN is the Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network, created in 1979 as a public service. Weekdays, it shows federal government proceedings, and other public-affairs broadcasts.

The Tuscaloosa shows will air on Book TV (C-SPAN2, Comcast channel 104) April 16, and history channel American History TV (C-SPAN3, Comcast channel 105) April 17. Videographers will shoot five or six pieces for both days, Hill said, each segment running 10 to 20 minutes.

"We don't show commercials, so we can kind of tailor our programming to how long we need to tell a story, tell the story how it deserves to be told," she said. "And the people of the city tell us the story."

—Reach Mark Hughes Cobb at mark.cobb@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0201.
Project creates citizen scientists

By: Ed Enoch

Staff members with the University of Alabama Museums hope to make use of people’s curiosity and smartphone cameras for projects to collect data on the biodiversity on UA’s campus and at Moundville Archaeological Park.

“It is just a really good example of how citizen science can add to actual science,” said John Abbott, director of UA’s Museum Research and Collections.

The project for campus and Moundville were recently launched on iNaturalist, an online network for naturalists where amateurs and experts can share and discuss observations and information for projects that focus on different geographic areas.

“We are trying to get anybody — students, academics, just your generally interested person — to contribute to these,” Abbott said.

The network, with projects across the globe, allows participants to upload images and other information such as GPS coordinates via smart phone applications or the iNaturalist website.

The projects are open-ended, according to John Friel, director of the Alabama Museum of Natural History. The projects will help collect long-term biodiversity data for the area and offer an opportunity for the public to participate in the research and learn through the experience.

Increasing citizen science opportunities through the university museums was one of the goals for Abbott when he arrived on campus.

“There is a whole community of avid nature photographers, birders, people who love butterflies,” Friel said. “It seems like a way to tap into all these people who could contribute their own observations.”

Part of the appeal of iNaturalist for Friel is its accessibility. There are forums and publications for specialists in specific fields, but the website’s generalist approach that allows people of all levels of expertise to engage on projects makes it more accessible.

“Sometimes people don’t know what they are photographing,” said Friel, an ichthyologist or a person who studies fish. “I am learning myself about all these plants and animals that occur in Alabama.”

It’s equal parts social network and trivia game.

“This is almost addictive,” Friel said.
Friel and Abbott hope the projects help establish a community of citizen naturalists who can contribute to future projects. The museums plan to launch a junior naturalist program in the next month and a master naturalist program in the future, allowing participants to learn about the field and participate in projects.

“We definitely view it as building a community, and I think there is so much opportunity here in Tuscaloosa to do that,” Abbott said.

The information gathered by the two iNaturalist projects will be used to develop checklists, guides and other educational materials for observations. There is also value in the compilation of long-term data sets – which are difficult to compile -- on the project sites, according to Abbott.

“I look at the real value as a long-term data set that will help us understand what the geographical and phonological trends are,” Abbott said.

At Moundville, the iNaturalist project seemed like a natural fit for the historic Native American complex bordered by woods and the Black Warrior River, according to Betsy Irwin, education coordinator for the park.

Visitors have a new way to engage with their surroundings while also contributing to other projects at the park such as efforts to remove invasive species and restore native vegetation and improve erosion control.

“There are many different ways we can use this data, scientifically as well as helping to improve the park,” Irwin said.
RETIN OBASOHAN

Belgium native has ‘heavy heart’

UA basketball player reflects on terrorist attacks

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

Retin Obasohan, a captain of the University of Alabama’s 2016 basketball team and a native of Belgium, said that Tuesday’s terror attacks in Brussels left him with “a heavy heart” but noted that he would “not live in fear,” whether in America or in Belgium.

At least 34 people were killed and scores were injured in bomb blasts at Brussels Zaventern Airport and locations in the city of Brussels early Tuesday morning. The Islamic State (ISIS) has reportedly claimed responsibility for the attacks.

“It’s been tough just waking up and hearing that,” Obasohan said at a Tuesday news conference in Tuscaloosa. “I was able to reach my family and friends. My family is good. It was good to see my father’s smile, my brother’s smile when I talked to them. It’s crazy to think that they were here (for Alabama Senior Day ceremonies) just a couple of weeks ago and flew home through that airport.”

Although Belgian authorities limited cellular phone service in the Brussels area, Obasohan said he was able to reach his family online via FaceTime. The Obasohan family lives in Antwerp, roughly 100 miles from the sites of the attacks.

Obasohan, who has been active in campus Christian ministry at UA, said he wanted to speak with the press to share his story and express solidarity “with all Belgians.”

SEE OBASOHAN, A6

See next page
"I won’t fly in fear," Obasohan said. "I’m not going to travel scared. I’m not going to fly back to Belgium scared. God says he gives us a spirit of courage and that is how I will respond.

"It makes me want to help. What that might entail, that’s above my pay grade. But I don’t believe in violence, I don’t believe in hurting innocent people. The best things you can achieve in life are done in relationships, not wars. As long as we keep thinking violence is the answer, there’s not much I can do other than keep preaching love."

Obasohan said he only knew one victim personally, a Belgian professional basketball player named Sebastian Bellin. Media reports indicated that Bellin, who played college basketball at Oakland University, was some 100 yards from the airport blast. He survived, but is undergoing surgery for shrapnel in his leg and hip, according to the Associated Press.

Obasohan said he could visualize the exact spot where Bellin was injured.

"Every time I fly here, I fly through Zavetern, probably 15 times or more," he said. "I know exactly where those American Airlines gates are. To some extent, I did visualize that. A month from now, one year ago, I was walking that same path."

Obasohan said he felt Belgium would prevail despite the Tuesday attacks.

"Brussels is still a beautiful city, Belgium is still a beautiful country," he said. "If you take a hundred-dollar bill and wipe it through the mud, it still retains its value.

"In times like this, you have two choices. We can either trust God or run away from God. It’s easy to run away from bad times. We have to have faith in the goodness of people and the goodness of God. I’m going to keep having faith."

— Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
UA graduate goes missing, found dead in crashed car

Carol Robinson
crobinson@al.com

A 25-year-old Tuscaloosa man was killed in a single-vehicle crash early Sunday morning on Tuscaloosa County 10, about 9 miles south of Tuscaloosa.

The University of Alabama graduate had been the focus of a search since friends and family reported him missing late Saturday night and early Sunday morning in the Forest Lake area.

Authorities said Zach Koch’s vehicle, a gray Mustang, was discovered about 1:30 p.m.

A state trooper was giving his K9 a bathroom break when he noticed the vehicle about 60 feet down a ravine.

Senior Trooper Reginal King said Koch’s vehicle struck a fence before traveling down the embankment and hit several trees.

Koch’s brother Justin Koch posted on Facebook on Monday afternoon that his brother had died:

“I don’t understand why but the Lord has taken my brother from us to be with him and while I will always feel a pit in my stomach when I know I can’t share life experience with him anymore I know the Lord always has a plan and I will share life with him again in heaven,” he wrote.

SATURDAY NIGHT/SUNDAY MORNING

Zach Koch was last heard from early Sunday morning in the Forest Lake area, according to police and posts from Koch’s friends on Facebook.

Tuscaloosa police spokesman Lt. Teena Richardson said a missing person’s report was filed with the agency at 11:22 p.m. Sunday after friends went to his home and were unable to find him.

Friends had earlier posted on Facebook that they had tried to call him repeatedly, but his phone was dead. They were not able to find him at any hospital or jail in Alabama, they said.

“For those of you who do not know Zach Koch, this is highly abnormal behavior for him to take off without letting anyone know,” one friend wrote.

His sister-in-law, Charlee Koch told AL.com earlier Monday that a phone-finder app showed Koch to be in the Fosters area.

to see her at a friend’s house on Union Chapel Road. He was having trouble finding the home, so his girlfriend texted him a map, his sister-in-law said.

Koch never showed up at the friend’s house, she said. His girlfriend called repeatedly beginning at 5 a.m. but the phone kept ringing. By 9 a.m., his phone was dead.

According to family, Koch’s car was spotted Sunday along Rice Mine Road at, or near, an assisted-living facility. A police officer saw it, and said it looked abandoned, but there had been no report filed yet on Koch. The officer checked on the car later, and it was gone, according to Koch’s sister-in-law.

Charlee Koch told AL.com earlier Monday that she texted his girlfriend at 2:30 a.m. Sunday and was going
Longtime Tide trainer Sang Lyda dies at 75

By: Emmalee Molay

Serving as an athletics manager and trainer for Alabama for 34 years, Henry “Sang” Lyda devoted almost half of his life to the University of Alabama. Lyda passed away Wednesday morning at the age of 75, and the amount in which he influenced student-athletes over the decades is immeasurable.

“Sang never met a stranger,” Gary White said. “He could be around someone for a minute, and when he left they would be friends.”

White was the head football manager from 1959-61 under Coach Bear Bryant and retired as associate athletic director of the university in 1995. White attended high school with Lyda in Gadsden and brought him to Tuscaloosa in 1959, beginning his involvement as assistant football manager.

“He helped do it all because they didn’t have trainers for every sport back then,” White said. “He had the student-athletes best interests at heart. The players believed in his ability to help mend them.”

While at UA, Lyda was a part of six football national championships, four SEC basketball titles and five SEC basketball tournament titles. He served as a trainer during 13 NCAA basketball tournaments including six “Sweet 16” teams and two teams that reached the Final Four in 1973 and 1978. He retired in 1995 and was inducted into the Alabama Athletic Trainer’s Association Hall of Fame in 1998.

After retirement, he moved to Orange Beach where he enjoyed his life for the past 20 years and returned to Tuscaloosa regularly for reunions and athletic events.

"I had the pleasure of meeting Sang at one of our letterman reunion events last summer and was looking forward to getting to know him,” Alabama basketball coach Avery Johnson said. “Sang worked under the likes of C.M. Newton and Wimp Sanderson, and was a valuable key to the success of our men's basketball program during those years.”

Sanderson was an assistant coach at Alabama from 1961-81 and head coach from 1981-92, working closely with Lyda ever since he was a student.

“He was a friend to all the players,” Sanderson said. He decided whether they could play or not, and wouldn’t play them unless they were well enough to play. He was a guy that the players loved and respected and he enjoyed working with them. He set a great example, and he’ll truly be missed.”
FEDERAL COMPLAINT

Student accuses UAB of mishandling sex assault probe

The Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM — A University of Alabama at Birmingham student said she filed a federal complaint alleging that university officials mishandled an investigation into an alleged sexual assault.

The woman told The Associated Press this month that she was treated unfairly during the university's investigation into the September 2014 incident. The Associated Press does not identify alleged victims of sexual assault.

The woman said she was raped by an acquaintance and didn't want to pursue criminal charges, but sought an investigation a year later after learning of her Title IX rights to protect herself on campus. The woman said she went to a crisis center for an examination and filled out a police report the morning after the incident.

The woman said the initial investigation went well past a 60-day timeline she was told officials would adhere to and the university didn't consider key evidence — including a rape kit — before clearing the alleged attacker. School officials issued a no-contact order and told her to avoid the man around campus rather than making him avoid her, she said.

"We share classes in the same building and so their solution was, 'OK she goes through the back door of buildings, she uses the stairs,' which is fine because I use stairs anyway. I have to use a parking deck that's farther away and inconvenient," she said. "I have to use the medical school library instead of the undergraduate library and I have to remove myself from the situation if we find ourselves in the same situation."

Federal student privacy laws block UAB officials from commenting on sexual assault investigations, university spokesman Jim Bakken said in an emailed statement.

"We work with appropriate parties on and off campus to review and ensure an appropriate resolution to any incident, as well as continue initiatives to educate and empower our students, faculty and staff to promote a campus culture that prevents and responds appropriately to sexual assault," he said.

The woman appealed the results of the investigation and said in her complaint to the U.S. Department of Education that the same investigator who oversaw the initial probe was involved in reviewing the appeal, which criticized the way the first investigation was handled. The woman, who is expected to graduate this year, accuses the university of creating a hostile learning environment.

Seven rapes were reported on UAB's campus and two were reported off campus in 2014, according to the school’s 2015 annual security report. Two rapes were reported on campus in 2013. The woman said she feels the numbers are undercounts and don't represent the true nature of sexual assault on campus.

"It’s just a widespread problem and I want other people to be able to come forward and be able to say ‘Hey, this happened to me’ and not be thrown around like I have," she said. The woman filed her complaint with help from the advocacy group End Rape On Campus.

"It’s a hard thing to get right, but I’ve really been encouraged through the whole process by their bravery and their courage to stand up to say this is wrong and it happened to me, too."
View from Space Hints at a New Viking Site in North America

By: Ralph Blumenthal

A thousand years after the Vikings braved the icy seas from Greenland to the New World in search of timber and plunder, satellite technology has found intriguing evidence of a long-elusive prize in archaeology — a second Norse settlement in North America, further south than ever known.

The new Canadian site, with telltale signs of iron-working, was discovered last summer after infrared images from 400 miles in space showed possible man-made shapes under discolored vegetation. The site is on the southwest coast of Newfoundland, about 300 miles south of L’Anse aux Meadows, the first and so far only confirmed Viking settlement in North America, discovered in 1960.

Since then, archaeologists, following up clues in the histories known as thesagas, have been hunting for the holy grail of other Viking, or Norse, landmarks in the Americas that would have existed 500 years before Columbus, to no avail.

But last year, Sarah H. Parcak (pronounced PAR-kak), a leading space archaeologist working with Canadian experts and the science series NOVA for a two-hour television documentary, “Vikings Unearthed,” that will be aired on PBS next week, turned her eyes in the sky on coastlines from Baffin Island, west of Greenland, to Massachusetts. She found hundreds of potential “hot spots” that high-resolution aerial photography narrowed to a handful and then one particularly promising candidate — “a dark stain” with buried rectilinear features.

Magnetometer readings later taken at the remote site, called Point Rosee by researchers, a grassy headland above a rocky beach an hour’s trek from the nearest road, showed elevated iron readings. And trenches that were then dug exposed Viking-style turf walls along with ash residue, roasted ore called bog iron and a fire-cracked boulder — signs of metallurgy not associated with native people of the region.

In addition, radiocarbon tests dating the materials to the Norse era, and the absence of historical objects pointing to any other cultures, helped persuade scientists involved in the project and outside experts of the site’s promise. The experts are to resume digging there this summer.

“It screams, ‘Please excavate me!’ ” said Dr. Parcak, an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, who won the $1 million TED prize last year for her pioneering work using satellite images to expose the looting of ancient Egyptian antiquities and is using it to globally crowdsource new archaeological sites from space.

The NOVA program will stream online at pbs.org/nova in the United States at 3:30 p.m. Monday, Eastern time, (along with a BBC program in England), and will be broadcast on PBS at 9 p.m. Wednesday.

Given the dashed hopes of previous searches and the many spurious claims of Viking presence in the Americas, scientists on the project as well as outside experts have voiced caution.
“Tremendous, if it’s really true,” said William Fitzhugh, director of the Arctic Studies Center and Curator in Anthropology at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History in Washington. “It wouldn’t be unexpected,” he said, but added that he wanted to see the data.

“There’s no lock that it’s Norse, but there’s no alternative evidence,” said Douglas Bolender, a research assistant professor at the Andrew Fiske Memorial Center for Archeological Research and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, who joined the expedition. He said a buried structure there could be a smithy for longboat nails and weaponry, another strong indicator of Viking presence.

“It would just be logical that there’s more than one site,” said Gerald F. Bigelow, a lecturer in history at Bates College in Lewiston, Me., and a specialist in archaeology of the North Atlantic.

Davide Zori, an assistant professor of archaeology at Baylor University in Waco, Tex., and a specialist on Viking expansion in the North Atlantic, called the find potentially “very important.”

Much depends on what else is found at the site. In archaeology, context is everything. A famous prehistoric site in Brooklin, Me., yielded an 11th century silver Norse coin but it is believed to have landed there through trade and not as proof of Viking settlement.

Master shipbuilders and seafarers, warriors, traders and raiders, the Vikings boiled out of the Scandinavian fjords starting around the 8th century, marauding through Asia and the Middle East, North Africa and Europe. The Vikings focused particularly on the British Isles, and west to Iceland and Greenland, as memorialized in oral narratives and later recorded as the sagas by 13th-century Icelandic monks.

Around 1000, Leif Ericson led an expedition to what became known as Vinland at the northernmost point of Newfoundland at L’Anse aux Meadows (the name an obscure corruption from the French) where explorers starting in 1960 discovered remnants of an extensive colony, including dwellings, a forge, and carpentry workshop — the Vikings’ first and so far only known landmark in the New World. They appear to have been routed by indigenous people the Norse called Skraeling.

One intriguing find was the seeds of a butternut tree, which did not grow that far north and hinted of travels to milder climates in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. But evidence of other Viking settlements has been lacking.

Dr. Parcak began her research by using a commercial satellite called WorldView-3, belonging to the company DigitalGlobe, to search known Norse sites on minuscule Papa Stour in the Shetland Islands of Scotland. Using the near-infrared spectrum invisible to the human eye, the satellite detected buried walls, and digging yielded a carnelian bead from India similar to those found at other Viking sites. Dr. Parcak then focused her satellite search on thousands of miles of coastline from the Canadian Arctic to New England.

After two weeks of digging at Point Rosee, an unexpected find in a flooded trench excited the explorers — several seeds, or perhaps blueberries, which were hurriedly sent for testing. The
dates came back wildly off — 700 years after the Vikings, maybe even contemporary. They seem to have migrated onto the site much later.

“You feeling nervous, Sarah?” a NOVA reporter asked Dr. Parcak.

“No, I’m not,” she said.
Black Patients May Get Better Treatment at These Kinds of Hospitals

By: Staff

(Reuters Health) - Black patients may do better when they’re treated at U.S. hospitals with more racially diverse populations, a recent study of outcomes for common gastrointestinal problems suggests.

Overall, black people were about 19 percent more likely to die or experience serious complications than white patients, the analysis of nationwide hospital data found.

But when black people received treatment at hospitals with more diverse patient populations, they were 20 percent less likely to die or experience major complications than counterparts seen at hospitals with less racial diversity.

While the study can’t prove diversity improves outcomes for black patients, the findings suggest that doctors may do a better job of caring for minorities when they routinely see patients from a broad variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, said lead study author Dr. Philip Okafor, a researcher at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

“Our underlying hypothesis is that hospitals and providers that treat more minority patients have higher levels of cultural competency,” Okafor said by email.

Previously, researchers thought black patients might have worse outcomes because they didn’t get to the hospital soon enough or because they had multiple complex medical issues that complicated their care, Okafor added.

“However, our results demonstrate that even when African-Americans came to the hospital for care, they had poorer outcomes in hospitals that treated a lower proportion of African-Americans,” Okafor said.

To assess how the diversity of patient populations influences outcomes for black people, Okafor and colleagues analyzed data on more than 848,000 admissions at almost 3,400 hospitals nationwide.

They focused on five common gastrointestinal problems – cirrhosis and alcoholic hepatitis, gastrointestinal hemorrhages, gastrointestinal obstructions, irritable bowel disease and gallbladder surgery.

At the hospital level, the majority of patients were white, and the proportion of minorities typically ranged from 26 percent to 30 percent.

Hospital charges overall were 36 percent higher for black patients than for white people, researchers report in The American Journal of Gastroenterology.

However, when black patients were seen at hospitals with more diverse populations, their

See next page
charges were 51 percent lower than if they were seen at hospitals with less diversity.

Black patients also had slightly shorter hospital stays, an indicator of the quality of care, when they were treated at hospitals with more diverse patient populations. The difference was less than a day, though.

Limitations of the study include its reliance on claims data used for billing purposes, which doesn’t capture nuances like quality of care, the authors note. The researchers also lacked data on the diversity among clinicians, which might influence outcomes for black patients.

Often, hospital outcomes are related to volume, with patients getting better surgery results when surgeons do more of the same procedure.

“There could be a volume effect with racially diverse hospitals simply treating more minority patients,” said Dr. Daniel Chu, a researcher at the University of Alabama at Birmingham who wasn’t involved in the study.

“In many of these circumstances, by treating the same situation repeatedly, a system is present or developed that provides standardized and consistent care not only on the medical front, but also in other dimensions such as social support, financial support, easy access, etc.,” Chu added by email. “These other dimensions may be particularly important or needed for minority patients.”
Blue Cross members could soon be paying more at 18 hospitals

Conversely, patients at 8 hospitals across the state will pay less

Amy Yurkanis ayurkanis@al.com

A change in the rankings of 18 hospitals by the state’s largest insurer, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama, could result in higher out-of-pocket costs for patients across the state.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama introduced its hospital tiered network in 2006, which classified hospitals as Tier 1 or Tier 2 based on the quality and the value of care. Patients save money by using preferred Tier 1 hospitals, and pay more out-of-pocket for Tier 2 hospitals.

Blue Cross moved 18 hospitals to Tier 2, a change that becomes effective next month. The facilities range from big hospitals in the state’s largest cities to small hospitals in rural communities.

Eight hospitals, meanwhile, will be moved to Tier 1 from Tier 2 and will cost less starting in April.

Insurers across the country have similar programs, which are intended to steer patients to high-quality, low-cost hospitals. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama employees evaluate hospitals based on cost, quality and patient experience. Many of the criteria come from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which provide online hospital rankings.

Hospitals in the lower tier are still in the Blue Cross network, but patients pay more in co-pays and deductibles. A spokesman for Blue Cross could not provide an estimate of the difference in cost.

This year, the company put a greater emphasis on the cost of care, which bumped many hospitals — including UAB — to Tier 2.

"Due to recent increases in health care costs, this year’s criteria placed greater emphasis on cost," according to a statement released by Blue Cross. "It is important that we continue to provide our members information about the more cost-effective hospitals. Blue Cross members who use Tier 1 hospitals will have lower out-of-pocket costs for inpatient and outpatient care.”

A spokesman for UAB said the hospital is still negotiating with Blue Cross and wouldn’t comment on the change. A spokeswoman for Medical West in Bessemer, which was also bumped up to Tier 2, echoed that sentiment.

"COMMITTED TO QUALITY CARE"

The changes will affect about 450,000 members, or 21 percent of the Alabama membership of Blue Cross Blue Shield, according to the statement. Not all hospitals are part of the tiered network. Children’s of Alabama in Birmingham and USA Children’s and Women’s Hospital in Mobile are not in the network and cost as much as a Tier 1 hospital.

Rosemary Blackmon, executive vice president of the Alabama Hospital Association, said Blue Cross used an unrealistic formula to evaluate cost. It is based on Medicare reimbursements, which are lower in Alabama than any other state, she said.

"The hospitals are committed to providing quality care at a good value," Blackmon said. "We would like to see a better financial measure for the tier rating just to account for the bottom-end Medicare payments we receive.”

Koko Mackin, a spokeswoman for Blue Cross, wrote in an email that the difference in out-of-pocket costs between hospitals in different tiers would depend on a member’s plan. A study of a similar program in Massachusetts found large differences in cost between preferred and lower-ranked hospitals, which could add up to hundreds of dollars for a single visit.

What hospitals?

A change in the tier rankings by the state’s largest insurer, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama, could result in higher out-of-pocket costs for patients at these 18 hospitals across the state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hospital</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>County</th>
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<tr>
<td>Baptist Medical Center South</td>
<td>Montgomery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cherokee Medical Center</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>Cherokee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clay County Hospital</td>
<td>Ashland</td>
<td>Clay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crenshaw Community Hospital</td>
<td>Loxley</td>
<td>Crenshaw</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evergreen Medical Center</td>
<td>Evergreen</td>
<td>Conecuh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hill Hospital of Sumter County</td>
<td>York</td>
<td>Sumter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jacksonville Medical Center</td>
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<td>Jacksonville Medical Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lakedale Community Hospital</td>
<td>Haleyville</td>
<td>Winston</td>
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<td>Medical West</td>
<td>Bessemer</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misail Memorial Hospital</td>
<td>Opp</td>
<td>Covington</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobile Infirmary</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Mississippi Medical Center</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td>Marion</td>
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<td>Prattville Baptist Hospital</td>
<td>Prattville</td>
<td>Autauga</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russellville Hospital</td>
<td>Russellville</td>
<td>Franklin</td>
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<td>Shoals Hospital</td>
<td>Muscle Shoals</td>
<td>Colbert</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Vincent’s St. Clair</td>
<td>Pell City</td>
<td>St. Clair</td>
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<tr>
<td>UAB Hospital</td>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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That study also found the policy effectively steered patients to preferred hospitals. That study also found more than 40 percent of hospitals changed tiers, usually because they decreased prices.

Blackmon said many Alabama hospitals might not be able to accept lower payments because they are struggling to remain profitable. Patients may have to make the choice between driving to a hospital further away or paying more for care.

More than 70 percent of hospitals in the tiered network belong to Tier 1, according to Blue Cross Blue Shield. Hospitals will have the opportunity to move up to Tier 1 during quarterly evaluations, but hospitals will not move down during the calendar year, according to the statement.
$500K gift boost UAB fund drive

Birmingham-based Protective Life has committed $500,000 to the UAB Athletics Foundation to support construction of a proposed $15 million Football Operations Building expected to house office space, meeting and film rooms, athletics training facilities, locker rooms and a weight room.

It is the first and largest corporate gift to the foundation.

"When the future of UAB football was in question, it was great to see the Birmingham business community step up and provide the funding for the operations needed to keep the program going," said Protective CEO and University of Alabama System Trustee Johnny Johns. "But the job isn't finished. UAB football cannot be successful without quality facilities for coaches and players. That is why community support for the Football Operations Building project is so important. We hope our gift will encourage others to do what is necessary to ensure UAB football's future."

UA Trustees expedited the first two stages of the necessary approvals in February. Since that time, UAB Athletics has been advancing the building design with architects and soliciting private donations to support the project. Once the design is completed and approved by the board, bids for the construction can be solicited and approved, and work can begin.

"UAB Athletics has more momentum and financial support than ever," said UAB Athletics Director Mark Ingram. "Our donors — old and new, including UAB undergraduates who voted in favor of a new self-imposed athletics student fee last fall — continue to support us at unprecedented levels."

See Next Page
UAB Basketball

Haase moving on to Stanford

Leaves school with 80-53 record in four seasons

Drew Champlin dchamplin@al.com

UAB head coach Jerod Haase is leaving after four seasons to take the same position at Stanford.

Stanford officially announced the news early Friday afternoon, naming Haase’s title "Director of Men’s Basketball.”

"Stanford University is a world-class institution which represents excellence across the board," Haase said in a Stanford release. "We will compete for championships by doing it the right way and graduating young men who will go on to accomplish great things in the world. I am humbled by the opportunity afforded to me by Bernard, and my family and I are eager to get started.”

Associate head coach Jeff Walburn, whose ties to Haase date more than 20 years, will also go to Stanford, AL.com has learned.

Haase met with his team Friday.

"UAB thanks Jerod Haase for the coaching excellence he brought to UAB for the past four seasons,” said UAB Director of Athletics Mark Ingram in a statement. "I am very proud of him as he moves to the next stage of his career. Jerod is a wonderful coach, a tremendous leader, an inspired teacher of young men and a fine role model. We wish him well at Stanford. We will begin our search for an outstanding new coach to build on the legacy of excellence that is UAB basketball.”

Haase, who turns 42 on April 1, led the Blazers to an 80-53 record. UAB improved in each of his four seasons, culminating with a 26-7 record this year when he was named Conference USA Coach of the Year.

The Blazers won the Conference USA regular season championship but lost in the first round of the conference tournament to Western Kentucky and then the NIT opener at BYU.

UAB went 20-16 in Haase’s third season, winning the Conference USA Tournament and defeating third-seed Iowa State in a first-round NCAA Tournament game.

He signed a contract extension through the 2020-21 season after the NCAA Tournament run, meaning he earned more than $1 million this year. His buyout is $500,000.

SEE COACH, 53

COACH
FROM B1

Stanford recently fired Johnny Dawkins, who had been head coach since 2008.

Haase is from South Lake Tahoe, Calif., which is around three to four hours away from Palo Alto. He played his freshman season at California before transferring to Kansas. He coached at Kansas and North Carolina under Roy Williams before coming to UAB in 2012.

Whoever athletics director Mark Ingram taps to take over will have a talented and experienced roster returning. Only one player departs, but it’s a big one in first team all-conference guard Robert Brown.

AL.com’s Kevin Scarbinsky contributed to this report.
Easy to say yes, hard to say goodbye

Kevin Scarbinsky  kscarbinsky@al.com

Brutal.
That's the word Jerod Haase used Friday afternoon.
Brutal.
After Stanford made it official that Haase will be the 18th head coach in school history, after the Cardinal made him an offer he couldn't refuse, I asked the fifth coach in UAB history how hard it would be to say goodbye.

"Brutal," Haase said. "It's going to be hard leaving here in a lot of different ways."

Haase isn't just leaving a job he did and did well for the last four years. He's leaving a home. He's leaving a community where he walked his kids to school and his wife helped coach T-ball.

The over-under on the amount of time it would take him to break down when meeting with his UAB players to say farewell: 30 seconds. He's very much a Roy Williams guy. It bothered him that everyone wouldn't be in town because of spring break.

Before that emotional meeting — and a conference call for the players not in town — I asked Haase what he's most proud of from his time in Birmingham.

"We built the program up, and I'm leaving it in a really good spot," he said. "When I say program, I'm talking about getting fans engaged, getting to know the boosters, doing community service, having the highest APR in the conference.
"We did win a lot of games, too. That's a program."
Haase leaving after putting down roots and setting school records leaves a lot of people on campus and in the community with a bittersweet feeling. One of those people is Brian Mackin.
The former UAB AD, who hit a home run when he hired Haase, sounded like a proud papa watching a successful son depart the nest.
"I'm very proud of him," Mackin said.
"It shows you can run a program and do it the right way. Jerod and his staff emphasized family. A lot of coaches say that. Jerod and his staff lived it. They absolutely did it the right way."
Mackin may have given Haase the best compliment any coach can get from the man who hired him four years after the fact.
"He was the man I thought he was," Mackin said. "He lives what he preaches. He was much more than a basketball coach. He was part of this community, and he'll be missed."
Haase will be missed here and, if the Stanford community forgets that he played his first year of college ball at rival Cal, he'll be embraced there. He would not have left UAB for just any job, and that's the thing about Stanford.
Despite the inability of Johnny Dawkins to get it done there, it's not just another job, even by Power-5 standards.
Neither is UAB, even by quality mid-major standards. It's a better job than it was when Haase arrived because he and his staff have recruited more consistently than Mike Davis and his staff.
SEE SCARBINSKY, B3

SCARBINSKY
FROM B1

Despite the downturn in Conference USA, current UAB AD Mark Ingram will find no shortage of quality candidates.
A number of familiar names, many of them big-name assistants as Haase was at North Carolina, have already begun working behind the scenes to get themselves into the mix.
If it were up to Haase, his assistant Rob Ehsan would be promoted to the top job to continue to develop the program Ehsan has played a key role in building, especially in recruiting.
There's no way to know which way Ingram might go. This will be his first major coaching hire at UAB, and it's critical that the next head coach continue the positive momentum of the last two seasons in particular.
Four years ago, Haase looked like the right man at the right time, and he proved Mackin right. Expect him to do the same at Stanford. When he does, we'll be fortunate to say we knew him when.
Who could replace Haase?

Drew Champlin | dchamplin@al.com

In light of Jerod Haase’s departure to Stanford, here is an early look at potential candidates for UAB’s coaching position. Some have confirmed interest and others are good fits. Also, this list could have names added.

ROBERT EHSAN
Who: UAB associate head coach
Why: Ehsan has been one of Haase’s right hand men since he took over the UAB program. He learned from legendary Maryland coach Gary Williams and was even the interim head coach there at age 29 before spending a season at Virginia Tech.

T.J. CLEVELAND
Who: Arkansas assistant coach
Why: A former UAB assistant, Cleveland was a finalist for the job when Haase was hired in 2012. The former Arkansas player prepped at Minor and has also coached at Missouri.

STEVE FORBES
Who: East Tennessee State head coach
Why: He’s been successful wherever he’s been as an assistant and JUCO head coach and led ETSU to SoCon tournament finals. Forbes was also on Bruce Pearl’s Tennessee staff when UAB athletic director Mark Ingram was at Tennessee.

CHUCK PERSON
Who: Auburn assistant coach
Why: The Brantley native knows the state, played at Auburn and was a very good NBA player. Name recognition also helps here.

RICHIE RILEY
Who: Clemson assistant coach
Why: Came to UAB with Haase in 2012 and helped start the turnaround. The 33-year-old Riley has been an assistant at four stops now and has interviewed for head coaching jobs in the past.

PHILIP PEARSON
Who: Georgia assistant coach
Why: Pearson has been a long-time SEC assistant at Alabama and then Georgia and has been in the mix for several mid-major jobs, including Little Rock last year.

DERRICK JONES
Who: Vanderbilt assistant coach
Why: Jones has ties to Birmingham, having coached and played at Samford. He’s also coached at Louisiana Tech under Mike White and New Orleans.
UAB grad named first dean of Samford University School of Public Health

By: Greg Garrison

UAB graduate Keith Elder has been named the first dean of Samford University's School of Public Health, as of summer 2016.

"This is an important time of growth for Samford's School of Public Health and Dr. Elder's combination of academic training, classroom and administrative experience, and service to his community and church make him the ideal choice for this role," said Samford Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs J. Michael Hardin. "I look forward to his leadership as he builds on Samford's long history of merging academics, faith and service to build academic programs that serve our students, communities and university well."

The school was established in 2013 as part of Samford's College of Health Sciences and Vice Provost Nena F. Sanders has led the school since its inception.

Elder is currently professor and chair of the Department of Health Management and Policy in the College for Public Health and Social Justice at Saint Louis University.

"Our country and world continue to face numerous health care challenges that are best addressed by a comprehensive approach that includes effective partnerships with communities, public health organizations, health systems and academic institutions and a well-trained public health workforce," Elder said.

"Samford's School of Public Health is guided by a mission to prepare servant leaders who demonstrate God's love by promoting the health and well-being of individuals and communities and to me, that mission embodies what public health is. Building on Samford's distinguished reputation, the School of Public Health is well positioned to greatly impact the public health of Alabama, the region and the country and I look forward to being a part of this effort," he said.

Elder previously served as faculty in the Department of Health Services Policy and Management in Arnold School of Public Health at the University of South Carolina and the Department of Health Services Administration in the School of Health Professions at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

"Dr. Elder comes to us with a combination of academic and administrative experience that makes him uniquely suited to lead Samford's School of Public Health," Sanders said. "Throughout his career he has worked alongside professionals in the majority of disciplines represented within the school and he has demonstrated his ability to provide leadership and build interdisciplinary teams while focusing on student success."

Elder is an accomplished researcher focusing primarily on providing evidence to inform health policy, health care delivery and health care processes, Sanders said. He has served as investigator on funded projects by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Alzheimer's Association, National Institutes of Health, Health Resources and Services Administration, and the Agency for

See next page
Healthcare Research and Quality. In addition, he serves on the editorial board of leading journals, including the American Journal of Public Health and the Journal of Health Administration Education.

Elder is a member of The Incarnate Word Foundation's Board of Trustees and the Saint Louis City Board of Hospitals and Health. He is a frequently invited speaker and is the founder of a long-standing men's Bible Study at Birmingham's Sixth Avenue Baptist Church.

Elder received his bachelor's and master's degree in public health and public administration from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He also holds a doctor of philosophy degree in health policy from the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

The School of Public Health offers eight degrees and majors and is home to the departments of healthcare administration, health informatics and information management, nutrition and dietetics, public health and social work. With the recent introduction of numerous new undergraduate and graduate degree programs, the school is experiencing rapid growth that is expected to continue as a number of additional programs are slated to launch throughout the next five years.
Finding their match

Med students find residencies across Alabama — and the U.S.

Amy Yurkanin
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Cory and Lauren Luckie had two big announcements on Match Day, the March 18 ceremony where graduating medical students find out where they will do their residencies — the next step in their medical training.

First, Cory Luckie announced that he would be going to the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa for a family medicine residency.

Then he announced that he and his wife were expecting a baby boy.

The Luckies had an ultrasound Tuesday, decided on a name — Crawford — and announced all of it in front of family and medical school classmates.

“We didn’t really plan it out,” Cory Luckie said. “We just asked if we could move our ultrasound up and just figured we would do it on Match Day.”

The National Residency Matching Program matches medical students with residencies that can last from three to seven years and provide critical on-the-job training in students’ chosen specialties.

UAB’s Match Day ceremony began at 10:30 a.m. Friday, and students began opening envelopes that revealed their placements at 11 a.m.

Most students announced where they had been matched, and then signed their name on a map of the United States in the location in which they will train as residents.

NOT TOO FAR TO GO FOR MANY

Many UAB medical students will remain in Alabama — like Luckie. One of them is Lakisha Moore-Smith, who completed a doctorate in pathology several years before she started medical school.

“Seven or eight of my classmates are my previous students,” she said.

She went back to school for medicine because she wanted to connect with people. Although she worried her age might make it difficult to make friends with classmates, she instead found it gave her a level head in dealing with the stresses of school.
"You don't freak out every time anything goes bad, like you have a bad test score or evaluation," Moore-Smith said.

Moore-Smith will become a resident at Baptist Health System in Birmingham. She is happy she won't have to uproot her family, including her husband and 2-year-old son, to complete her training.

Several students will remain at UAB, including John Killian, who matched as a general surgery resident. He grew up in Birmingham and went to college at the University of Alabama. Like Moore-Smith, he took a nontraditional route to medical school — teaching in New Orleans for two years before he enrolled at UAB.

He plans to combine medicine and teaching by staying in academic medicine after he completes his surgical residency and fellowships.

"The thing that always drew me to medicine is that the best doctors are also great teachers," he said.

**GOING OUT OF STATE**

La Keisha Nicole Hyndman will specialize in pediatrics, and become a resident at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis. She came from a large family — her father was one of 12 children — and she grew up interested in medicine and children.

During medical school, she and her classmates studied from four to eight hours every night to keep up with the academic load.

"You pretty much just go to class and study," she said.

The payoff for all that work is getting into a residency program at the top of your list, she said.
Although many UAB medical students will stay in the South, not all of them will. Brian Warmus will travel back to his home state of California to train as a neurology resident at the University of California-San Francisco. He and his family have spent the past eight years in Birmingham as he completed a Ph.D. and M.D. Both his daughters were born in Birmingham.

"It was my top choice," Warmus said as he struggled to hold back tears. "I don't know why I'm crying."

Davis Bradford matched to a residency program in internal medicine at Boston University. The Muscle Shoals native studied chemical engineering and worked for a year between undergrad and medical school.

"I have a really strong commitment to this community," he said. "I would really love to end up back in Birmingham."
Blue Cross members will pay more at 18 hospitals starting in April

By: Amy Yurkanin

A change in the rankings of 18 hospitals by the state's largest insurer, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama, could result in higher out-of-pocket costs for patients across the state.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama introduced its hospital tiered network in 2006, which classified hospitals as Tier 1 or Tier 2 based on the quality and the value of care. Patients save money by using preferred Tier 1 hospitals, and pay more out-of-pocket for Tier 2 hospitals.

Blue Cross moved 18 hospitals to Tier 2, a change that becomes effective next month. Eight hospitals moved to Tier 1 from Tier 2 and will cost less starting in April.

Insurers across the country have similar programs, which are intended to steer patients to high-quality, low-cost hospitals. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama employees evaluate hospitals based on cost, quality and patient experience. Many of the criteria come from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which provides online hospital rankings.

Hospitals in the lower tier are still in the Blue Cross network, but patients pay more in co-pays and deductibles. A spokeswoman for Blue Cross could not provide an estimate of the difference in cost.

This year, the company put a greater emphasis on the cost of care, which bumped many hospitals – including UAB – to Tier 2.

"Due to recent increases in healthcare cost, this year's criteria placed greater emphasis on cost," according to a statement released by Blue Cross. "It is important that we continue to provide our members information about the more cost-effective hospitals. Blue Cross members who use Tier 1 hospitals will have lower out-of-pocket costs for inpatient and outpatient care."

A spokesman for UAB said the hospital is still negotiating with Blue Cross and wouldn't comment on the change. A spokeswoman for Medical West in Bessemer echoed that sentiment.

The list of hospitals bumped to the lower tier included big hospitals in the state's largest cities and small hospitals in rural communities. You can find a full list here, which includes information about hospitals that have moved to different tiers.

The changes will affect about 450,000 members, or 21 percent of the Alabama membership of Blue Cross Blue Shield, according to the statement. Not all hospitals are part of the tiered network. Children's of Alabama in Birmingham and USA Children's and Women's Hospital are not in the network and cost as much as a Tier 1 hospital.

Rosemary Blackmon, executive vice president of the Alabama Hospital Association, said Blue Cross used an unrealistic formula to evaluate cost. It is based on Medicare reimbursements, which are lower in Alabama than any other state, she said.

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"The hospitals are committed to providing quality care at a good value," Blackmon said. "We would like to see a better financial measure for the tier rating just to account for the rock-bottom Medicare payments we receive."

Koko Mackin, a spokeswoman for Blue Cross, wrote in an email that the difference in out-of-pocket cost between hospitals in different tiers would depend on a member's plan. A study of a similar program in Massachusetts found large differences in cost between preferred and lower-ranked hospitals, which could add up to hundreds of dollars for a single visit.

That study also found the policy effectively steered patients to preferred hospitals. That study also found that more than 40 percent of hospitals changed tiers, usually because they decreased prices.

Blackmon said many Alabama hospitals might not be able to accept lower payments because they are struggling to remain profitable. Patients may have to make the choice between driving to a hospital further away or paying more for care.

More than 70 percent of hospitals in the tiered network belong to Tier 1, according to Blue Cross Blue Shield. Hospitals will have the opportunity to move up to Tier 1 during quarterly evaluations, but hospitals will not move down during the calendar year, according to the statement.
UAB shouldn't willingly be pawns of a billboard company

Steve DeMedicis for AL.com

Almost everyone in Birmingham was happy to see the giant Pepsi billboard come down. Harbert Realty, the owner of the sign and a local company, originally had installed the Pepsi billboard against the wishes of the city’s Design Review Committee. After placing this giant eyesore on our skyline, Buffalo Rock and Harbert Realty both quickly felt the unhappiness in our community.

Harbert Realty knew the sign was a hot potato, so they passed the potato by selling the sign to an out-of-state billboard company, 84 Outdoor. An out-of-state billboard company isn’t going to care one iota about how the people of Birmingham feel.

The corporate counsel of 84 Outdoor, Cheri Bomar, was in Birmingham this past week lobbying city officials for a quick approval to replace the giant Pepsi billboard with a giant UAB billboard.

84 Outdoor is a billboard company, founded in 2001, from Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania is overrun by billboards because the industry has a stranglehold on politicians there. In fact, Pennsylvania Sen. Arlen Specter, a Republican, always fought any efforts by others in the U.S. Senate to strengthen the Highway Beautification Act. The company which put up most of the billboards in Birmingham back in the late 1980s was named Patrick Media and they were from Scranton, Pa. Patrick Media later sold out to Lamar Outdoor.

As you drive above Southside on 280 and the billboards spoil the view of Sloss Furnaces, Red Mountain, Vulcan, UAB and our downtown skyline, you can thank Patrick Media of Scranton for the blight.

To halt the proliferation of billboards in Birmingham, the city council in 1989 amended the city’s sign ordinance to prohibit any new billboards from being erected anywhere within the city limits. Existing billboards were "grandfathered in" and allowed to remain. Courts have upheld the right of governing bodies — cities, states, or counties — to limit billboards and even ban them, purely for aesthetic reasons. Four states ban billboards altogether; Vermont, Maine, Alaska and Hawaii. Hundreds of cities in the United States ban billboards.

However, once a city has allowed a billboard to go up, there are limits on the authority of the city to regulate the content of the billboard. 84 Outdoor and their lawyers are well aware of this fact.

The existing sign is a message board, a lighted sign serving a distinctly different purpose than a billboard. 84 Outdoor is trying to claim it is a billboard, grandfathered in, and by putting a UAB billboard up there they intend to set a precedent.

Before the Pepsi sign went up, Harbert Realty told the Design Review Committee they were studying a way to renovate/restore the message board. Harbert told the DRC the Pepsi sign was only going to be a "temporary" sign. The Design Review Committee still didn’t approve the sign, even as a temporary sign. The Pepsi sign could be called temporary, or non-authorized, or illegal, and, therefore, it did not set a precedent because it wasn’t approved.

Members of the Design Review Committee told Ms. Bomar even though they may prefer the UAB sign over the Pepsi sign they didn’t want to set a precedent and have the message board become a billboard.

For how many years is UAB going to be willing to pay $300,000 per year to rent this sign? As soon as the sign is established as a billboard, 84 Outdoor will want to rent it to the highest bidder. Once the UAB sign comes down what sign will go up in its place?

By establishing precedent that the sign is now a billboard, 84 Outdoor could drop UAB and offer the sign space to any company they want, with Birmingham having no say in the process. The billboard company is using UAB’s good image.

UAB should not allow itself to be a pawn in this way.
Ala. lawmakers hear pros, cons of CBD oil

Legislation would decriminalize medicinal cannabidiol

Mike Cason  mcason@al.com

A father told a legislative committee last week that his daughter's seizure disorder improved dramatically from taking cannabidiol after his family moved from Alabama to Oregon, where the product is legal.

Wayne Young testified by Skype at a public hearing held by the Alabama House Judiciary Committee.

Young said his daughter, Leni, went from having 20 or 30 seizures a day to having five over 10 months.

The committee is considering a bill that would allow people to take cannabidiol, or cb, to treat certain conditions under the supervision of a doctor.

Cannabidiol is made from cannabis, the marijuana plant, but has a much smaller amount of THC, the substance in marijuana that produces a high.

The committee took no vote after hearing from those for and against the bill, sponsored by Rep. Mike Ball, R-Madison.

Parents and children turned out in support of the bill, much as they did two years ago when their persistent lobbying efforts led to the passage of a bill known as Carly's Law.

Ball and other advocates said this year's bill would be an expansion of Carly's Law, which authorized a UAB study on the treatment of seizure disorders with cannabidiol.

They said the bill would allow those suffering from seizure disorders who were excluded from the FDA-approved study to receive help without having to move to a state where cannabidiol is legal.

Leni Young was among those who did not qualify for the UAB study, and Ball has named the bill Leni's Law in her honor.

RAISING CONCERNS
Doctors and law enforcement raised concerns about the measure.

Dr. Shannon Murphy, a pediatrician, said the bill could allow the use of cannabidiol that is not screened for quality or content like the product given to patients in the UAB study.

Murphy said she was speaking on behalf of the state Medical Association and the Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Dr. Roxanne Travelute, president of the Jefferson County Medical Society, also spoke in opposition to the bill.

Attorney General Luther Strange said the bill would force police to determine whether a person in possession of cannabidiol had a medical condition that justified the use of the substance.

Strange said he supported the approach of Carly's Law, but told lawmakers they should be careful not to get ahead of the scientific research.

PROPRIETORS OF THE BILL
Gena Dalton of Madison spoke in support of the bill.

Dalton said her daughter, Charlotte, did not qualify for the UAB study.

Dalton said Charlotte has had more than 300 seizures since she was 7 months old.

Dexter Hearn, a pharmacist from Arley, said his 10-year-old son, Zachary, has benefited from his participation in the UAB study.

Hearn said Zachary went from having about 200 seizures a week to about 20. Hearn spoke in favor of the bill.

CARLY'S IMPROVEMENT
Carly's Law was named after Carly Chandler, 5, whose father, Dustin Chandler, became a fixture in State House halls two years ago, advocating for the bill.

Chandler, of the Birmingham area, said the frequency of Carly's seizures has dropped markedly from her participation in the UAB study, from 200 to 300 a day to three or four every five or six days.

With Carly's brain getting rest from the seizures, her cognitive ability has improved, he said.

Chandler said that led to a breakthrough, when he was able to engage Carly through eye contact for the first time.

He urged lawmakers to clear the way so more parents can have access to treatment that could lead to that kind of progress.

"We have got to help families now," Chandler said.

Rep. Mike Jones, R-Andalusia, the Judiciary Committee chairman, said he did not yet know when the committee would vote on the bill.
Fiber Internet company plans major expansion in Birmingham

By: Alan Alexander

Southern Light and the city of Birmingham are expanding a partnership to provide high-speed Internet connectivity throughout the city.

Last summer, the city and Mobile-based Southern Light signed a franchise agreement for the company to lay 120 miles of fiber optic cables.

This week, the city and Southern Light announced that agreement has been expanded to 500 miles of cables that deliver Internet speeds 1,000 times faster than current providers. Southern Light will be investing $30 million into the project, which is already underway and is expected to take a few years to complete.

But it won't be that long before some customers have access to fiber. Southern Light CEO Andy Newton said the first customers will be connected in a few months.

Birmingham Mayor William Bell said the new fiber infrastructure will help support the city's growing technology industry and help recruit more companies to the city. Economic development officials have said fiber Internet is becoming one of the most requested amenities from site selectors.

"The fiber optic infrastructure will allow Birmingham to increase its Internet capabilities and use them in a more efficient and effective way," Bell said. "Over the past few years, Birmingham has strategically been working on building its infrastructure to support the technology coming out of UAB and many businesses in the area, and we have formed a great partnership with Southern Light so that businesses and individuals can receive the best technological infrastructure possible."

The initial rollout will be focused on the business and government sectors, and Newton said the open-access network will allow other companies to provide residential services.

The first customers will be the Retirement Systems of Alabama, the University of Alabama at Birmingham Women's and Infants Center and the Department of Defense 117th Air National Guard facility.

"This is a dynamic network, and we will be constantly adding to it, so we expect to be a corporate citizen of Birmingham starting now and in the years ahead," Newton said.
Editorial: Stay away, Sen. Sessions

By: The editorial board of The Anniston Star

U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Mobile, is aligned with a presidential candidate assailed for his comments about women, vulgar language and loose playing with matters of fact and policy.

Sessions is a key member of Donald Trump’s foreign policy advisory team. The senator is also scheduled to deliver the commencement address in May for the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Problem is, a group of UAH students doesn’t want the Trump-backing Sessions giving that keynote speech. If you’re for Trump, you’re not for us, they say. So they’ve started an online petition to keep Sessions off the stage on graduation day, May 1.

“It is known that Republican Presidential Candidate Donald J. Trump has said many inflammatory remarks towards women, the disabled, and immigrants,” the petition says. “All of which are populations not to be forgotten at this university.”

The petition will fail because (a.) Sessions is an influential U.S. senator and (b.) less than 500 students have signed it thus far. But this truth remains: Sessions is linked, hand-in-hand, with Trump in the public’s eyes.
Report: University of Alabama in Huntsville College Students Protest Donald Trump-Supporting Jeff Sessions as Graduation Speaker

By: Jeff Poor

According to report that aired Monday on Huntsville, AL NBC affiliate WAFF, some students at the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) are objecting to Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL) as the keynote speaker for this upcoming spring's graduation ceremony. One of those reasons cited is Sessions support of Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump for president.

A petition has been started by UAH student Victoria Forrester on Change.org asking Dr. Christine Curtis, the university’s provost and executive vice president for academic affairs, to reject Sessions as the graduation speaker. She cited “a long-standing record of voting against funding for higher education” as one of her reason for opposing Sessions.

However, she also said security was reason for opposing Sessions. Forrester pointed to violence at Trump’s political rallies as cause for concern.

“There’s been a lot of violence at those rallies,” Forrester told WAFF. “I don’t see why I should have to anticipate any possible violence at my graduation.”

UAH student government president Austin Finley expressed his support for Sessions to remain as the graduation speaker.

“Sen. Sessions has been a strong supporter of our military,” Finley said to WAFF. “And, I’m very thankful for his service to the state of Alabama and to this country.”

Last month at a rally before an estimated 30,000 in nearby Madison, AL, Sessions formally endorsed Trump.
UAH students protest Trump-supporting Jeff Sessions as graduation speaker

By: Paul Gattis

Citing in part his support for Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, students at the University of Alabama in Huntsville are protesting U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions as the keynote speaker at spring graduation.

A petition on Change.org points to an array of reasons Sessions should not be welcome as the graduation speaker but primarily focuses on his growing ties with Trump, the GOP front runner.

Sessions is chair of the Trump campaign’s National Security Advisory Committee and has been a strong influence on Trump’s immigration policies. Sessions, who arranged a meeting between Trump and GOP leaders earlier this month in Washington, has also been speculated as a vice presidential candidate.

Despite the petition, posted over the weekend and now with 315 signatures by midday Monday, the school stood by its decision to tap Sessions as the graduation speaker for the May 1 event at the Von Braun Center.

"The Honorable Jeff Sessions has ably served the people of Alabama as United States Senator since 1997, and was the unanimous choice for Commencement speaker of a diverse selection committee that represents students, faculty and staff," the school said in a statement to AL.com. "As a university that values inclusiveness, we welcome Senator Sessions with the respect and civility that he and his office deserve."

Dalton Hicks, a UAH junior majoring in aerospace engineering who, along with girlfriend and UAH graduate Victoria Forrester, started the petition, acknowledged that preventing Sessions from speaking may not be possible.

"Getting things to change in such a quick manner like this may not be feasible," Hicks told AL.com on Monday. "We do want to put forward the message that a large part of the student population did not agree with this decision. If they are able to remove him as the speaker and replace him with someone who is more indicative of the whole of UAH, the diversity of UAH, that would be amazing.

"But at least this gets the information to them that this wasn't OK, you kind of dropped the ball here, you could have done a lot better with the speaker and you didn't. It just lets them know to try not to do this again."

In the petition stated that Sessions' presence as the speaker "only enragers the student body and in no way represents the whole of this University."

"It is known that Republican Presidential Candidate Donald J. Trump has said many inflammatory remarks towards women, the disabled, and immigrants," the petition states in part. "All of which are populations not to be forgotten at this university. Whereas, Donald J. Trump has proposed a large amount of cuts and downsizing of the Department of Education that will likely interfere with the federal funds necessary to run our beautiful institution and provide
students the opportunity of a higher education. This in turn will cause a rise in the cost of attendance of an establishment of higher education which runs counter to the wishes of the student body at this university.

"While we as students at this university understand that listening to all voices can allow for better communication of ideas and an equal understanding of all views, this Commencement Ceremony is not the time or place for such. This speech is something to inspire and send off students to the larger world. You want to leave them motivated and driven and we believe that this choices only enrages the student body and in no way represents the whole of this University."

Hicks said that Sessions' voting record on higher education funding, his support of Trump and his lack of support for LGBT citizens played roles in starting the petition.

He also said that Sessions did not measure up to NASA Administrator Charles Bolden, the December graduation ceremony speaker.

"Either the university was blind to that or somebody messed up something along the line or there is some other underlying reason," Hicks said. "That doesn't gel with us, the students."
The myth of the 97 percent global warming consensus

By: Staff

By Roy W. Spencer, Ph.D.
Principal Research Scientist
The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Nothing helps raise public awareness like a good meme, and at least on that score, the "97 percent of scientists agree" meme has been wildly successful in convincing people that the science of global warming is settled. But as we shall see, the statistic – even if it were true – tells us nothing particularly useful regarding the global warming debate.

The 97 percent number comes from a 2013 paper that was published by John Cook in Environmental Research Letters and that claimed to review about 12,000 published scientific papers on global warming and climate change. Now, for those of us who work in climate change research, it is well known that "climate change" is widely assumed to be mostly human-caused, despite the fact that very few published studies have actually attempted to demonstrate this to be the case.

Again, it is simply assumed.

And that is one of the (many) problems with the Cook (2013) literature review study. It only established that there is widespread consensus that humans contribute to (not even dominate) global warming, a position that the vast majority of climate "skeptics" agree with – including myself. I do not know of any climate skeptic researchers who claim that humans have no influence on the climate system. The existence of trees has an influence on the climate system, and it is entirely reasonable to assume that humans do as well.

The most pertinent questions really are: (1) just how much warming is occurring? (not as much as predicted); (2) how much of that warming is being caused by humans? (we don't really know); (3) is modest warming a bad thing? (maybe not); and (4) is there anything we can do about it anyway? (not without a new energy technology).

Also, while the scientific consensus on climate change is a mile wide, it is only inches deep. Very few climate researchers can tell you what evidence points to (say) 50 percent of recent global warming being human-caused. There might be a few dozen scientists in the world who are familiar enough with the science to defend it. Instead, the vast majority of scientists simply repeat what they have heard, or are familiar within only a cursory manner. Climate change research involves so many specialties and sub-disciplines that few scientists have a knowledge base sufficiently holistic to make an informed judgment.

Consensus on the quantitative role of gravity in space flight is meaningful but consensus on the quantitative role of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions in climate change...? Not so much.

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Regarding just how wrong scientific consensus can be, I like to use the example of peptic ulcers. With millions of sufferers being treated over the last century by doctors, you would think we would know what causes them. Until relatively recently it was assumed that eating spicy food or stress caused them. But two Australian doctors, Robin Warren and Barry Marshall, had a theory that they were caused by bacteria, a fringe idea that led to them being shunned and ridiculed at conferences.

Yet they were correct, and were eventually awarded the 2005 Nobel Prize in medicine for their work. One can only imagine the thousands of published medical papers that simply assumed that ulcers were caused by stress or spicy food. Would it have been 97 percent? Or even more? I don't know. Yet, they were all wrong.

Now, if the physical cause of millions of peptic ulcers (which can even be studied in a laboratory setting) went undiscovered for so many years, isn't it possible that there are natural causes of climate change, for which we have only one patient to study, and it cannot be put in the laboratory? Climate change is a relatively young science. Computerized climate models do a reasonably good job of replicating the average behavior of the climate system, but have been almost worthless for forecasting climate change. They have not even been able to hindcast (let alone forecast) the warming rate of the past 30-50 years, generally overstating that warming by about a factor of two.

When I have discussed the evidences for natural causes of climate change with "consensus" researchers, they inevitably retreat to the position that "we need to get away from fossil fuels anyway." But there are no large-scale replacements yet available – even optimistic estimates place 80 percent of the energy generation burden on fossil fuels in the coming decades. You cannot simply legislate or regulate new forms of energy generation into existence.

And it should concern us that researchers, who should remain unbiased, are so easily swayed by their perceptions of energy policy that it would affect the way that their science is presented. How can the real policymakers rely upon scientists whose objectivity has been compromised by their particular political or economic views?

We really don't understand the natural sources of climate change on decadal or centennial time scales. I liken these sources as "chaos" in the climate system, most likely tied to small changes in ocean circulation that occur naturally, just because that's what nonlinear dynamical systems (like the ocean and atmosphere) do. We have published research that suggests as much as 50 percent of global average warming over the last 50 years was because of more frequent El Nino activity, which affects the ocean circulation, global cloudiness, and global temperatures.

Yes, human greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels almost certainly play a role. How much of a role is unknown.

Returning to Cook's 97 percent paper, it is now known that many, if not most, of the 12,000 papers reviewed didn't actually state a position on the cause of climate change. They weren't even reviewed by experts but by environmental activists.
Nevertheless, the fact that consensus exists in the climate community cannot be denied. In my experience well over 80 percent of all climate papers published do indeed assume that climate change is largely human-caused. But this, by itself, is unremarkable in a field where so little is known regarding the natural source of climate change. We can't forecast chaotic climate variations any more than we can forecast chaotic weather variations, so researchers cling to what they do know: that carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas, that it is slowly increasing, and that it is therefore the leading suspect in the search for causes of global warming.

The extreme popularity and success of the 97 percent meme tells us something about the global warming debate and how it is received. People gravitate toward simple ways to support and defend their preconceived beliefs. Global warming is one of those issues that the believer holds onto with an almost religious fervor. As a scientist I learned long ago that there is no point wanting this or that theory to be correct. Mother Nature really doesn't care what you believe. Instead, I just follow the evidence and generally assume that whatever is developed as an explanation is most likely going to be proved wrong eventually ... as is the case with most published science.

Climate science isn't rocket science. It's actually much more difficult.

Dr. Roy Spencer is a principal research scientist in the Earth System Science Center at The University of Alabama in Huntsville. He earned a Ph.D. in meteorology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Before joining UAH, Dr. Spencer was a senior scientist for climate studies at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center. His research interests are satellite information retrieval techniques, passive microwave remote sensing, satellite precipitation retrieval, global temperature monitoring, space sensor definition, satellite meteorology and climate feedbacks.
3 emerging UAH tech proposals receive funds

By: Travis Leder

A panel is awarding three commercially viable proposals a total of $44,627 in hopes of improving the marketability of these concepts.

The money comes from the Charger Innovation Fund (CIF), which is UAH's effort to take research, and accelerate the inventors' ability to commercialize their ideas.

"The CIF program supports our faculty and staff's entrepreneurial efforts, and in turn helps to build new business opportunities within our community," says UAH vice president for research and economic development Dr. Ray Vaughn, "UAH has a very innovative and hardworking faculty, both within our numerous research centers and in our academic departments."

Here are UAH's descriptions of the three proposals receiving funding.

- **Brightness Limiting System (BLiS), Jason Carter, Rotorcraft Systems Engineering and Simulation Center (RSESC), $15,000** - The Brightness Limiting System, or BLiS, is a dynamic solar shade that uses see-through glass displays with embedded systems to filter out glare spots from a viewer's line of sight.

- **Ultra-Thin Film Wide Angle Transmission Color Filters for Imaging and Display Applications, Dr. Junpeng Guo, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE), $14,984** - An optical color filter uses thin layers of a proprietary material being applied over a glass substrate. The varying material thicknesses filter different wavelengths of light, thus presenting different colors at different thicknesses.

- **Novel Photodetector Based on a Silicon Photo-Multiplier with Temperature Compensation," Dr. Evgeny Kuznetsov, Center for Space Plasma and Aeronomic Research (CSPAR), $14,643** - The operation of an improved Silicon Photo-Multiplier (SiPM) is not adversely affected by temperature. The improved SiPM would be more temperature-resistant than other SiPM's currently available.

The Charger Innovation Fund has now supporter 12 technology proposals since 2013, and organizers believe these funds will be a big boost toward commercializing the work done in the laboratory.
"The CIF process helps them move their technologies to become, not just science, but part of Alabama's economic engine," says UAH Office of Technology Commercialization director Kannan Grant.

Judges heard a total of five proposals in this process before deciding on funding three.
Flying high for science

By: Will Harkins

UAH and Bob Jones have teamed up to help educate and develop interest for students in STEM career fields.

Bob Jones engineering students filled and launched a high altitude balloon loaded with instruments to measure temperature, pressure, and take lots of video of it's journey to 120,000+ feet.

They did two launches, one at Discovery Middle School, the other at West Madison Elementary School. The hope is to spark interest of young kids in the fields of science and technology. One Bob Jones engineering student says that that is how she got interested in the filed herself.

Madeline Anne See, sophomore at Bob Jones says "They launched a balloon, Bob Jones did I believe, when I was in 8th grade at Discovery and I thought it was real interesting then."

After the balloon gets so high, it'll pop, and a small parachute will bring the instruments back down to earth. By the time it returns to the surface, the balloon could have traveled as far as Rome, GA.
Tales of a tilting Moon hidden in its polar ice

By: Planetary Science Institute Staff

The same face of the Moon has not always pointed towards Earth. The spin axis of the Moon has moved by at least 6°, and that motion is recorded in ancient lunar ice deposits, said Matthew Siegler of the Planetary Science Institute (PSI) in Tucson, Arizona.

This motion is believed to have resulted from a warm, low-density region of the lunar mantle below the dark patch of lunar mare called Oceanus Procellarum. The same heat source that caused the volcanic mare to form also warmed the mantle. This is the first physical evidence that the Moon underwent such a dramatic change in orientation and implies that the ice on the Moon is billions of years old.

The new findings help explain the earliest dynamical and thermal history of the Moon and shed light on the origin of lunar water.

“We found that the polar shift required to explain the distribution of ice matches perfectly with the existence of a fossilized mantle plume below the lunar mare,” said Siegler. “So, the same thing that caused the dark lavas that make up the face of the Man on the Moon also caused the axis of the Moon to move — and it is recorded in the polar ice.”

“This ice distribution tells us the near side of the Moon shifted towards the north pole — so the Man on the Moon is sort of turning his nose up at Earth. This gives us a way to model exactly where the ice should be, which tells us about its origin and where astronauts might find a drink on future missions to the Moon.”

A physical change of the lunar spin axis, known as true polar wander, can only result from a large change in the mass distribution of the Moon. According to models by James Keane from the University of Arizona, this change was provided by a large warm region of the near-side lunar mantle, which still exists, controls the current orientation of the Moon, and the face we see from Earth.

This also provides an explanation for a longstanding mystery of the odd distribution of lunar hydrogen that has been painstakingly mapped by Richard Miller of the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Compared to similar temperature environments on the planet Mercury, the Moon has far less ice. As this polar migration occurred, ice formerly hidden from the Sun in shadowed craters near the lunar poles would have moved into sunlight and boiled away.

The Moon may have once had much more ice near its poles, and the ice we see today is the tiny portion that has survived this polar migration. Large amounts of ice could have been brought to the Moon by comets and icy asteroids early in the Moon’s history or potentially outgassed from the lunar maria themselves. Figuring out the origin of this ancient lunar water might also help scientists understand how water was delivered to the early Earth.
Systems engineering amplifies the power of the human mind

By: Paul Collopy

Every day in Huntsville, we are reminded of some of the greatest achievements of the human race. The Saturn V rocket, a replica of the vehicle that NASA astronauts rode to the moon, overlooks the city. Nearby sits a prototype of the SR-71 Blackbird, the fastest airplane ever put into service. Every day, huge twin-rotor Chinook helicopters fly overhead. From Huntsville’s airport, Boeing’s largest aircraft fly freight across the world.

All these aerospace wonders were created in the 30 years following World War II. The middle of the 20th century gave us critical materials, manufacturing processes, and scientific advances that helped enable the engineering design and development of moon rockets, durable helicopters and supersonic airplanes. How were these wonders brought about? In each case, they were realized through the collaboration of thousands of engineers, a kind of collaboration that had never been achieved before.

There is nothing new about teaming thousands of workers together for massive undertakings. In ancient Egypt thousands of workers hauled stones to build the pyramids. Moving a single stone toward the pyramid was a physical task so large that it required hundreds of people pulling together. In wartime, tens of thousands of soldiers fight together to achieve tactical objectives. In the invasion of Normandy in 1944, groups of dozens or hundreds of soldiers were executing the same task. Successfully conquering a particular bluff or pillbox was a military task so difficult that large formations of troops were necessary. So what is so special about thousands of engineers designing a large airplane or a transportation system to the moon?

To design a moon rocket or a jumbo jet, the challenge is intellectual rather than physical, which introduces a new type of difficulty. The engineering behind the Saturn V is too complex for one person, or even a team of a dozen people to understand. The Egyptians could combine with one rope the work of dozens of laborers. Systems engineering is the modern equivalent of a rope for effectively combining the separate thoughts of dozens, hundreds, and even thousands of intellectual workers. Systems engineering is the discipline that guides, coordinates and facilitates design engineers in large engineering projects.

In a modern large engineering project, every engineer is engaged in a separate task. Because of this, every engineer sees the project in a different way. This is similar to the old story about a group of blind men who are tasked with describing an elephant by feeling it, and each perceives the elephant as a very different thing depending on whether he explored the trunk or leg, or tail. When a modern aircraft or spacecraft is designed, a thousand engineers may team together and each will describe the aircraft differently from the point of view of their particular assignment.

The large engineering projects that followed World War II brought together very large and diverse teams of engineers to take on vast cognitive tasks about which no one person, not even the project manager or the chief engineer, understood more than a few percent of the whole. Think about this. In the 20th century, humankind learned how to deliberately create artifacts that
exceed human technical comprehension. Examples are software programs with millions of lines of source code, or integrated circuits with 4 billion transistors.

Even more difficult to comprehend, however, are modern aircraft, rockets and spacecraft that combine sophisticated mechanical systems with massive electronics driven by huge software programs. These very complex machines are designed by thousands of engineers, coordinated by hundreds of systems engineers. So, how does systems engineering work? How can people design things that are more complex than anyone can understand?

To get a grasp of this, consider the design of ships in 1900. The first complex engineered systems were large ships with a vast number of parts, such as battleships and ocean liners. Systems were needed for propulsion, steering, plumbing, lighting, and kitchens. Battleships also had armor and guns and sometimes torpedoes. Engineers dealt with complexity by dividing the ship into parts and designing the parts separately. One person would design the rudder, and another would design the propeller. The designers would discuss interfaces with each other to make sure, for example, that the boiler would fit inside the hull. During this period, design was successful without systems engineers because the design teams were not very large, and the interactions between different parts of the ship were fairly straightforward.

It was during the development of torpedoes around 1900 that our ability to design complex engineered systems hit a wall. Although ships had more parts than a torpedo, the torpedo was more difficult because almost all of the parts of a torpedo interacted with each other, usually in ways that caused the torpedo to miss its target. A torpedo is essentially an automated submarine with very complicated control systems managing speed, direction, and depth. The propeller interacts with the engine exhaust while the gyroscopes interact with the engine torque. For several decades, all the way up to World War II, the torpedo's systems problems were not effectively sorted out. A new way of managing complex engineered systems was needed.

This new way arrived with the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles in the 1950s. The Ramo-Wooldridge Corp., with help from The Boeing Company, led the design of a process for systems engineering. It worked like this: quantitative requirements for the system were defined, such as "the missile shall be able to strike a target 8,000 miles away and shall strike within 200 feet of the target on 50 percent of its flights."

From these, similar quantitative requirements were derived for the engine, the nozzle, the structure, the guidance system, and all other parts of the missile. From the engine requirements, additional technical requirements were derived for each part of the engine, such as the combustion chamber and the fuel pump. Eventually, every part of the missile had technical requirements. Once the parts were designed, they were built and tested to be sure that every requirement was met. Then the parts were assembled into systems, like propulsion or navigation, and each system was tested to ensure that it met its particular requirements. And so on until the whole missile was tested.

In design, a missile is broken down into major systems, each system is broken down into subsystems, and each subsystem is broken down further. If the missile counts as level one, and the major systems are at level two, the early intercontinental missiles had about five levels. At

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the bottom level are parts, and the point of the whole process is to break down the whole system far enough that each part is simple enough for one engineer to design.

This process made sense. It should have been able to deliver the end product within specifications. However, in reality, there were often problems with interfaces where one subsystem had a very elaborate connection to another subsystem. For instance, the guidance system has a complicated connection to the steering system requiring a whole set of information to be passed back and forth very quickly and very accurately. Problems encountered during testing were often due to these interfaces. The engineers designing equipment on one side of the interface expected it to work in a slightly different way than the engineers on the other side. Nevertheless, once systems engineers realized that interfaces, especially complicated interfaces, needed a great deal of attention and care, the whole process generally worked.

During the past 40 years, however, the process has been working less effectively. Today's complex engineered systems, like the Boeing 787 airliner, have seven to 10 levels of decomposition, leading to around 100 times as many different parts. The connection between the overall airplane design and the individual part design is much more tenuous and much less clear. Under the stress of large complex applications, the systems engineering process that was so effective in the 1950s is exhibiting its shortcomings. Currently, 90 percent of our aerospace and defense systems cost more than we thought they would, averaging a 50 percent overrun of cost estimates. Systems require more years to develop than we expect. Between 30 percent and 50 percent of programs are cancelled, usually for cost and schedule overruns.

To put this in perspective, my own study showed that the Department of Defense alone loses $200 million per day to overruns, delays, and cancellations in the development of large complex engineered systems. (Defense is no better or worse than any similar organization. They keep more detailed public records, which makes their engineering performance easier to assess.)

Why does the simple, common-sense approach to systems engineering fail to successfully manage modern development programs? This question takes us back to where we started - these systems are so complex that no single person can understand more than one or two percent of the whole thing. When we set the overall system requirements, we are predicting what the system can do. However, because no one really understands the whole system, our predictions are in error. We cannot know what the system is capable of until we build it and test it. At that point, it is much too late to write requirements.

So where do we go from here? Imagine a future without requirements, where, instead of saying, "We want an airliner with a range of 8,200 miles," we say, "Let's make an airplane about this big, design it to be as good as it can be, and see how far we can get it to fly."

Perhaps there is a way to engineer systems without predicting the design outcome. This would be very helpful since we prove on every project that we are not very good at predicting outcomes. Would we rather have an airliner that meets requirements, or have the best airliner that is possible? Since we cannot obtain a system that is better than the best possible system, why not make a systems engineering process that designs the very best possible system? Why settle for less?
The further we delve into such questions the more we realize that systems engineering is a discipline in its infancy and the best times for systems engineers are yet to come. Most of systems engineering is a collection of ad hoc processes, all of which seem to make sense. Unlike other fields of engineering, the processes are not grounded in scientific theory. They are not proven to be effective. They only seem reasonable.

A new wave of systems engineering is coming due that has this grounding in theory – a science of systems engineering. The new processes will be more effective and the impact on engineering design and development will be more powerful.

Systems engineering, at its best, amplifies the engineering power of the human mind. Large organizations become system-designing entities that comprehend systems thousands of times more complex than any one person could grasp. A greatly improved systems engineering approach could unleash the capacity of humanity for technological accomplishment. We could master our world and visit others. We could solve environmental crises while making cheap energy available to everyone. We could open the door to a new renaissance of human potential.

Dr. Paul Collopy is a professor of system engineering and chair of the industrial systems and engineering management department at UAH. He earned his Ph.D. in engineering-economic systems from Stanford University, and he was formerly a program director at the National Science Foundation. His research interests are engineering and systems design, complex engineered systems, systems science and technology management.
OPINION: Key climate experts skeptical of forecasts

By: Merrill Matthews

MANY coastal city officials are considering spending millions — in some cases billions — of taxpayer dollars preparing for an impending flood caused by rising sea levels.

For example, in 2013, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced a $20 billion, 20-year plan to protect the city from rising sea levels.

The concerns are being driven in part by recent studies predicting the coming floods, such as two new reports that claim the seas are rising faster than at any other point in the last 28 centuries. They contend that if human-caused carbon emissions continue at the current rate, the oceans could rise by as much as 4 feet by 2100.

That conclusion is tame compared to a 2015 study by NASA’s former lead climate scientist, James Hansen, and others, who boldly predicted that sea levels could rise by at least 10 feet in 50 years.

But notice there’s a 500 percent variance between the two predictions if we extrapolate so that both use the same end point. Given all the other important public policy challenges facing cities, such as providing good public education, safe communities and infrastructure improvements, shouldn’t city officials demand a little more scientific consensus on the magnitude of the threat?

They won’t get it.

And the reason is that such claims are not based on observed scientific data, but manmade computer models, which have overpredicted climate warming for decades.

For example, John Christy of the University of Alabama at Huntsville and the state’s climatologist, stated in congressional testimony that climate models have predicted 2.5 times more global warming than has actually been observed by satellites and weather balloons.

And Roy Spencer, a former senior scientist for climate studies at NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center, notes that 95 percent of the climate models have overpredicted actual warming.

It’s like believing Uncle Harry’s frequent predictions of an imminent global economic collapse, not because he’s ever been right, but because he’s wrongly predicted it so often.

Yes, sea levels are rising, and have been since the end of the Ice Age some 11,700 years ago. But the observed sea level rise averages between eight and 10 inches over 100 years — which is a long way from 4 feet, not to mention 10.

The fact is that climate models are astonishingly unreliable, as even many climate scientists who support modeling concede.
As Mark Maslin and Patrick Austin, climate scientists at University College London, explained in the journal Nature in 2012: “Why do models have a limited capability to predict the future? First of all, they are not reality. This is perhaps an obvious point, but it is regularly ignored. By their very nature, models cannot capture all of the factors involved in a natural system, and those that they do capture are often incompletely understood.”

And remember, these are climate-model defenders.

Don’t misunderstand me: Rising sea levels can pose a threat to humans and property, as Hurricane Sandy amply demonstrated. Coastal city officials should be weighing the risks and costs of an effective response. But the public policy challenge is to accurately assess the nature and seriousness of the threat and act accordingly.

With respect to sea levels, the current threat comes primarily from humans moving closer to the sea, rather than the sea moving closer to humans.

People are willing to pay big bucks to live right on the ocean; but that means damage totals — in lives and money — can rise significantly during major storms and sea surges.

If past observed sea level trends continue, the ocean certainly could pose a significant threat to humans and property — in several hundred years. Is that worth spending billions of dollars now, when there are so many other important city priorities?
Did the moon once flop over on its side? Well, here's what scientists say

By: Lee Roop

"This is unexpected, since if the water is 'recent' it should be distributed uniformly around the poles," Miller said.

Statistical analysis showed the pattern was "very unlikely to be due to random chance," Miller said, "which suggests there some underlying physical process."

Miller and his collaborators begin modeling theories - "peeling back the layers of the onion" – to seek an explanation.

Their conclusion is that sometime between 3 and 4 billion years ago, a bubble of hot, radioactive material formed in the moon's molten interior. It started making its way to the surface.

"It's the surface of the moon that's currently pointing at us," Miller said. "The bubble came in our direction."

We see a feature on the moon's surface that appears to be consistent with the bubble's movement, Miller said. Its scientific name is the Procellarum KREEP Terrane (PKT), and it's known in folklore as "the man in the moon."

What basically happened, Miller said, is "the crust of the moon rotated underneath the pole ... like a liquid thing. The surface moved ... not just the surface but the whole moon moved."

What could that mean? First, it suggests that a large amount of the water at the lunar poles is ancient, Miller said. More recent water wouldn't show such an antipodal pattern. That raises the question of how the water survived billions of years of bombardment by sunlight and space weather.

"We need to go back to the moon," Miller said, "and specifically to the poles of the moon to sample these water deposits...."

What could 3 billion-year-old water tell us if we got some? For starters, it says "that water is a lot more abundant than we expect," Miller said. "We're finding water on almost everybody in the solar system."

"This is sort of like a geologic time capsule," Miller said. "We're trying to twist open this time capsule to find out what it's trying to tell us."

Miller is working with Dr. Matt Siegler of the Planetary Science Institute and James Keane of the University of Arizona in the research. The work was first presented at the 46th Lunar and
Planetary Science Conference in Houston. It is based on Miller's analysis of the moon's poles and the search for water.

Could the moon have flopped on its side some 3.5 million years ago like a child's top? Scientists, including one from Alabama, say "yes" in a paper published today in the journal Nature. (See a video illustrating the phenomenon below.)

Dr. Richard Miller, the University of Alabama in Huntsville scientist who's part of the research, admits the theory "sounds crazy." But data led the team to the conclusion, and the model has held up to tests so far.

The story begins with scientists looking for water on the moon. They found it at the north and south poles, but one of Miller's collaborators, Dr. Matt Siegler of the Planetary Science Institute, noticed that the water at the two poles seemed to be pointing in opposite directions. It's called an antipodal distribution pattern, Miller said last week.
UAH astrophysicist discovers moon tipped over in the ancient past

By: Josh Barrett

For as long as humans have been around, we have all looked up at the moon and seen the same face peering back at us. But a new paper published in the journal Nature on March 23, 2016 suggests that the moon might have looked a little different from the Earth's perspective in the primordial past.

Richard Miller, a co-author of the paper, is an astrophysicist at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. A colleague of his noticed that the ice deposits at the moon's north and south poles did not line up with the poles themselves, and instead seemed to point away from each other.

"I said, 'that can't be right,'" Miller said, "and then, I started the detailed analysis based on his observation, and absolutely it turns out that to very high statistical significance, the ice at the poles of the moon is pointing in opposite directions."

That means that at some point in the past, ice was deposited at the moon's poles, and then the moon's poles changed. It seems that the moon tilted about five degrees from the original poles. How do scientists know that?

"The water ice sort of acts as an arrow pointing in the direction of that tip," Miller said.

Another author of the paper, an expert on the inner workings of the moon, came to the conclusion that a giant radioactive bubble burst from the moon's interior, altering the distribution of of mass, causing the tilt. That eruption also created the "seas" that make up the dark spots on the moon's "face."

The discovery has all sorts of implications. It means the water in the moon's poles has been there for billions of years, accumulating there before the tilt.

"What it suggests is that the moon is not a static object," Miller said. "The moon had different poles in the past, not the poles we see now," Miller said. "The face of the moon that we see now was not the face of the moon a few billion years ago."
SCS Announces New Editor-In-Chief of Simulation Journal

By: Staff

Dr. Mikel D. Petty is currently the Senior Scientist for Modeling and Simulation at the University of Alabama Huntsville's Information Technology and Systems Center and an Associate Professor of Computer Science.

Prior to joining the University of Alabama in Huntsville, Dr. Petty was Chief Scientist at Old Dominion University's Virginia Modeling, Analysis, and Simulation Center and Assistant Director at the University of Central Florida's Institute for Simulation and Training. He received a Ph.D. in Computer Science from the University of Central Florida in 1997. Dr. Petty has worked in modeling and simulation education since 1990 in areas that include verification and validation methods, simulation interoperability and composability, and human behavior modeling. He has published over 190 research papers and has been awarded over $16 million in research funding. He served on a national Research Council committee on modeling and simulation, is a Certified Modeling and Simulation Professional, and is now Editor-in-Chief of the journal SIMULATION. He has served as dissertation advisor to five graduate Ph.D. students in three different disciplines, including the first two students to receive Ph.D.'s in Modeling and Simulation at Old Dominion University and the first student to receive a Ph.D. in Modeling and Simulation at UAH.

SIMULATION is the monthly refereed transactions of the leading society devoted to advancing the discipline and profession of modeling and simulation. An archival journal in both print and electronic form, it consists of distinct sections—one devoted to theory, the other to applications. Published articles must have a clear relevance to general modeling and simulation issues. In addition to its archival mission, the journal aims to help professionals and researchers, particularly those involved in multidisciplinary projects, apply advances in modeling and simulation theory, methodology and technology to their application areas.

SCS is the world's premier professional society devoted to modeling and simulation (M&S). We serve individuals and organizations in more than 150 countries around the world. Our membership includes individuals from industry, government and academia whose interests span all aspects of M&S. Our Mission is to promote the use of modeling and simulation in ever-expanding application areas through education and providing a forum where the scientific basis for its foundations can be enriched through education and research.

For more information about SCS or SIMULATION, visit http://scs.org/ or scs@scs.org.
VORTEX-SE Weather Research in Alabama, County Health Rankings Released

By: Alex Aubuchon

Dozens of the country’s top meteorologists are gathering in north Alabama for a massive research project focused on severe storms and tornadoes.

It’s called the Verification of Origins of Rotation in Tornadoes Experiment, or VORTEX Southeast. The program hopes to allow researchers to better understand how the climate and environment in the Southeast affects how tornadoes form and how strong they get. Scientists also want to improve their ability to forecast these storms.

Dr. Kevin Knupp directs the University of Alabama in Huntsville facility where the VORTEX program is headquartered. He says one of the main reasons behind the study is that Southeastern tornadoes tend to be more deadly.

“The fatality rate is much higher here in the Southeast, for several reasons. One would be greater population density. But other reasons are that tornadoes just are not as visible here as they are on the Great Plains, because of low cloud base and trees and topography.”

Researchers from across the country will observe storms and gather data through the end of April. They plan to publish their findings later this year and hope to conduct a second campaign next spring.

A new county-by-county study on health in Alabama shows even affluent communities can improve. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation released its rankings, which examined 30 factors like smoking and obesity as well as education and jobs.

Shelby County ranked best in the state; Wilcox County was the worst. Shelby has four times as many doctors for its population compared to Wilcox and half the number of drunk driving deaths.

Katie Wehr is with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. She says Alabama’s urban and rural counties show similar problems to other states around the south.

“So in general, we see counties that are healthier counties have higher graduation rates, lower numbers of children living in poverty, lower smoking rates. And I think if we look side by side between Shelby and Wilcox, we’d see something similar.”

The study also looked at things like preventable hospital stays, air pollution, and how long it takes for people to drive to and from work.

Officials in Gulf Shores say an immediate ban on alcohol has been placed on public beaches in the Gulf Shores corporate limits.
The decision to ban alcohol on Gulf Shores beaches came Friday during a special session of the Gulf Shores City Council. The ban is effective immediately and will last until April 17.

Mayor Robert Craft says the reasoning behind the ban is to maintain a safe environment in the Gulf Shores during spring break. Craft says there has been an increase in students at the beach in recent years. The Gulf Shores Police Department says they have seen a significant spike in arrests recently.

Gulf Shores spokesman Grant Brown says no alcohol may be consumed between the dunes and waterline. Anyone in violation of the new alcohol ban is subject to a fine up to $500 or up to six months in jail.
Former secretary of state to be speaker

Condoleezza Rice to highlight college’s 140th anniversary

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is scheduled to be the keynote speaker for Stillman College’s 140th anniversary celebration.

Rice will speak May 19 in Birthright Alumni Hall on the Stillman campus. Tickets for the event are $140 and will be available online and at the college. Stillman said it would release details about the day’s schedule later.

Rice now holds the Denning professorship in global business and the economy at Stanford University’s Graduate School of Business and is a Stanford political science professor and a senior fellow on Public Policy at the Hoover Institution. She was secretary of state for President George W. Bush, and was the second woman and first African American woman to hold that office. Before being named secretary of state, she was Bush’s national security advisor.

Rice also was a member of the first College Football Playoff Committee.

Rice was born and raised in Birmingham. Her family later moved to Tuscaloosa, where her father, a Presbyterian minister, became dean of students at Stillman.

The theme of the 140th-anniversary celebration is “A Foundation for Life.” The celebration will also feature comments from other special guests and music. Stillman was founded in 1876 by the Rev. Charles Allen Stillman, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Tuscaloosa.

Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will return to Tuscaloosa, where she lived as a teenager, to be the keynote speaker at Stillman College’s 140th anniversary celebration on May 19. CHUCK KENNEDY/MCT
Stillman College President Peter Millet announced plans on Wednesday to step down at the end of June 2017 once his current three-year contract expires.

"I love Stillman and I love Tuscaloosa," Millet said. "However, I have a desire to be in a location closer to family."

Millet stressed the decision not to seek a contract extension was his, adding he approached the trustees about his desire to step down.

"This was 100 percent, me coming to the trustees and said this is what I wanted to do," Millet said.

The Stillman College board of trustees announced on Wednesday it would use the next year to search for a successor.

Millet announced he would not seek an extension of his contract beyond 2017 in a letter to trustees. Millet officially began his tenure as Stillman's sixth president in July 2014.

The former provost served as interim president following resignation of former president Ernest McNealey in fall 2013.

Millet, who thanked the trustees, students, faculty and staff, alumni and other stakeholders, characterized his time leading the institution.

SEE MILLET, A4
as an unexpected pleasure and the decision to leave as difficult.

"As I move to the next stages of my life and career I will carry with me many pleasant memories of the brilliant students and dedicated faculty and staff. The work has been both productive and meaningful," Millet wrote in the letter. I have grown in ways that I could not have at any other institution. For that I am grateful."

Though, Millet said he planned to continue work in higher education administration, he did not confirm on Wednesday where he and his wife, Marcia Millet, a faculty member, planned to move after Stillman.

Stillman board of trustees Chairman Dennis O. Driver thanked Millet for his service.

"He has led the college through several challenging years, making difficult and tough decisions for the betterment of the college. There, however, is still much, much more to be done as we work to achieve greater levels of success," Driver said.

Noting an improving financial situation, progress toward re-accreditation and other positive signs, Millet argued the college was well positioned for the next president.

"Stillman is on such an upward trajectory right now; we wanted to make the announcement in enough time so that the trustees would be able to identify a candidate who would build upon the good work that is happening already," Millet said.

Millet's tenure has been defined by efforts to reverse the small private college's fortunes. Millet launched new capital campaigns and efforts to boost enrollment including tuition rate reductions last fall, partnerships with community colleges, and initiatives to attract non-traditional students.

Millet, citing the financial challenges facing Stillman, also announced in December the college was eliminating all sports except for men's and women's basketball after this school year.

Millet said his agenda for his last year includes efforts to strengthen community ties, bolster the institution's finances, ensure students have a productive college experience, and maintain a positive, family-oriented environment for faculty and staff.

"I will continue to be with the full presidential responsibilities during the remainder of my tenure," Millet said.

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Higher education

UAB grad named Samford’s first Public Health dean

Greg Garrison
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UAB graduate Keith Elder has been named the first dean of Samford University’s School of Public Health. The move takes effect this summer.

“This is an important time of growth for Samford’s School of Public Health, and Dr. Elder’s combination of academic training, classroom and administrative experience, and service to his community and church make him the ideal choice for this role,” said Samford Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs J. Michael Hardin. “I look forward to his leadership as he builds on Samford’s long history of merging academics, faith and service to build academic programs that serve our students, communities and university well.”

The school was established in 2013 as part of Samford’s College of Health Sciences. Vice Provost Nena F. Sanders has led the school since its inception.

Elder is currently professor and chair of the Department of Health Management and Policy in the College for Public Health and Social Justice at Saint Louis University.

“Our country and world continue to face numerous health care challenges that are best addressed by a comprehensive approach that includes effective partnerships with communities, public health organizations, health systems and academic institutions and a well-trained public health workforce,” Elder said.

“Samford’s School of Public Health is guided by a mission to prepare servant leaders who demonstrate God’s love by promoting the health and well-being of individuals and communities and to me, that mission embodies what public health is,” he said.

Elder previously served as faculty in the Department of Health Services Policy and Management in Arnold School of Public Health at the University of South Carolina and the Department of Health Services Administration in the School of Health Professions at UAB.

Elder is an accomplished researcher focusing primarily on providing evidence to inform health policy, health care delivery and health care processes, Sanders said. He has served as investigator on funded projects by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Alzheimer’s Association, National Institutes of Health, Health Resources and Services Administration, and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. In addition, he serves on the editorial board of leading journals, including the American Journal of Public Health and the Journal of Health Administration Education.

Elder received his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in public health and public administration from UAB. He also holds a doctor of philosophy degree in health policy from the University of Maryland Baltimore County.
Education secretary praises Alabama A&M

By: Paul Gattis

The nation's top educator showered praise Wednesday on the work at Alabama A&M University, highlighting their work in science and technology that's giving students a boost.

During a brief visit to campus, U.S. Secretary of Education John King met with administrators and students and took part in a public town hall.

His stop in Huntsville Wednesday afternoon is part of a two-week tour across the country visiting institutions of higher education. Alabama A&M is the only Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) he's scheduled to visit.

"I've been very impressed by the work Alabama A&M is doing in preparing STEM graduates and particularly their partnership with NASA, which is a multi-layer partnership," King told AL.com when asked why he chose to visit Alabama A&M. "So I wanted to try to celebrate that and lift that up.

"I'm visiting a number of colleges over next two weeks to try to point to colleges who are really creating pathways to opportunity and Alabama A&M is one of those."

Alabama A&M's work in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education was a focus of King's visit. So was the school's partnership with NASA – Todd May, director of Marshall Space Flight Center, participated in the town hall discussion.

King said one thing that stood out during his visit at Alabama A&M was the relationships students develop with their professors.

"One of the things that I've seen is that clearly they are very committed to close mentoring relationships between faculty and students," he said. "So the students described having relationships with processors that really helped guide them as they made choices about what classes to take, what internships they pursued and helping them stay focused on the goal of graduation.

"It's also clear they have strong partnerships with employers. NASA is one and Lockheed Martin folks were here as well as another partner. For a student sometimes, it's important to know what's available after graduation. What's that target destination? So employer partnerships here are making a big difference."

Another element that's a focus on the tour for King – who was confirmed this week by the U.S. Senate to head the U.S. Department of Education – is seeking ways to improve the graduation rate of college students.

"It's a combination of STEM education and also places that have strong completion rates or are improving their completion rates," King said of his tour's focus. "It's one of the challenges I

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mentioned earlier that the United States used to be first in the world in college completion. We're now 13th. We're also trying to emphasize schools who are doing a great job on completion. Certainly that's a focus on Alabama A&M on their STEM programs in particular."
Anti-SEC sentiment has no place in UAB search

Kevin Scarbinsky  kscarbinsky@al.com

Ask any UAB fan to choose his or her favorite to become the school’s next basketball coach. Most answers seem to fall into one of two categories.
1. Rob Ehsan; or ... 
2. Anyone but.

The “anyone but” category seems to be split into two subcategories.
1. Anyone but someone associated with Alabama or Auburn; or ...
2. Anyone but someone associated with the SEC.

The Alabama animus is understandable — shortsighted but understandable — given the absurd arrangement of having boosters of one university’s athletics interests sitting on a board of trustees that governs another Division I institution.

There is no shortage of evidence to support the widely held belief that some Alabama boosters on the BOT have not exactly been friends of UAB football in particular.

Thankfully, since UAB football’s return, some of those old attitudes seem to be changing for the better. Just the same, forgive UAB fans if they prefer to retain their suspicion out of habit.

As for basketball, anti-Alabama sentiment is a perfectly normal response considering Tuscaloosa’s history of arrogance in refusing to play UAB.

Letting those bad feelings extend to the entire SEC is understandable on a gut level. UAB lives in the SEC’s shadow. It just does. Always has and probably always will.

It doesn’t matter if UAB has a better basketball program than Alabama or Auburn or any number of SEC schools at a given time. It’s simply a matter of math and history. There are two SEC programs in Alabama, and people in that state started growing attached to them long before UAB was born.

Part of being a Blazer is knowing you’re outnumbered and your very home is behind enemy lines. Another part of being a Blazer is reveling in that knowledge.

As natural as the distrust or dislike or downright disgust for everything SEC may be, it has no place in a coaching search.

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SCARBINSKY
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It appears UAB AD Mark Ingram has begun the search to replace Jerod Haase without preconceived notions or blinders. On Tuesday, Ingram told AL.com’s Drew Champlin, "I want to get the best person for the job. Today, I’m open to whomever that might be."

Makes perfect sense.

If it’s Ehsan, hire him. If it’s Auburn associate head coach Chuck Person, he should be the man. If it’s someone whose name hasn’t even hit the headlines yet, so be it, but no one should be dismissed because of where he’s played or coached.

The most successful UAB head coach since Gene Bartow spent a lot of years as a top assistant at Arkansas, but Mike Anderson’s SEC roots didn’t prevent him from sharing a C-USA title or reaching three straight NCAA Tournaments or beating No. 1 seed Kentucky to reach the Sweet 16.

The right coach can come from a lot of different places. Even from the evil empire known as the SEC.
ALABAMA SOFTBALL

McClaney named finalist for CLASS award

Staff report

University of Alabama senior Haylie McClaney has been named one of 10 finalists for the 2016 Senior CLASS award, which celebrates senior student-athletes who use their platform in athletics to make a positive impact as community leaders.

Fans can vote for up to three candidates for the award once per day at the official website: www.seniorklassaward.com. Voting will run through May 9 and fan votes will be combined with those of the media and Division I head coaches to determine a winner, which will be announced during the 2016 Women's College World Series.

The Senior CLASS award, which stands for Celebrating Loyalty and Achievement for Staying in School, is awarded each year to a senior student-athlete that best exemplifies the four areas of excellence: community, classroom, character and competition. McClaney is a senior exercise science major and holds a 4.0 cumulative grade-point average at Alabama. She is a two-time Academic All-American and was named the Academic All-America Team Member of the Year for Division I softball last season. She is just the second player in program history to earn first-team honors as both an All-American and Academic All-American in the same season, doing so as a sophomore and junior.

Charlotte Morgan (2010) and Kayla Braud (2013) previously won the Senior CLASS award at Alabama, while Kaila Hunt (2014) was a finalist.

The other finalists are Caitlin Attfield of UAB, Elena Bowman of Manhattan College, Megan Cooley of Boston College, Jallyn Ford of James Madison, Kassey McCravey of Army, Erin Miller of Oklahoma, Kelsey Nunley of Kentucky, Heather Stearns of Baylor and Kelsey Susalla of Michigan.
Alabama crushes No. 15 Mizzou

Tide wins 16-2 in five innings

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

The Alabama softball team scored a run on just four pitches to start Monday evening’s game against 15th-ranked Missouri at Rhoads Stadium.

Three first-pitch bunt singles were followed by a hit batter.

The Crimson Tide scored two more first-inning runs on a pop-up to the second baseman that was dropped for an error. Then things got really weird.

There were the four walks, four singles — one of which turned into a de facto inside-the-park round-tripper as Kallie Case came all the way around on an outfield error — to go with two pitching changes and two home runs.

And that was just in the bottom of the second inning.

When it was all over, sixth-ranked Alabama had won 16-2 in five innings. UA played poorly in losing the first game, but roared back to win twice by the mercy rule to take the series.

Alabama’s methodology in the series finale was bizarre. It happens, Crimson Tide coach Patrick Murphy said.

"Unbelievable," he said. "They’re better than that. Everybody knows that. "I learned a long time ago you’re not as bad as you think you are and you’re not as good as you think you are.

"It was one of those games when I think I looked up at one point and we had 12 runs and four hits or maybe five. That hasn’t happened. We took advantage of every walk, every wild pitch, passed ball, error and hit. And when we do that, you see what happens."

In the series opener, Alabama looked bad. It turned into fuel.

"We were not satisfied at all with that first loss," said freshman catcher Reagan Dykes, who hit a three-run homer in the big second inning. "We expected much more out of ourselves."

Alabama pretty much emptied its bench, sending 14 different batters to the plate. Missouri emptied its bullpen, throwing all four pitchers. Alabama drew eight walks and struck out just twice while pounding out 10 hits.

Marisa Runyon hit a three-run homer and finished 2-for-2 with four RBIs. Haylie McCleney, Chandler Dare and Case had two hits each.

Winning pitcher Sydney Littlejohn (12-2), who might be emerging as UA’s ace, beat Mizzou for the second time in the series, allowing a two-run home run and three other hits with one strikeout and one walk.

The margin of victory was the largest for UA in an SEC game since a 14-0 victory over Kentucky in 2013, and the 16 runs were the most by Alabama in SEC play since a 19-4 victory over South Carolina in 2012.

Alabama (29-6 overall, 3-3 in SEC play) will visit No. 1-ranked Florida for a three-game series starting Friday. Missouri fell to 24-6, 3-3 in SEC play.

— Reach Tommy Deas at tommy@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0224.

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Beers named SEC Gymnastics Scholar-Athlete of the Year

Lauren Beers is the fourth Alabama gymnast to win the SEC Scholar-Athlete of the Year award. STAFF PHOTO/MICHELLE LEPIANKA CARTER

By Sean Landry
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

For the sixth time, a member of the University of Alabama gymnastics team is the SEC Gymnastics Scholar-Athlete of the Year.

The league office announced Thursday that senior Lauren Beers had been selected by the conference's coaches for the honor, the Crimson Tide's sixth in the award's 13-year history. The team's other honorees are Michelle Reeser in 2005, Kayla Hoffman in 2011 and Kim Jacob in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

Beers has won the NCAA Elite 89 award twice, given annually to the athlete at each national championship location with the highest GPA. Beers has a perfect 4.0 GPA through her first year of graduate school after finishing an undergraduate degree in exercise science last year. She has been named a CoSIDA Academic All-American twice and a Scholastic All-American three times.

One of two seniors on the Crimson Tide, Beers is ranked in the top ten in the country on vault and in the top twenty on floor exercise. Her top scores on each exercise came on her senior night, when she posted a perfect 10 on vault and a 9.975 on floor. She is one of just three gymnasts with a perfect score on vault this season, a mark for which she earned SEC Specialist of the Week honors.

For her career to date, she is a five time All-American.

Off the floor, in addition to her academic prowess, she was named Alabama's representative on the SEC Community Service team for her work with the Yeah Yeah Yeah 5K race, Read Across America, Northport Funeral Service Day, Project Angel Tree, the RISE School, DCH Cancer Center and the Tuscaloosa Magnet School.
COMMENTARY

If OU can do it, why not UA?

CECIL HURT

With little local interest left in the NCAA basketball Tournament, there is an opportunity to think more philosophically about why that is the case and what can ultimately be done to change it.

For instance, in the first game of the Elite Eight, Oklahoma looked great in overpowering a very good Oregon team that many Alabama fans got to see first-hand in Birmingham last December.

There are a handful of programs around the country that make University of Alabama fans look and say "if they can do that in basketball, why can't Alabama?" There's an understanding that it's difficult to forge a basketball program like Kansas or Kentucky, Duke or North Carolina or Indiana, in a place where college football is so deeply engrained in the culture for reasons that stretch back 100 years. That's not a cry to surrender, or an insult to anyone from Avery Johnson to the loyal fans — and there is a core of such fans — that have been trekking to Coleman Coliseum and Foster Auditorium before that. It's just a fact of cultural history. It's a dynamic that works both ways and if you don't believe it, think about the football accomplishments of the teams listed above.

There is another group of teams, though, that have both a college-football culture and a history of basketball success: Florida, Ohio State, Michigan, maybe Michigan State. The explanation for their basketball success when a few similar schools — Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Clemson and so on — can't seem to do the same isn't always simple. There are demographic factors involved, particularly given the population
of Ohio and Florida as compared to that of Alabama. But it's hard to say the same thing about Oklahoma.

No one questions that Oklahoma is a football-first culture (spare me the Big Game Bob Stoops comments) in a medium-size state and a league with its own 800-pound basketball gorilla (Kansas, as opposed to Kentucky.) But, five times now, the Sooners have been able to elevate themselves to Final Four territory. It's not a case of cutting corners, either, under the well-respected Lon Kruger. Sure, it helps when you have the National Player of the Year, Buddy Hield, develop in your program. But this isn't just a one-off Larry Bird/Indiana State situation.

None of this is breaking news for the Alabama administration. There is a reason that Johnson's predecessor, Anthony Grant, came with a strong Florida Gator background. That's what UA wanted to replicate, but Grant never seemed to be able to turn the recruiting corner and make it happen.

The goals are the same with Johnson, who is pursuing that distant dream with energy and enthusiasm — and a confidence that if Lon Kruger (who, coincidentally or not, made a Final Four at Florida, too) can get there, so can he and his team.

Thus, while there is no particular vested interest in Oklahoma basketball here, their success should be something Alabama welcomes. Because if Oklahoma can do it, or Ohio State, or Florida, then the incessant "football school/basketball school" debate becomes irrelevant. You simply devote the resources and have the patience to become a "both" school. It happens in gymnastics and softball and golf right here in Tuscaloosa, and it can happen in basketball as well.

— Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Malzahn, Saban not real victims of satellite camps

Kevin Scarbinsky  kscarbinsky@al.com

Jim Harbaugh’s Alabama satellite-camp invasion so far has netted the Michigan program one signee and one commitment. Neither of those three-star players, according to 247sports.com, had an offer from Alabama or Auburn.

At this rate, Harbaugh will put a dent in the in-state recruiting of the Tide and Tigers by the year — let me recheck my math — 2525. Or never. Whichever comes first.

In other words, he’s not really hurting Nick Saban and Gus Malzahn. Bill Clark, Neal Brown and Joey Jones may be another story.

If anyone should be opposed to this satellite-camp madness, it’s the other three Football Bowl Subdivision head coaches in Alabama.

One of the advantages for Clark at UAB, Brown at Troy and Jones at South Alabama in coaching an FBS program in the Heart of Dixie is location. They don’t have the recruiting budgets of the bigger programs, but they do have access to plenty of talented players in their backyards who can’t all sign with Alabama or Auburn.

That pool has gotten a little deeper in recent years given Alabama’s increased emphasis on national recruiting during the Saban era.

Other SEC and FBS programs have been mining the state for years, but UAB, Troy and South Alabama have managed to land some special players for the cost of a few tanks of gas. For some prospects, there’s no place like home even if they can’t find a home in Tuscaloosa or Auburn.

That natural territorial advantage potentially can take a hit when a program such as Michigan comes to visit. Harbaugh and company made big news when they worked a satellite camp in Prattville a year ago, and they’ll be back in June for another camp at Bob Jones High School in Madison.

That’s a great opportunity for the high school players in this state. They get an up-close-and-personal look at one of the biggest names in coaching and his staff at one of the bigger programs. It’s an opportunity many of the players wouldn’t have if they had to pay their own way to Ann Arbor.

From the perspective of the high school player, how can you argue against satellite camps?

From the perspective of the college coach, especially one at an FBS program that’s not in a Power 5 conference, you can’t be happy to see Harbaugh meeting, greeting and working with high school prospects in Alabama.

Or Ohio State coach Urban Meyer and his staff putting boots on the ground in Georgia, which he’ll do in June.

Ohio State obviously has drawn a line between spring practice on spring break in Florida (cheap gimmick for a start-up program) and satellite camps in the Deep South (legitimate recruiting tool for an established power).

Of course, all this hand-wringing over satellite camps will vanish if the NCAA votes them out of existence next week. If not, expect SEC coaches to hit the road and return the favor this summer as the conference prohibition on satellite camps ends. That SEC ban won’t be reinstated if the

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NCAA doesn’t shut them all down.

If this summer becomes open season, don’t be surprised if some of the SEC’s big names make their way to the Rust Belt. That way, they can do more than wave at Harbaugh and Meyer as they cross the Mason-Dixon line in opposite directions. They can do to MAC coaches in their footprint what Harbaugh’s trying to do to Conference USA and Sun Belt coaches here. Make sure no diamonds in the rough get overlooked.

So the rich get richer and the strivers have to strive even harder.
Tide players speak highly of Pruitt

By: Aaron Suttles

He's not yet spoken publicly since his return to Tuscaloosa, but first-year defensive coordinator Jeremy Pruitt’s presence is speaking volumes by how well his players are speaking of him.

Pruitt was around for the University of Alabama’s playoff run that culminated in a national championship, but not in a coaching capacity. He was the guy in the sweat shirt and pants standing on the sideline watching practice.

Now he’s the guy directing the defense and working with the inside linebackers every day.

According to Crimson Tide defenders, his style differs from Kirby Smart, who left Alabama after eight years as defensive coordinator. But everyone is hoping the results, namely a defense consistently ranked among the best in the nation, continues the same.

“Coach Pruitt, he’s a great teacher of the game,” middle linebacker Shaun Dion Hamilton said. “I’m really going to enjoy playing for him. I remember when he first came I could just tell by the way he came off that he’ll be a great guy to play for.

“He knows his stuff, he’s been in the system already before so it’s not really a big adjustment for him. He’s going to have his tweaks with the system. But he’s a great guy to play for.”

Senior outside linebacker Ryan Anderson described Pruitt as a player’s coach. Others agree.

“He definitely is,” Hamilton said. “When you sit in a meeting with him, and you go through meetings, I’m sure all the other guys will say the same thing. You can’t do nothing but want to practice hard and play hard for him.

“I’d probably say coach Smart is kind of a coach that’s a loud guy, a get in your face type guy. coach Pruitt, I won’t say he’s laid back, because when you make him mad he’s definitely going to get on you, but they’re just different styles.”

Iron Mike

On the field Da’Shawn Hand is quite the imposing figure. At 6-foot-4 and nearly 280 pounds, he’s the personification of big and fast.

But off the field Hand showcases a gentle personality. He’s quite funny, too.

This week he was asked if anyone had ever told him he looked like former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson.

“Awww, man. C’mon. Don’t do me like that,” Hand joked. “You know, I’ve actually got that before. It is what it is. He was a great, he was aggressive. I like to think I just look like Da’Shawn Hand.”

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Howard a handful

Defending 6-foot-6 tight end O.J. Howard isn’t easy. Ask the guys he faces in practice every day.

“Talk about a great player, I’m glad he’s on our team and not on the other team,” Hamilton said. “Because going up against him every day at practice, whether he has his hand on the ground or he’s split out, I know that you’re not going to find too many 6-5, 250-pound tight ends that can run routes like Calvin Ridley’s size. It’s great going against him and he definitely makes us better.”

Work in progress

Charles Baldwin was considered one of the top junior college players in the country. During spring practice he’s shown promise but has some things to learn to play the way an Alabama offensive lineman is expected to play.

“A very good athlete. He’s got a lot of ability. He’s got a lot to learn,” UA coach Nick Saban said. “He’s got a long way to go. We’re going to continue to work with him, to get him to do things right, to get him to buy into doing things the way we need him to do them so he can have success here.

“I think it might take some time but we’ve got a lot of patience and got a lot of people around here that are willing to see what we can make work with him.”
Remember Turner, Lyda for how they lived

CECIL HURT

There is no good timetable for losing a friend. There is an ache at their passing, whether those losses come at regular intervals or, as often seems to be the case, when one loss piles on top of another so quickly that the pain seems to compress itself into a single numbness, an inseparable sadness.

Over the past three days, two deaths happened, taking away not one but two fine men, different in some ways but united in many others, particularly by a love of the University of Alabama. Even more, though, the two were shining examples of how the world of athletics, sometimes flawed and sometimes fierce, can produce individuals who compete fearlessly, work tirelessly and yet retain the kind of fundamental decency and gentleness of spirit that would shine through it all.

Kevin Turner was a former football star at UA and in the NFL. Henry Lyda was a certified athletic trainer for many sports at Alabama over a long career, most notably basketball but also golf and track and any other sport where his help was needed. They were known to their friends, a wide circle that included myself for half my years now, as "KT" and "Sang" and I can hardly recall an instance where anyone called them anything else. Their paths surely crossed during KT's football career — even

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though Sang didn’t technically work with football by the late 1980s and early ’90s, he cared about all players regardless of sport. But beyond any friendship they might have had, they are linked for me in a memory of the way they lived.

KT was more famous, probably. Such is the nature of Alabama football, and the more quiet, behind-the-scenes role of the athletic trainer, even from those days when

that job constituted far more than tending to the injured and encompassed everything from making travel arrangements to being sure everyone was fed. The image that KT projected wasn’t just the good player, although he was certainly that. Even more, he was a versatile player and one who put “team” ahead of “self.” When he played fullback under Bill Curry, in Homer Smith’s wonderfully innovative offense, he was a lithe, elusive pass receiver. When Gene Stallings, to whom “fullback” meant something entirely different took over, KT didn’t complain. He adapted to the new role, becoming a tough, physical back, a persona that carried him all the way to the NFL.

Sang probably could have gone on to the NBA, or the NFL, if he had wanted. He was widely respected and honored by his peers and fellow trainers. But I’m not sure he ever harbored any ambition to move away from Tuscaloosa and a job he truly loved. In all the years I knew Sang, I never heard a cross or angry word — although you could get a disapproving look out of him if you happened to speak favorably of a couple of easy-to-guess SEC rivals.

But, like KT, Sang was willing to do whatever it took, to take any role that might help the team he worked for or, in KT’s case, played for. It’s telling that Thursday’s remembrances from KT’s NFL teammates, Patriot or Eagle, sound just the same as the memories that his Alabama teammates shared. He was that kind of teammate and, like Sang, that kind of man.

I hadn’t seen KT much recently as he fought against the unspeakable cruelty of ALS, but he was always the same person. I met as he was fresh out of Prattville High School, fighting to find a way to make his situation into something that would help someone else. I did see Sang last month when Alabama basketball played in Baton Rouge. He always made it a point to come by press row and speak, to ask about a column or an article I’d written recently, taking time to make someone else feel good.

About two weeks later, Sang was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. A month or so after that, he was gone.

Sudden or lingering, the loss of a friend always comes with its own heartache. This week doubled that. The fact that it was two such good, humble decent men multiplied by a thousand times. I’ll miss them both because I knew them. The world will miss them both because there are too few, far too few, of their kind.

— Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0235.
Veteran players show up while youth lack experience

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

It happens every year in spring practice and it will happen again at the opening of full camp — young players hitting a sort of mental wall that they must cross to take the next step in their development.

Nick Saban sees it. He most assuredly witnessed it Monday afternoon, and that's why he made it the main part of his talking points during his press conference.

Following the fifth practice of spring and on the heels of two days off, Saban saw what he usually sees during a practice following a break: veteran players showing why they're veterans and young players exposing their youth.

"The one thing that you notice in players that have a little maturity, have a little experience, is you give them the them

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them the weekend off for Easter and they come back and they don’t skip a beat," Saban said. "And you see some of the younger guys on the team that you’re really trying to work with, they don’t seem to be able to retain the things that you worked to get them to this point and you take a step back, and now you’ve got to try to take two steps forward.

“I think that’s maturity with young players. Experiences like this help them see what they need to do to work, get focused, prepare better so that they know what they need to do when they get out there and we can get it done the way we need to get it done. That’s the focus for what we need to improve on.”

Saban used the safeties to illustrate his point.

Ronnie Harrison was a true freshman who played in all 15 games (he started one game) on special teams or at safety last season. Age wise, he still counts as a young player but his experience level gives him an advantage over his two other safety classmates Kendall Sheffield and Deionte Thompson.

Harrison, you might remember, was the defensive back who stripped the ball from a Clemson receiver in the back corner of the end zone that prevented a touchdown during a crucial moment of the national championship game.

Sheffield and Thompson redshirted in 2015.

"Ronnie played a lot last year. He’s definitely ahead of the other two," Saban said. "I think the big thing that the other two, they fall into the category of the guys that I just talked about. They both have ability to do certain things and really can be positive players on the team, but the big thing is learning what to do, how to do it, why it’s important to do it that way. And be able to go out there and play with confidence and execute it.

“That’s going to come from better focus, better preparation, better discipline, better carryover. Spend more time thinking about football when they’re not playing it so they get a better understanding of what they need to do. Come in and meet with your coaches on days when we don’t have practice so you can have a better understanding of it. If those guys are going to make that kind of progress, that’s the kind of habits that they need to develop and they’re only going to develop those habits if they invest their time properly in doing those things.”

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After 5 years away, Mobile native Sigler excited for return home

Former Blount coach, Alabama star is guiding Jaguars’ cornerbacks

Greg Stephenson cstephenson@al.com

Kelvin Sigler didn't grow up dreaming about coaching at South Alabama, but that's only because the Jaguars didn't have a team at the time.

The Mobile native and former Alabama player is back in his hometown this spring, beginning his first year as South Alabama's cornerbacks coach. The Shaw High School graduate and former Blount head coach joined Joey Jones' staff in February, just in time for the start of spring practice.

"I'm excited," Sigler said. "That coach Jones and (defensive coordinator Kane) Wommack gave me this opportunity to come back home, me being from Mobile, giving me a chance to get back down here and be around my family — we're very thrilled."

Sigler returns to his hometown full-time for the first time in five years, since he left Blount to take a position as a defensive analyst under Nick Saban at Alabama. He spent the last three seasons as cornerbacks coach at Northern Illinois, a power in the Mid-American Conference.

It was while at NIU that Sigler caught the eye of Wommack, who was defensive coordinator at Eastern Illinois before taking the same job at USA in January. The two also had mutual friends in the coaching world — including two of Sigler's college teammates — Jason Jones (who worked with Wommack at Ole Miss), and current South Alabama running backs coach Tim Bowens — who further endorsed Sigler's credentials.

"He's a Mobile guy," Wommack said of Sigler. "First and foremost, we felt like we needed a guy in that position that could continue to boost our recruiting. We're starting to gain more and more attention as a program. So as you start to gain that, you want to have those guys on your staff that can go in and have that niche in this state.

"But then also, from a fundamental standpoint, I liked the background he had as a high school coach, and then working with coach Saban. And when I was at Blount —"

South Alabama plucked cornerbacks coach Kelvin Sigler away from Northern Illinois, where he spent three seasons. Mike Kittrell/AL.com

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FROM BI

with coach Saban. And when I was at Eastern Illinois, you thought so highly of what Northern Illinois did. They were relevant every year. And so I had gotten to know him a little bit through this process and spoke to some people who spoke very highly of him."

Sigler coached at Blount from 2008-2011, leading the Leopards to a 27-18 record and four straight playoff berths. One of his top players during that era, linebacker Enrique Williams, signed with South Alabama in 2009.

That was the first year the Jaguars had a team, and the program transitioned to Division I in 2011 and joined the Sun Belt Conference in 2013. By that time, coaching in his hometown had become a reality for Sigler.

"Growing up as a kid, I knew they didn't have a team, but I always thought if they could get a team with the talent here in Mobile, they could have a really good team," Sigler said. "I was just on the road recruiting (for Northern Illinois) and I talked to coach Jones. He ended up giving me a call later that week and basically said we'll probably have a position come open in the secondary and would I be interested in coming back home? And I said of course. The opportunity came at the right time."

Said Jones, "I always admired Kelvin when he was at Blount, the way he approached his players, the way he was extremely organized when I walked in there recruiting. I knew he was a very good football coach. The fact that he's from Mobile, the fact that he played at Alabama, certainly are plusses because of the recognition he's going to get when he goes into a player's living room or school."

Sigler — who is married with four children — starred at Shaw High School alongside future Alabama and NFL star Chris Samuels, and both signed with the Crimson Tide in 1995. Sigler got on the field on special teams as a true freshman, then worked his way into the starting lineup the following year.

Sigler was one of the top safeties in the SEC his sophomore and junior years, but his college career was curtailed by a serious knee injury suffered as a senior in 1998. He then went into coaching, working his way around the state of Alabama as an assistant before landing the head coaching job at Blount in 2008.

From there it was off to Alabama, where Sigler spent one season. The Crimson Tide won the national title that year, and Sigler said he absorbed all he could, particularly from Saban.

"Just his mentality, the way he goes at it," Sigler said. "Coach Saban is about business. He wants to make sure the kids are getting the job done, and put the kids in the best position possible to be successful. It's all about hard work, you know. He wants to try to outwork his opponent. Just going in there with that business-like attitude about everything and making sure I'm doing what I've supposed to do to put the kids in the best situation possible to be successful."

Sigler's parents are both deceased, but he said he still has numerous extended family members in the area. He said he works each day to "do things to make them proud."

He said he's also enjoying working as part of the defensive staff under the highly energetic Wommack. The cornerback position is one of the most experienced and talented for the Jaguars, with junior Jeremy Reaves, sophomore Jalen Thompson and senior nickel back Kalen Jackson among the top handful of players on the USA roster.

"I really love what (coach Wommack) is doing, just the style of defense and his coaching mentality is great. I think we all jell well on the defensive side of the ball. We're all on the same page. The thing is, we want to all be on the same page and just make sure our players get the job done."

"I think we have a very talented group back there. They have a high football IQ. They love the game. I'm excited I have the opportunity to coach these guys."
Middle Tennessee shocks the world? That should've been UAB

By: Kevin Scarbinsky

Imagine how Jerod Haase feels now.

Bad enough his UAB team ended its record-setting season with two double-digit defeats, one robbing the Blazers of a shot at the NCAA Tournament, the other knocking them out of the NIT.

Then this happened Friday.

That Stephen F. Austin team Haase scheduled this season to try to improve his RPI? That mid-major power the Blazers beat 76-66 in Bartow Arena? That team, as a No. 14 seed, took down West Virginia.

And this happened Friday.

That Middle Tennessee team UAB beat twice during the regular season and finished three games ahead of in the Conference USA standings? That team, as a No. 15 seed, knocked out Michigan State and busted brackets from coast to coast.

It was just the eighth time since the field expanded to 64 teams in 1985 that a No. 15 seed beat a No. 2 seed. People are calling Middle's 90-81 victory the biggest upset in tournament history because State was one of the favorites to win the national title, but the Blue Raiders never trailed.

They jumped out to a 15-2 lead and proved to be tougher over 40 minutes than the toughest program in the country.

Middle Tennessee pulled off the biggest shocker of an opening round that matched the 2001 record of 13 upsets by seed with two Alabama natives as starters playing key roles. Giddy Potts, the sophomore guard from Athens, scored 19 points and grabbed five rebounds in 39 minutes. Perrin Buford, the junior swingman from Decatur, added 15 points, seven rebounds and six assists in his 39 minutes.

Conference USA takes a lot of heat - deservedly so - because it's become a one-bid league that's a shadow of what it used to be, but this is the second straight year the C-USA Tournament champ won its first-round game.

Haase has been there, done that. A year ago, his UAB team was a No. 14 seed, and the Blazers toppled No. 3 Iowa State.

This UAB team flipped the script from last year in a most unfortunate way. That 2015 team made everyone forget a so-so regular season with a memorable run through the C-USA Tournament into the second round of the NCAA Tournament. This team gave
people a reason to discount its memorable regular season with not one but two postseason flops.

It's the way of the college basketball world. One or two weekends can overshadow the work of the previous four months, for better or worse. One win over the right team at the right time can make you an overnight sensation, even if, like Middle Tennessee's Kermit Davis Jr., you've been a good basketball coach for a long time.

The more people celebrate Davis and the Blue Raiders - they play Syracuse on Sunday for a Sweet 16 berth - the more Haase and the Blazers have to be kicking themselves. That C-USA Cinderella could've and should've been them. A year ago, it was. A year from now, it could be again.

That's some powerful motivation for the long offseason to come.
Tide gymnasts gear up for final home meet

By: Sean Landry

Nearly a month after a senior night win over the University of Georgia, the University of Alabama’s gymnasts are preparing for their final home meet of the year.

On Monday, the NCAA announced the six-team field for the Tuscaloosa Regional, the final stepping stone for the Crimson Tide before the National Championships in Fort Worth, Texas. No. 4 Alabama will host No. 10 Cal, No. 15 Boise State, No. 21 Kentucky, No. 26 West Virginia and No. 34 Bowling Green on Saturday, April 2.

“I think it’s a great field,” senior Lauren Beers said. “I know we’ve had a couple of them here this season, so it’ll be familiar territory so it’s nice for them. I’m excited. Regionals is always a lot of fun. It’s the first real postseason meet with the byes and the different warm-up situation, and to have it Coleman will be a lot of fun. I’m excited and I think the team’s excited.”

With a regional qualifying score of 197.4, Alabama will be the top seed at the regional, ahead of Cal (196.77) and Boise State (196.575). The top-seeded team at every regional will start the meet on a bye before uneven bars and finish on vault, as determined by a random draw.

“I’ve always had this thought: You’ve got to compete four events,” coach Dana Duckworth said. “It doesn’t matter what order you do them in, you’ve got to compete them.”

The trip to Tuscaloosa will be West Virginia’s second of the year, after posting a 195.25 in a Valentine’s Day win for Alabama.

“I think this is a great regional for us. I love that we’re going to see some teams that we’ve seen already, because it’s fun to see how some teams progress throughout the season. But I’ll be so focused on Alabama, that I won’t know what’s going on around us.”

Baseball honor

University of Alabama baseball freshman Chandler Taylor was named SEC freshman of the week on Monday, the league office announced. Taylor helped lead Alabama to its first series win at LSU in two decades.

Taylor started all four games in right field for UA last week, going 4-15 with two walks, one double, two home runs and four RBI. He leads the team with four home runs and is tied for the team lead with 11 RBI on the season. He’s been a mainstay of the middle of the order this season after launching a home run in his first collegiate at-bat against Maryland on Feb. 19.

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He did much of his damage last Saturday as the Crimson Tide swept a doubleheader in Baton Rouge to clinch the series. Taylor was 3 for 9 with a double, home run and two RBIs while making his SEC debut. The Tigers entered last week ranked in the top 10 in every major poll.

The series win for Alabama marked a milestone for the program. The Crimson Tide hadn’t won a road series against LSU since 1996, a season in which UA went to the College World Series. UA head coach Mitch Gaspard was an assistant coach for Alabama in 1996. He now has at least one road series win against every SEC West opponent as Alabama’s head coach with the exception of Arkansas. He’ll have a chance to get a win there later this season when Alabama travels to Fayetteville in May.

– Ben Jones

Tough schedule

The Alabama softball team’s game against 13th-ranked Oklahoma last Saturday was its ninth against top-25 opposition this season. Alabama has compiled a 5-4 record against those teams. That includes a 4-2 record in out-of-conference play, where UA has faced five different ranked teams, most since 2009.

Alabama defeated Arizona twice and both Tennessee and James Madison once each out of conference. UA lost to Central Florida and Oklahoma.

The Crimson Tide opened SEC play two weekends ago at an LSU team that is ranked in the top five, taking one of three games.

Of the teams Alabama played that were ranked at the time, all are still ranked in the top 25 except for UCF, which fell out of the top 25 but is still receiving votes in both major polls. LSU and James Madison are both ranked inside the top 10.

Alabama is 26-5 overall, 1-2 in SEC play, and ranked No. 9 in the initial official NCAA RPI (ratings percentage index) rankings, which take strength of schedule into account.

After hosting Alcorn State tonight at 6 p.m. at Rhoads Stadium, the schedule doesn’t lighten up: UA’s next six games will be against ranked conference teams. Alabama will host No. 15 Missouri on Saturday through Monday for a three-game series, then visit No. 1-ranked defending national champion Florida in Gainesville on April 1-3.

Before falling 2-0 to Oklahoma in a pitching duel, Alabama’s bats were hot last weekend at the Eastern Tournament in Fullerton, Calif. Through four games, the Crimson Tide scored 31 runs, including six home runs and six doubles. Marisa Runyon batted .600 over the weekend with two doubles and two homers, driving in six runs and scoring three times. Candler Dare batted .500, leading the team with eight hits.

– Tommy Deas
Former Tide coach talks career

IAN THOMPSON

Scott Limbaugh was Jay Seawell’s assistant golf coach at the University of Alabama from 2007-12, before heading to Nashville, Tenn. to take over as head coach at Vanderbilt University.

I caught up with him this week as he was telling me about a new, one-day event he has spearheaded, the FarmLinks Collegiate Match Play, to be played Saturday and feature six-man teams from Alabama, Auburn, Vanderbilt and Georgia Tech.

“The National Championship has been played at match play for quite a few years now and I wanted to add another opportunity for my team to play a couple of matches.

“I grew up in Childersburg, so, when I started kicking the tires on an event and talking to Jay (Seawell) about it, FarmLinks seemed like a natural fit.”
FarmLinks is in nearby Sylacauga and Limbaugh talked to FarmLinks owner David Pursell, a strong Auburn supporter, who was immediately onboard.

Hence Alabama will play Auburn in one match, while Vandy and Tech will play in the other. The winner of each morning team match will meet in the final that afternoon, with the losers squaring off in the consolation bracket.

"We had an extra day of competition left and this is a great way to use it," Limbaugh continued.

All golf teams get 24 days of competition, spread over the fall and spring semesters, not including Conference and post-season play.

"So, we will have the Iron Bowl in golf, which I bet has not happened in many, many years," Limbaugh, his usual energetic and upbeat self, was telling me.

"It will be open to the public to watch, with the first match going

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THOMPSON
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off at 8:00 am. FarmLinks is allowing people to rent carts to watch the action and see some of these great players up close and personal before they reach the Tour down the road."

In the event that a team match ends in a 3-3 tie, the tie will be broken by the most holes won, so margin of victory in individual matches could prove key.

A number of players with statewide ties would be expected to play including Alabama’s Robby Shelton and Tom Lovelady, Auburn’s Michael Johnson and Vanderbilt’s Patrick Martin.

Others on their respective squads with state ties who could be teeing it up include Alabama’s Alex Green, Tyler Hitchner, Robby Prater, William Sellers and Steven Setterstrom; and Auburn’s Ryan Benton and Blake Messer.

Limbaugh’s final days with the Tide were spent at the 2012 National Championship where Alabama lost in agonizing fashion to Texas, including Jordan Spieth, by three matches to two.

The night before the final, I received a phone call from (Vanderbilt alumni and prominent PGA Tour player) Brandt Snedeker about the opening of head coach. I didn’t answer it initially as I didn’t know the number and I had a lot on my plate with the final the next day."

Obviously he returned the call, talked things through with Snedeker and the rest is history.

“I wasn’t in a hurry to leave Tuscaloosa. I loved it there, met my wife there, had a lot of great things going on, but knew this was an awesome opportunity.”

He has brought energy and a change in culture to the golf program at Vanderbilt, including raising the money to build a “first-class golf house and locker room.”

Their team now more than holds its own in the SEC’s, finishing second last year, and on the national golf scene too.

BENT BROOK NOW REOPEN

Bent Brook Golf Course in Bessemer reopened for play on Saturday after being closed for over two weeks due to the damaging effects of a tornado.

The staff has been working tirelessly over the past two weeks to get the golf course in playable condition. Employees from all departments and job descriptions have helped in the clean-up effort,” Director of Golf Mickey Smith said.

“Without the willingness of these dedicated and unselfish staff members to go above the normal call of duty, we would have been closed for several more weeks. I am truly thankful for their efforts.”

Smith noted that there is still work to be done on the 27-hole facility, but it would continue with golf returning as well.

“With approximately 200 trees either uprooted or damaged, we will be cleaning up for weeks to come.

“Based on the number of phone calls we have received since the storm, we know our golfers are anxious for the course to reopen. We are too.”

— Ian Thompson has been writing about golf in Alabama for over 20 years. His weekly “Mr. Golf” column concentrates on golfers, golf events and people associated with the sport of interest to the Tuscaloosa and Birmingham areas. Reach him with story ideas at thompsonettesoff@gmail.com.
Smart takes a disappointing stand on restricting transfers

Kevin Scarbinsky  kscarbinsky@al.com

You just know Georgia fans want Kirby Smart to be different than Mark Richt. At least in the ways that matter to men and women who bark like Dawgs.

They want him to win more rivalry games. They want him to win more championships. They want him to stop letting Nick Saban wipe his feet on their hallowed hedges.

Smart already has obliged his new fan base, but in the worst possible way.

He’s not going to be like Richt when it comes to transfers. On that issue, Smart is not going to put the players first. He’s going to show them who’s boss.

If you were a Georgia player under Richt and you wanted to leave, you were free to go to the destination of your choice. Richt famously said “life’s too short” to restrict a young man’s options if he believed the grass would be greener elsewhere.

Now if you’re a Georgia player and you want to leave the program, you’re also free to go — except Smart can and will tell you where you can go, at least without penalty.

You want to transfer to Miami to play for Richt, the coach who recruited, signed and

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developed a relationship with you? Sorry. Smart doesn't want you to go play for the Hurricanes because he seems to fear a potential mass exodus to Coral Gables.

You want to transfer to play elsewhere in the SEC to attend a school closer to home? Nope. Smart doesn't want you to go to Florida or Auburn because he seems to fear you might come back to bite him on the field.

Actually, despite Georgia's about-face, you still can go to the school of your choice, but if your new home is on Smart's banned list, you'll have to pay your own way to go to school there for the next year.

It borders on unconscionable that a coach who makes millions of dollars a school that makes tens of millions can impose such a financial penalty on a student-athlete.

Smart is no longer a defensive coordinator, but early in his first year as a head coach, he seems awfully defensive.

Sadly, Smart's stance on transfers, which he outlined Saturday, isn't out of the ordinary among his head-coaching peers. Richt has been the outlier in recognizing, as he said a few years ago, that a football player's time in college is limited.

"I want every young man to have a successful time in his four- or five-year window to be able to go to college," Richt said. "So I don't want to impede a guy from realizing his goals and his dreams, wherever it is.

"I want our guys to stay, and sometimes when they do choose to leave, I still like the kid and I still want the kid to have success. If he thinks he will have success at a school you compete against, then so be it."

Richt's way is the right way. Smart's way isn't very wise.

If college football is supposed to be all about the student-athlete — as coaches and administrators like to tell us — there's no good reason to limit a player's options if he chooses to transfer.

He already faces a rather significant impediment. If a player transfers from one Football Bowl Subdivision school to another, barring a successful appeal for special circumstances, he still has to sit out a year before he can play again.

That's enough of a deterrent to prevent a significant portion of a team's roster from taking a hike.

Let's be honest. If you're doing right by your players as a coach, most of your players don't want to leave. If they do, it's probably because they don't like their position or their playing time. You lose if you force unhappy players to stick around.

Georgia's new approach, urged by Smart and adopted by AD Greg McGarity, is as wrong as it is common. It's especially disappointing coming from a coach who, during his tenure at Alabama, seemed to understand the value of the student-athlete. Smart developed strong relationships with his Crimson Tide players, and it's no coincidence they tended to play so hard for him.

This decision, which came to light because a Georgia tailback named A.J. Turner wants to transfer, is the worst possible policy change at the worst possible time.

College athletes are more aware of their power than ever. They have a better understanding than their predecessors of their absolute importance to a system that makes rich men of so many other people, including coaches such as Smart.

He's totally within his rights to make rules for them while they play for him. When he tries to control their futures, he's simply gone too far.
Trump ‘chalking’ response reveals flawed campus culture

Cameron Smith
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The words were clear: "Accept the inevitable: Trump 2016" or, in several cases, just "Trump 2016." Someone wrote them in chalk around Emory University’s Atlanta campus.

A few of the “chalkings" even had aggressive exclamation points.

According to The Emory Wheel, student protesters responded by gathering outside of the school’s administrative building and shouting, "You are not listening! Come speak to us; we are in pain!"

These students felt that campaign slogans scrawled in chalk were evidence of intimidation because Georgia’s Republican primary already has come and gone.

But that’s not the end of it.

Emory’s president, James Wagner, said any students “responsible for the chalkings will go through the conduct violation process.” If the chalkers are “from outside of the university, trespassing charges will be pressed.”

Really? It’s chalk. The rain will wash it off far sooner than the issue will make its way through the university’s politically correct process.

Since when is college a place where feelings are more important than freedom? Lately, that seems to be the case.

Does Donald Trump offend me? Absolutely. He’s a bully from the word go. To speak the language of the easily offended Emory students, he’s a walking "trigger word." If those enduring "pain" from the Trump chalking bothered to watch cable news or any of the debates during the past months, they’d surely be in agony.

Let’s think about this critically for a minute. Imagine my neighbor writes “Really Inevitable this Time: Clinton 2016” on the sidewalk across from my house. What can I do about it? I annoyingly assess my political “pain,” realize the chimpunks have torn up my lawn, and move on with my life.

That’s what happens in the real world. I recognize that many college administrations don’t seem altogether concerned with preparing students for their futures. They’re content with taking a student’s money, coddling their feelings for a few years and leaving them with staggering debt.

The adults at the helm of colleges and universities across the nation also have given quarter to the idea that the correct response to something like a “Trump chalking” is suppression of political expression. Ironically, the protesters’ desire to shut down Trump’s chalkey support is completely aligned with Trump’s stated interest in stifling his own political critics. In America, we ignore offensive speech; we don’t cut it off.

The depth of this bizarre academic culture runs so deep that Emory has a Committee for Open Expression that sets the guidelines for “open expression, dissent, and protest.” Framed another way, it’s a free expression committee whose task it is to craft the university’s restraints beyond the existing boundaries of the First Amendment.

The Constitution beautifully articulates our rights of speech, association, and assembly with nuanced contours articulated over generations of litigation. That’s the framework facing students as they graduate, and it might be useful for them to get accustomed to it.

Free speech and expression isn’t always kind and gentle, but it’s far better to endure the occasional offense than to suffer oppression in silence. North Korea probably wouldn’t take kindly to a good political chalking, but the nation also recently sentenced Otto Warmbier of Ohio to 15 years of hard labor for stealing a propaganda banner.

Trump is capitalizing on this type of bureaucratic, politically correct nonsense. He is a walking, talking, tweeting rebuttal to the sentiment that people have a right not to be offended. We don’t have to like it to understand why we allow his type of speech and expression in political life.

Listen to students’ concerns, wash off the chalk, and move on. It’s time for Emory and other universities to realize they’re preparing students for the future, not protecting them from it.

Cameron Smith is a regular conservative columnist for AL.com and state programs director for the R Street Institute, a think tank in Washington.
The college GPA arms race is not letting up

The waters of Lake Wobegon have flooded U.S. college campuses; the grade of an A is now reserved as a measuring stick for recognizing academic excellence and distinction — not only the ranks of the top universities, but also the ranks of the top students. In a country where grades are everything, the push for higher grades has become a race to the top, and the stakes are high.

WASHINGTON — CATHERINE RAMPPELL

Evidence of this is found in the recent report on grade inflation from Stuart Rojstaczer, a former Duke University professor. He found that the share of A grades has tripled, from just 15 percent of grades in 1940 to 45 percent in 2013. This trend has led to increased pressure on students to perform at their best, and has also led to the perception that grades are a measure of intelligence and ability.

In this competitive environment, the push for higher grades has become a race to the top, and the stakes are high. Students are often forced to choose between their academic achievements and their mental health, as the pressure to achieve becomes increasingly intense. The race for grades has also led to a shift in how grades are used, with the emphasis on the highest possible grade rather than on the quality of the work itself.

The authors attribute today's inflation in grade distribution to the commodification of higher education. That is, students pay more in tuition, and expect more in return — better service, better facilities and better grades. Or at least a leg up in employment and graduate school admissions through stronger transcripts.

And indeed, some universities have explicitly lifted their grading curves (sometimes retroactively) to make graduates more competitive in the job market, leading to a sort of grade inflation arms race. But rising tuition may not be the sole driver of students' expectations for better grades, given that high school grades have also risen in recent decades. And rather than some top-down directive from administrators, grade inflation also seems related to a steady creep of pressure on professors to give higher grades in exchange for better teaching evaluations.

It's unclear how the clustering of grades near the top is affecting student effort. But it certainly makes it harder to accurately measure how much students have learned. It also makes it more challenging for grad schools and employers to sort the superstars from the also-rans (which, if you're an elite school like Harvard, is probably a feature, not a bug).

Lax or at least inconsistent grading standards can also distort what students — especially women — choose to study, pushing them away from more stingly graded science, technology, engineering and math fields and into humanities, where high grades are easier to come by.

But what to do about the rise of the Gentleman’s A? A decade ago, my alma mater, Princeton, decided to lead the charge against grade inflation. But when students grumbled, and other schools didn’t follow, the school abruptly abandoned its fight. Wesleyan, which had the highest average GPA in Rojstaczer’s database in 2000 (3.5), underwent a similar endeavor, only to see its grades creep back up more recently.

Without collective action — which means both standing up to students and publicly shaming other schools into adopting higher standards — the arms race will continue.

— Catherine Rampell is a columnist for The Washington Post. Readers can email her at crampell@washpost.com.
Symbolic Gestures

Harvard University became the latest major institution to alter a key part of its physical identity to accommodate concerns about honoring a dubious historical figure. Martha L. Minow, dean of the Harvard Law School, announced that she would recommend the school retire its shield — its de facto logo — which was based on a bookplate belonging to the family of Isaac Royall Jr., an early donor to the law school and a slaveholder.

Meanwhile, Stanford University is taking perhaps the next logical step in dealing with the recent tide of questions over how to handle contentious symbols. The university's leadership announced this month that it would establish a committee to devise principles for considering and renaming streets and buildings on campus. The new committee's first task will be to tackle the case of Junipero Serra, a Roman Catholic priest who established missions throughout California and was elevated to sainthood by Pope Francis last year. The Stanford Undergraduate Senate introduced a bill this year to consider renaming a street on the campus that bears Father Serra's name, because of his association with the cultural repression and genocide of Native Americans in California.
In Explaining Confederate Symbols, Colleges Struggle to Summarize History

By: Corinne Ruff

A statue of a Confederate soldier at the U. of Mississippi will get an explanatory plaque that seeks to place the monument in historical context. Many universities are undertaking such efforts, a task that presents difficult choices.

In a prominent spot on the University of Mississippi campus stands a statue of a nameless Confederate soldier. Erected in 1906, it was one of many unveiled across the South as a generation of Confederate veterans reached old age, says Andrew P. Mullins Jr., an associate professor of education and former chief of staff to the chancellor.

Mr. Mullins, who has worked at the university for decades, has spent a lot of time thinking about the history of the statue over the past several months. In 2014 several racist incidents at the university — including the appearance of a noose on a statue of the institution’s first black student, James Meredith — prompted the creation of a committee to analyze Confederate symbols on the campus. In the fall, as renewed cries from students surfaced to demand such symbols’ removal, the committee, which includes Mr. Mullins and several others, began drafting language to put the Confederate statue in historical context.

Across the country, and the South especially, colleges and universities are coming to terms with their historical ties to the Confederacy, and how those ties are honored through monuments, statues, and building names. In fielding students’ calls to remove such symbols, many colleges have promised to add much-needed context — to turn what protesters see as a celebration of white supremacy into an honest historical snapshot.

"We believe in maintaining that history in its historical context, in its place," Mr. Mullins says. For Mississippi’s Confederate statue, that means installing an informational plaque. Its exact language was released earlier this month.

Context for a Statue

The University of Mississippi is installing a plaque at the foot of a statue of a Confederate soldier on its campus to provide historical context. It charged a committee with drafting a text for the plaque and approved the following language:

As Confederate veterans were passing from the scene in increasing numbers, memorial associations built monuments in their memory all across the South. This statue was dedicated by citizens of Oxford and Lafayette County in 1906. On the evening of September 30, 1962, the statue was a rallying point where a rebellious mob gathered to prevent the admission of the University’s first African American student. It was also at this statue that a local minister implored the mob to disperse and allow James Meredith to exercise his rights as an American citizen. On the morning after that long night, Meredith was admitted to the University and graduated in August 1963.

This historic structure is a reminder of the University’s past and of its current and ongoing commitment to open its hallowed halls to all who seek truth and knowledge and wisdom.
The plaque, which will be placed directly in front of the statue, describes when the statue was built and by whom, as well as its role in a historical event in 1962, when a mob rallied there to prevent Mr. Meredith (whose statue now stands just across from the Confederate soldier) from entering the campus. The plaque concludes: "This historic structure is a reminder of the university’s past and of its current and ongoing commitment to open its hallowed halls to all who seek truth and knowledge and wisdom."

But not everyone agrees with those words. Students in the university’s chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People will present a counternarrative to administrators on Thursday, part of which will read, "While the current university creed advocates respect for and the dignity of all persons, this historic structure is a reminder of the central role of white supremacy in the history of the University of Mississippi and the state of Mississippi."

Mr. Mullins admits that there is a lot more the committee could have put on the plaque, but "we had to make a decision," he says. Among other things, he has been asked why there was no mention of slavery, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, or the University Grays (Mississippi’s 11th Infantry Regiment in the Confederate army).

So how did the committee come up with the language it chose? For several months, Mr. Mullins and the other historians and administrators on the committee researched the memorial, listed what they felt should be included, and critiqued one another’s suggestions.

Mr. Mullins says he would have liked to include more detail on the "Lost Cause" — a campaign of Confederate glorification at the turn of the 20th century that occurred alongside the political oppression of African-Americans in the South, and that fueled the construction of statues like the one at Ole Miss. But he was overruled, he says, by other members who said it was better to explain the era as one in which Confederate veterans were dying out.

"My point is, you can’t put everything," Mr. Mullins says. "And you finally have to compromise and move on."

An ‘Honest Reckoning’

For many colleges, this is a time of "honest reckoning" with how they got where they are today, says Edward L. Ayers, president emeritus of the University of Richmond and a historian of the South, who was brought in by Ole Miss to consult on sensitive spaces on the campus.

Mississippi’s statue is far from the only symbol causing a stir at colleges. A statue of Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy, was recently moved from a central location at the University of Texas at Austin to a local museum of American history. There, a task force of 12 members, made up of students, historians, and faculty members, came up with five options for the university's president to consider.

In conversations among committee members, Gregory J. Vincent, Austin’s vice president for diversity and community engagement, recalls input from students: to avoid "whitewashing"
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history, to ensure that history is portrayed accurately, and to consider whether the panel's options would allow the university to foster a learning environment.

Daina R. Berry, an associate professor of history and African and African-diaspora studies at the university, sat on the committee that drafted the options, but she kept her personal feelings about the statue to herself. As an African-American who teaches the history of slavery, she says, she is used to separating her work from personal views. "As a historian," she says, "you want to write history in the purest form so you can let the reader come up with their own judgments and opinions. I was trying to do an unbiased job on a report I felt was very important."

Although the statue of Davis was removed, statues of other Confederate leaders remain. University administrators are considering whether to erect a plaque to provide historical context for the remaining symbols.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has a statue of a Confederate soldier that closely resembles the one at Ole Miss. Known as "Silent Sam," the Chapel Hill statue stands at a prominent entrance to the campus.

W. Fitzhugh Brundage, a professor at the university who studies Southern history, says there has been a cycling of demands to remove the statue that crests every few years, until students graduate and the issue quiets down again. Last year opposition to the monument took the form of repeated vandalism — so frequent that the university put it under surveillance.

The continued presence of the statue is offensive to many students. What makes it more so, Mr. Brundage says, is its outright association with racial oppression. For instance, at its ceremonial dedication, a speaker bragged about having whipped a black woman in public. "Not every Confederate monument has such an explicit link drawn between it and white supremacy," Mr. Brundage says.

Supporters of the monument argue it is a symbol of regional heritage, not hate. But, he says, "that's not how the people who put it up saw it."

The university has begun taking steps to deal with such controversies. Last year it renamed a building and formed a task force that is studying the campus's history and planning markers for sites associated with racism in the past, including the quad where Silent Sam is located. The group will also consider options for an orientation program or course that will "communicate a complete history" of the university to incoming students and others new to the campus.
Campus battles rage over names

By: Katy Murphy

SAN JOSE, California -- At universities across the country, centuries-old names that adorn buildings, streets and squares are under siege - from Stanford’s Serra Mall to the University of California, Berkeley’s Barrows Hall to Yale’s Calhoun College to the University of Alabama’s Morgan Hall.

Once widely revered in a different era, a priest, anthropologist, vice president, U.S. senator and dozens of others whose names are etched on college campuses have become the subject of a historical autopsy. Students, inspired in part by the Black Lives Matter movement, are calling for the removal of symbols honoring people connected to slavery and colonialism.

This month, the renaming movement is gaining momentum at Stanford, where a student campaign is taking aim at Father Junipero Serra. The 18th-century Spanish missionary’s name is ubiquitous on campus, but his detractors, backed by the student government, argue the newly sainted Serra -- whose role in the Spanish colonization of California led to the assimilation and exploitation of Native Americans added controversy to his canonization last year -- should not have dorms, halls or streets named after him.

It is “important for the university to recognize that we need to reinvest and re-appropriate these spaces in the names of indigenous people,” said Leo John Bird, a Stanford junior from the Blackfeet Reservation in Browning, Montana, who has pressed for the changes.

Students from UC Berkeley, Amherst, Yale, Princeton, Georgetown, Alabama and many other campuses in the past year have started similar campaigns - and the results are starting to show.

The movement “has now reached the fulcrum moment where it is going to start rolling downhill and taking everything with it,” said Alfred Brophy, a professor at the University of North Carolina School of Law and an expert in reparations history and law who has been observing the trend.

A Harvard Law committee this month recommended the school ditch an unofficial seal bearing the family crest of Isaac Royall Jr., an early donor who got rich from the slave trade. Amherst trustees in January voted to drop “Lord Jeff,” the school’s unofficial mascot inspired by Lord Jeffery Amherst, the 18th-century British army officer for whom the town was named - and who suggested that smallpox be used as a weapon against Native Americans.

The shootings at a black church in Charleston, S.C., last June moved Yale’s leaders to consider renaming a residential college named after John C. Calhoun, a statesman and vice president under John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. In a speech in August, Yale President Peter
Salovey said Calhoun, an 1804 Yale graduate, “mounted the most powerful and influential defense of his day for slavery.”

UC Berkeley did not agree to change the name of Barrows Hall to honor the Black Panther Party revolutionary Assata Shakur, as the Black Student Union demanded last year. But last week the school revealed senior campus officials were conducting a “comprehensive assessment of all of the building names” on campus.

Stanford is about to undertake a similar review. The president and provost have announced a new committee led by history Professor Emeritus David Kennedy to set principles for campus names.

“Not all of those names are names of people that have unblemished histories,” Provost John Etchemendy told the Faculty Senate this month. “So we want to be able to apply the principles, not just to the Serra name but to other names to determine whether or not they should be changed.”

Not everyone agrees with the rush to rename. Some critics argue that the offending figures - living in the norms of decades or centuries past - are unfairly being held up to modern standards.

Serra wasn’t perfect, but “it seems incredibly harsh to judge him by these exact moral standards that we hold today,” said Stanford student Harry Elliott, who is Catholic.

Renaming buildings won’t fix the problems facing minority students on college campuses, but it is a powerful step nonetheless, said Anthony Williams, a UC Berkeley sociology major from Vacaville.

“How do we make spaces inclusive in a university system that was never meant to include us?” he asked.

Williams, who is African-American, and fellow student Bradley Afroilan, who is Filipino-American, created an art installation outside of Barrows Hall to bring attention to the debate - and to David Prescott Barrows, an anthropologist whose book about the Philippines, published in 1905, referred to its people as “little savages.”

His name, as students point out, is on a hall housing the university’s ethnic studies department.

“We have this building named after this person who depicts us as below-human,” Afroilan said. “Here at Berkeley, we’re still trying to find a way to make this the public university it’s supposed to be.”

Even if Berkeley agrees to take Barrows’ name off the hall, it is unlikely to rename the building after Shakur, a former Black Panther who was convicted of killing a New Jersey state trooper before escaping prison and fleeing to Cuba. Williams said he would welcome the name of black scholars from Berkeley, among others.
At UA, the administration removed the portrait of John Tyler Morgan from display in the building bearing his name in December. The portrait was replaced by an exhibit from UA’s Paul R. Jones Collection of American Art.

Morgan was a Confederate general who later became a U.S. senator and a leader of the Ku Klux Klan. He also was instrumental in the rebuilding of the University of Alabama, which saw most of its buildings burned by Union forces in the waning days of the Civil War.

After Alabama novelist Harper Lee died last month, UA students started an online petition to rename Morgan Hall after her.

The renaming campaigns are playing out within larger, decadeslong efforts led by minority students and faculty to make college campuses more diverse and welcoming - and to infuse new perspectives into a traditionally white, Eurocentric curriculum.

But it’s not only colleges that are grappling with tainted legacies. Last year, a 13-year-old at Jordan Middle School in Palo Alto started a petition to change his school’s name after writing a book report on the school’s namesake, Stanford founding President David Starr Jordan, and discovering his belief in eugenics.

The Palo Alto Unified school board voted last month to form a committee to review the names of all the district’s schools.

Still, some say that campuses shouldn’t try to scrub away their oppressive pasts by erasing names or moving offensive busts - including those of some of our nation’s founding fathers - out of view.

“If I were a college administrator,” Brophy said, “the first thing I’d do is take down all of the names of the slave owners: ‘Hey, we solved that problem. We’ve checked that box. We’ve gotten rid of racism on campus. Next up, the fraternity problem.’”

The challenge for colleges is to find “the most appropriate way to acknowledge and come to terms with the sins of the past,” said Beverly Tatum, who for 13 years served as president at Spelman College, the historically black liberal arts school for women in Atlanta.

“The foundation of our nation was built on the oppression of indigenous people and the enslavement of Africans,” Tatum said. “That is painful history for all of us.”

The staff of The Tuscaloosa News contributed to this report.
There's More Than Protests to Blame for Mizzou's Enrollment Woes

By: Eric Kelderman

The University of Missouri at Columbia is feeling the aftershocks of last fall's protests in its enrollment figures.

Projected enrollment for this fall is down by about 900 students, about 15 percent fewer than last year's figures, said Barbara Rupp, the university's interim vice provost for enrollment management. Count transfers and graduate students, and the enrollment decline grows to about 1,500, she said. Ms. Rupp said it's too soon to tell how the racial and income characteristics of the fall class will differ.

The student shortfall has set off alarm bells on the campus, where the interim chancellor has warned of steep budget cuts because of the loss of tuition dollars. Ms. Rupp said there was no doubt that the fall protests and the resulting negative news-media coverage had contributed to the decline. "It's a pretty conservative state, so there are some people who are not at all happy about what happened here," she said.

For nonresidents, the barrage of media coverage created the image of a campus "literally falling apart," Ms. Rupp said. But the question is how much those events drove away potential students.

The university was already expecting fewer students for the 2016-17 academic year, Ms. Rupp said. And the number of first-time, full-time freshmen last fall was 300 fewer than the previous fall, she explained.

One reason is that Missouri, like a lot of Midwestern states, is experiencing a decline in high-school graduates. Since 2010 the number of in-state students who enroll as freshmen at Mizzou has dropped by more than 14 percent, from 4,369 to 3,747, according to figures from the university system.

To make up for that trend, the university has been aggressively recruiting in several metropolitan areas, setting up year-round operations in places like Chicago, Dallas, Denver, and Minneapolis, Ms. Rupp said. Those efforts paid off initially. Mizzou saw a 42-percent increase in nonresident freshman enrollment from 2010 to 2015 — rising from 1,720 to 2,447, the system's figures show.

Students from out of state not only lifted enrollment, Ms. Rupp said. They also helped to increase the university's racial diversity. Since 2010 there has been a 23-percent increase in black students at the university, and a nearly 54-percent increase in Hispanic students, according to a Chronicle analysis of figures from the system.

But competition from other universities has grown, especially since the university joined the Southeastern Conference in athletics, Ms. Rupp said.
There is still time to reduce the enrollment shortfall, and Mizzou officials are using several tactics to assure prospective students and their parents that the university is both safe and welcoming. Some faculty members and students have been attending events for admitted students in the big cities where Mizzou recruits, Ms. Rupp said, and faculty members are also writing personal emails to admitted students, encouraging them to enroll.

One bright spot for the university, Ms. Rupp said, is an increase in the number of "high ability" students — those with ACT scores of 33 or above.

"As much as possible, we're urging people to come and visit the campus," she said. "I don't know how much we can move the mark, but every little bit helps."

Correction (3/18/2016, 5:12 p.m.): This article originally misstated the proportion by which the university expects its fall enrollment to decline. It is about 15 percent, not nearly a quarter. The article has been updated to reflect this correction.

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