



ADVISOR



TEACHERS, EMPLOYEES, PUBLIC, STATE POLICE AND JUDICIAL

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SERVING OVER 295,000 MEMBERS

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“Congratulations” Governor Riley and South Alabama

Editorial

The announcement that EADS North America is coming to Mobile is great news for Alabama and especially the counties surrounding Mobile. Large airplanes are assembled in just two places in the world; Seattle (Boeing) and Toulouse, France (Airbus). Mobile could become the third name on a very short list.

In 2006, EADS will open an engineering center employing 150 engineers at the Brookley Industrial Complex, located at the Mobile Downtown Airport. A future assembly plant with over 1,000 employees is contingent on EADS winning a share of the contract to build aerial refueling tankers for the U.S. Air Force.

This announcement may be as important to South Alabama as the arrival of Dr. Werner Von Braun in Huntsville after World War II, and the arrival a decade ago of Mercedes to Tuscaloosa.

Special recognition goes to Governor Bob Riley; Neal Wade, Director of the Alabama Developmental Office; and their staffs. Our entire congressional delegation led by U.S. Senators Richard Shelby and Jeff Sessions made the difference in attracting this superb company to Alabama. Alabama also had unanimous support from our Democratic and Republican Congressmen, which is key to this project’s success in the future. Thank you U.S. Representative Jo Bonner and the entire leadership of Mobile for making this exciting company a part of Alabama. ■

Politics 101

By David G. Bronner

Politicians across America are using pension funds and health care programs for public employees as “cannon fodder.” Currently, at least eight states are considering proposals to either deny or walk away from commitments made to their public employees over the past six decades. Most RSA members rely heavily on the pension and health care benefits the RSA has fought to attain over the last three decades. If members expect to keep those benefits, they must become politically active or perish in the upcoming elections.

Like most states, Alabama will continue to have more needs than available funds. Unfortunately, Alabama will do worse than most states because for decades the state has grossly underfunded basic state services like education, state police, prisons and other programs. For example, last year Alabama was the only state that did not reduce Medicaid funding simply because Alabama was the only state already at the minimum funding level set by the federal government in order to receive the nearly 80% funding of the program.

I really do not care whether our members are Republicans, Democrats, or Independents like me. However, I do care very much if they elect someone who hates the RSA and wants to drastically hurt the pension fund and/or health care program. Members, if you want the RSA staff to protect and defend the programs within reason, you must send to Montgomery elected leaders who are committed to the preservation of the RSA. Do not vote for those who want to destroy your benefits as has happened in the steel and automotive industries. However, RSA members must act in a reasonable manner regarding their benefit levels if the RSA is to retain the support of the people of Alabama. ■

Auburn-Opelika is No. 1 BEST IN AMERICA



In 2002, *Golf Digest* rated the best American cities for golf, and Alabama was nowhere to be found. That has now changed. The 2005 survey by *Golf Digest* ranks Auburn-Opelika No. 1, with Anniston-Gadsden No. 9. Both are in the Top 10!

Golf Digest states, “...The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail’s stunning 54 holes of 4-½ star golf at Grand National, a site that lives up to Jones’ description as the ‘best he’d ever seen.’”

For the third time since 1998, *Golf Digest* has ranked 330 areas in cooperation with The Longitudes Group on four

criteria:

- Access to golf (45%) Weather (25%)
- Value of Golf (15%) Quality of Golf (15%)

The survey finds that the best places to live and golf are increasingly shifting to small towns in the South (11 of the top 20), while the Northeast remains a golfer’s wasteland. ■

Overcoming Poverty

By Wayne Flynt

“Imagine 50 smart-looking sailing crafts jockeying for position at the starting line of a high-stakes regatta....Then something terrible happens. Most of the 49 boats spring away, leaving you in their wake. Suddenly you realize that you forgot to weigh anchor....

This is the meaning of the parable: the 21st century will be a fierce, competitive race with huge consequences, good and bad, for winners and losers. Alabama doesn't enter the race on equal terms. Historic decisions about race, education and tax policy (many of them not very wise) put the state at a significant disadvantage.

Of the states many liabilities, none is more significant than its long heritage of poverty. Varying from 14 to more than 20 percent, Alabama's poverty rate continues to be among the nation's highest. Affecting nearly equal numbers of blacks and whites, urban dwellers and rural people, the one aberration in statistics seems to be age. Alabama's poorest residents are its youngest and oldest.

What does it say about moral values of a society when its poorest, least powerful, most neglected people are its children and senior citizens?

...Nearly one-third of the state's 67 counties regularly show population declines in the decennial census. These

counties stretch from the mainly white Appalachian hill counties through the Black Belt into southwestern Alabama. These concentrations constitute the anchor holding Alabama behind sister states.

Of course, not every town or county experiences poverty in the same way. Towns and counties with well-funded public schools in which citizens take pride, with well-educated populations, with highly skilled, well-paying jobs prosper and grow while poorly educated populations with low incomes stagnate.

For instance, in 2004 Shelby County's rate of poverty—6.5 percent—ranked that county by far the lowest in Alabama, the only county in fact with single digit rates of poverty. By contrast the wealthiest antebellum Alabama counties, located in the Black Belt, were the poorest at the beginning of the 21st century....

Race, of course is as important to Alabama poverty as region. Black Belt counties are not only the poorest in the state, they are also the most heavily African American. Blacks constitute some 26 percent of the state's population, but own less than 7 percent of the state's businesses.

Auburn University Montgomery's Center for Demographic Research reports that the median income of black

households in the state trails that of white households by a staggering \$17,000 annually. Thirty percent of blacks live in poverty compared to 10 percent of whites, and the black infant mortality rate is twice that of whites.

Because whites outnumber blacks nearly three to one, the total number of poor whites in the state is about equal to that of poor blacks. But with the black population predicted to increase to a third of the total within the next two decades, the rate of poverty may soar as well.

Whether viewed from the perspective of Judeo-Christian ethics, Biblical imperatives (note the admonition contained especially in Matthew 25:31-46), or pragmatic concern for the skill of the state's labor force and the viability of its economy, poverty in Alabama must be understood, the sources of that poverty addressed, and progress made to curtail, reduce, and finally eliminate poverty.

This is the primary task of the Alabama Poverty Project, which seeks to bring together people of faith to end poverty. The state simply will not be able to compete if apathy and neglect continue to characterize the response of most affluent citizens toward the poorest....” ■

Wayne Flynt is Distinguished University Professor of History at Auburn University.

PEEHIP Open Enrollment Time is NOW!

Recently, the PEEHIP office mailed 150,000 open enrollment/member handbooks to each PEEHIP eligible active and retired member's home address. This handbook contains information and forms for members to make changes to their insurance coverage or to enroll in any of the PEEHIP plans. **Please remember that all completed open enrollment forms and written requests must be received by the PEEHIP office prior to September 1, 2005.** In addition, members will have the ability to make open enrollment changes by using the NEW enrollment online process available from September 1 until September 10, 2005.

However, if you know the open enrollment changes you want to make, PEEHIP strongly recommends that you complete the enrollment forms prior to September 1 for early processing.

If you do not have changes in your health insurance coverage, you will automatically remain enrolled in the same or existing insurance plan(s) and the appropriate monthly premium will continue to be deducted from your check. **Please do not complete the PEEHIP enrollment application if you do not have changes in your health insurance coverage.** In addition, if you have completed and returned the Tobacco Usage Certification form that was sent to your home address in April or

May, **do not** complete the Tobacco Certification form in the back of the handbook unless you have had a subsequent change in your tobacco use status.

If you have not received your open enrollment/member handbook, your address may be incorrect in our records. You can update your address by sending an address update to our office or by downloading an address change form from our website at www.rsa.state.al.us. Click the Publications and Forms link and complete the Address Change Notification form and mail it to our office. In addition, you can download a copy of the open enrollment/member handbook from our website. ■

Travel & Leisure Rates the RTJ

Brian McCallen of *Travel and Leisure* magazine had this to say about the RTJ, "It's a simple idea, really. String together a selection of worthy courses in a given state or region, package it with lodging entities, brand it as a golf trail and offer complete vacations at incredible prices. The idea was legitimized by Alabama's Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, which was established in 1994, and has inspired dozens of others from Utah to Canada."



The magazine studied the top five trails in North America: Bear Trace Trail (Tennessee); Brainerd Trail (Minnesota); Muskoka Trail (Canada); Red Rock Trail (Utah); and the RTJ Trail (Alabama).

Alabama was called, "...The mother of all golf trails...and the 'Best Overall' for quality and quantity, nothing can top the RTJ. Great golf in gorgeous and surprisingly hilly settings."



WANT TO HELP?

A FREE Car Tag

Tired of that worn-out dealer tag on the front of your car? Would you like to help the RSA and our Alabama Tourist Department advertise "Alabama's Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail" on your front bumper? If so, call Tisha or Deborah to request a tag at (334) 242-5718, or 800-214-2158 menu 2, ext. 503, or write:

Tag
P.O. Box 302150
Montgomery, AL 36130-2150

Editorial: *The Birmingham News*

Conditions at Alabama prisons are ripe for another, potentially costly federal lawsuit, the governor's task force on prison overcrowding was told last week. Prisons are overcrowded, dilapidated and understaffed, says the legal director of a group that has sued the prison system in the past and won.

But a lawsuit is not what should worry task force members the most. What's more worrisome is that there is no easy or cheap answer to even begin fixing the very serious problems that ail prisons. As daunting as the task is, those problems must be fixed.

Alabama's prisons hold twice the number of inmates—27,732—they were built to house. We're guarding them with about half the number of corrections officers we need. The prisons themselves are badly in need of repairs. And there is no money in the state budget to fix those problems (including the cost of defending the prison system from more lawsuits).

What is a poor state to do? Alabama already has tried all the quick fixes—squeezing in as many inmates as possible in already overcrowded prisons; leaving prisoners in county jails for long months; speeding up paroles of nonviolent convicts; sending inmates to private, out-of-state prisons, etc. At this point, there are

really only two options left: making changes to reduce the prison population or launching a massive prison-building program.

Neither option is cheap. But in a state that can't even afford to hire adequate state troopers to patrol our highways, several new prisons are a dream.

Earlier this year, state prison Commissioner Donal Campbell asked that the prison system's annual budget be more than doubled to \$580 million, with most of the increase going to build two new prisons.

Even if there were money for new prisons, two more prisons wouldn't solve today's crowding problem, let alone deal with the rapid growth in the prison population. Just over the past year, for example, the number of prisoners has risen by about 1,300 inmates—enough to fill one prison.

If we can't afford to build our way out of this prison mess, we'd better put more effort into keeping people out of prison, such as drug treatment, alternative sentencing and community corrections programs that force some offenders who don't pose safety threats to pay for their crimes without putting an even bigger burden on crowded prisons.

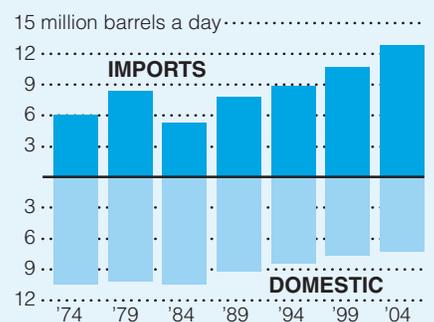
A whole package of sentencing

reform bills that would help make sentences more uniform and fair has been given to the Legislature. Unfortunately, the bills died in this year's legislative session after the Senate got bogged down in a filibuster.

Next year, lawmakers must make passing those bills and funding alternatives to prison a top priority—or say how they're going to find \$300 million for new prisons." ■

Growing Dependence

Sources of United States oil consumption



Source: Energy Information Administration

The New York Times

Candidates Sought for Three TRS Board Positions

Candidates are now being sought for three TRS Board of Control positions. The three positions, Teacher Position No. 3, Support Personnel Position No. 2, and Principal Position, will be filled in a statewide election that will take place this October. Elected members will begin their three-year term of service on July 1, 2006.

Teacher Position No. 3: To be eligible, a candidate who petitions to run for the Teacher Position must be an active member of the TRS and currently a teacher with a city or county school system.

Support Personnel Position No. 2: To be eligible, a candidate who petitions to run for the Support Personnel Position must be an active member of the TRS and currently a support personnel employee with a city or county school system.

Principal Position: To be eligible, a candidate who petitions to run for the Principal Position must be an active member of the TRS and currently a principal with a city or county school system.

Application Process: If you are eligible and interested in running for the Teacher Position No. 3, Support Personnel Position No. 2, or Principal Position, nomination packets are available on our website at www.rsa.state.al.us or you may contact the Elections Coordinator at 1-800-214-2158 extension 573.

In order to qualify as a candidate for the Board, nomination petitions must have at least 50 valid signatures of active members of the TRS. The completed petition must be returned to the TRS office no later than 4:00 pm, September 6, 2005. Member signatures on the nomination petitions will be verified before the candidate's name is placed on a ballot. ■



**The
ADVISOR**

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RSA-1

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The Retirement Systems of Alabama

135 South Union Street

P.O. Box 302150

Montgomery, Alabama 36130-2150

Phone: 334/832-4140

1-800-214-2158

RSA Web site:

<http://www.rsa.state.al.us>

**LOUIS
VUITTON
MURAKAMI
HANDBAG**

PROBLEM

Cheaper
leather, rivets,
and fasteners;
no lining

RESULT:

Wears out
faster



REAL: \$1,200



FAKE: \$70

PRSR1 STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MONTGOMERY, AL
PERMIT NO. 402

RETIREMENT SYSTEMS OF ALABAMA
135 SOUTH UNION
P.O. BOX 302150
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Travel & Leisure Magazine Calls Alabama's RTJ Golf Trail "Best Overall."