SPECIAL SECTION:

UAB FOOTBALL 2015

(CONTINUED)
UAB, Watts announce action plan to improve communication

By: Clare Huddleston

After a brief interview with Fox6 Wednesday morning, UAB President Ray Watts released a statement announcing an action plan for improving dialogue among administration, faculty, students, alumni and the community.

Additional Links

Dr. Watts speaks at SOM town hall meeting at UAB

Vestavia lawmaker introducing bills to save UAB football

“I regret how we handled the Athletic Department announcement,” Watts said in the statement, “I want to make sure there is a real mechanism for sharing and addressing questions and concerns and, more importantly, gaining insights into the best way to move UAB forward.”

Watts says he has created four tasks forces which will be led by faculty and administrative leaders.

· Vice President of Human Resources Alesia Jones will work closely with the faculty senate and lead a task force studying employee benefits.

· Interim Athletic Director Shannon Ealy will chair a task force made up of students, alumni, athletes and others focused on how to best engage and build support for programs so they can compete for championships.

· Provost Linda Lucas will lead the task force on improving shared governance across the campus.

· Assistant Vice President of Student Life Andy Marsch will chair a task force of student leaders addressing how to engage students in decisions affecting campus life, facilities, programs, housing and other areas.

The statement adds Clay Ryan of Maynard, Cooper & Gale will work with the university on educational and governance issues, as well as strategic planning initiatives, to advance important dialogues beyond UAB’s campus.

The university also has enlisted Birmingham’s Direct Communications to help communicate and support the important dialogue that will lead the strategic direction of the campus.

UAB Forward, a public website launched Wednesday as part of Watts' action plan, will provide the platform for updates, enabling readers to provide input and learn about the great things UAB faculty, staff, students, alumni and partners are doing every day.

“We have important work ahead of us to continue to move UAB forward,” Watts said in the statement, “This experience has created an opportunity for us to learn to work more effectively together and continue to change UAB for the better.”
UAB unveils plan for improved communication in wake of football decision
By: Allan Alexander

University of Alabama at Birmingham President Ray Watts has admitted mistakes were made in the process of announcing the end of the school's football program, and now UAB has unveiled its plan to improve communication moving forward.

Specifically, the new action plan aims to improve communication among administration, faculty, students, alumni and the community about the university's next steps in its strategic planning process. It was that process that led to the end of the football program and has sparked other concerns among faculty members.

"I regret how we handled the athletic department announcement. I want to make sure there is a real mechanism for sharing and addressing questions and concerns and, more importantly, gaining insights into the best way to move UAB forward," Watts said.

The plan includes the formation of four task forces headed by UAB faculty members:

- Vice President of Human Resources Alesia Jones will work closely with the faculty senate and lead a task force studying employee benefits.

- Interim Athletic Director Shannon Ealy will chair a task force made up of students, alumni, athletes and others focused on how to best engage and build support for programs so they can compete for championships.

- Provost Linda Lucas will lead a task force on improving shared governance across the campus.

- Assistant Vice President of Student Life Andy Marsch will chair a task force of student leaders addressing how to engage students in decisions affecting campus life, facilities, programs, housing and other areas.

UAB will also bring on public relations firm Direct Communications to assist with university communications and Clay Ryan of Birmingham-based law firm Maynard Cooper & Gale to work with the university on educational and governance issues. The school also launched a new website, UAB Forward, to provide a platform for updates and enable readers to provide input.

Faculty members have been critical of the communication of the football decision and other issues – concerns that led the school's faculty senate to schedule a vote on a resolution of no-confidence for Watts. That vote is scheduled for Jan. 13.

President Watts was scheduled to meet with the Birmingham Business Journal and other media outlets on Monday but suffered from an illness and had to cancel those interviews. The school has said it will reschedule those interviews in the days to come.
UAB President Ray Watts hires lawyer, PR firm as dialogue around school's future continues

By: Kelsey Stein

UAB President Ray Watts regrets how the public learned that several athletic programs would be eliminated, and he outlined a plan to improve future dialogue for the university.

School officials recently hired a communications firm and an attorney to create a plan to foster more open discussions of future decisions affecting the campus.

"I regret how we handled the Athletic Department announcement," Watts said in a prepared statement Wednesday afternoon. "I want to make sure there is a real mechanism for sharing and addressing questions and concerns and, more importantly, gaining insights into the best way to move UAB forward."

After the Dec. 2 announcement, Watts held several meetings with students, faculty and alumni to hear their concerns and answer questions, according to a news release.

Just Wednesday morning, he held a town hall meeting with School of Medicine faculty and students to "have a dialogue," one of a series of meetings set up with colleges across campus.

The cuts to the athletic department were part of a strategic planning process that will address changes and goals for each of UAB's schools and programs.

According to the news release, the action plan "encourages input and opens up new formats for dialogue," including the formation of four task forces led by faculty and administrative leaders to study issues shared with Watts in recent discussions.

These task forces will be created on campus:

- Vice President of Human Resources Alesia Jones will work closely with the Faculty Senate and lead a task force studying employee benefits.

- Interim Athletic Director Shannon Ealy will lead a task force made up of students, alumni, athletes and others focused on how to best engage and build support for programs so they can compete for championships.

- Provost Linda Lucas will lead the task force on improving shared governance across the campus.

- Assistant Vice President of Student Life Andy Marsch will lead a task force of student leaders addressing how to engage students in decisions affecting campus life, facilities, programs, housing and other areas.

Other task forces will be formed to guide candidate searches and hiring for several vacancies, including the next athletic director.

On Dec. 8, university officials finalized a contract with consultants at Direct Communications.
Under the agreement, the company will assess current internal and external communications, help UAB staff create and edit communications materials, help UAB Media Relations with media outreach and monitoring, and help to identify and organize task forces and committees to improve overall communication.

The agreement will continue on a month-to-month basis, and consultants will be paid hourly. Senior executives from Direct Communications will be paid $275 per hour; senior account Managers will be paid $175 per hour; and account managers will be paid $85 per hour.

On Dec. 29, university officials hired attorney Clay Ryan, of Maynard Cooper & Gale.

Ryan will work on educational and governance issues, including strategic planning initiatives and working with community and government leaders. He will be paid $295 an hour.

In a request submitted to UAB this week, AL.com also sought information about the cost of heightened security for Watts. After a Dec. 2 meeting with football players and staff, a group of supporters, frustrated with silence from school officials, punched Watts’ car as he drove away and yelled obscenities.

UAB Police Chief Anthony Purcell released this statement: "Security is UAB's highest priority, and we do not divulge information about our security practices and procedures, or related details, that we believe may be directly or indirectly used to compromise those practices or the safety of any of our nearly 19,000 students, more than 23,000 faculty and staff, and countless patients and guests."

Updates will be provided on UAB Forward, a public website launched today, where visitors can offer input and learn about new developments with faculty, staff, students, alumni and partners, according to the news release.

"We have important work ahead of us to continue to move UAB forward," Watts said. "This experience has created an opportunity for us to learn to work more effectively together and continue to change UAB for the better."
University Fields PR Help in Athletics Crisis

By: Greg Hazley

The University of Alabama-Birmingham has brought in outside PR counsel as it copes with fallout from its controversial decision to shutter its football program and fire athletic director Brian Mackin.

The university, engaged in a strategic planning study, brought in outside consultants and in early December said it would scuttle its Blazers football, bowling and rifle programs after the 2014-15 seasons to save tens of millions of dollars. The decision, which leaked before an announcement, was met with disappointment and rancor among supporters of the team, students and other stakeholders.

As a result, the school engaged Birmingham-based Direct Communications, the well-connected but low profile firm led by veteran corporate and political PR consultants Rick Heartsill and Steve Raby. The university said DC will help communicate and support the "important dialogue that will lead the strategic direction of the campus."

University president Ray Watts expressed "regret" this week about how the announcement was handled and outlined several moves, including the hiring of DC, to address concerns.

That includes the launch of a new public website, UAB Forward, along with the formation of task forces to study several "priority issues that have been shared with [University president Ray] Watts in recent discussions."

*Sports Illustrated* reported in November that ending the football program was on the board's radar, claiming supporters of the program believed the university's board of trustees wanted to scuttle the football program over a feud with its former athletic director and to avoid competition with the more prominent Univ. of Alabama Crimson Tide football team.
Public Service Commission, UAB president need lesson in transparency

In following recent local news, I am struck by the similar circumstances between the demise of UAB’s football program and the way in which Alabama Power’s electricity rates are determined. Starting next month, customers will pay 5 percent more for electricity, courtesy of our Public Service Commission’s rate-setting “system.” Around the same time, the UAB Faculty Senate will be taking a no-confidence vote in university President Ray Watts.

In both instances, decisions that affect a great many Alabamians were made with zero public or customer input. Alabama Power is a monopoly. With no competition to put downward pressure on prices, what faith can customers have that we are not getting fleeced? In most states, there is a formal and public process overseen by government officials designed to protect the interests of you, the customer. Not in Alabama.

For decades now, the decisions about how much you pay for electricity and where that energy comes from have been made behind closed doors. Your representatives in these decisions are the three Public Service commissioners: President Twinkle Cavanaugh, Jeremy Oden and Chip Beeker.

As reported by AL.com political reporter Mike Cason, Cavanaugh analogized a Dec.

The game is rigged. The plays have been called. The “score is already in the books.” We, the stakeholders, are not even a part of the game. We’re bystanders relegated to merely observing the inconsequential song-and-dance routine after the fact. It’s all for show.

9 PSC meeting on Alabama Power’s rates and environmental compliance to “a press conference after a football game. The coaches can answer questions, but the score is already in the books.”

Underscoring that point, Michael Churchman, executive director of the Alabama Environmental Council, said, “Once a year the public gets to ask questions, and yet is derided for asking those questions, given very little time.”

John Garner, the chief administrative law judge who presides over PSC meetings, repeatedly made clear on Dec. 9 that questions about the lack of transparency in how rates are set were “outside the scope of the meeting.” Questions about clean, renewable energy sources like wind and solar were quickly quashed.

Back to Twinkie’s football analogy, did you catch what she said? The game is rigged. The plays have been called. The “score is already in the books.” We, the stakeholders, are not even a part of the game. We’re bystanders relegated to merely observing the inconsequential song-and-dance routine after the fact. It’s all for show.

It’s time to throw a penalty flag. As columnist Kyle Whitmire wrote about the UAB debacle, “football shouldn’t define a university, this fight is about who gets to define UAB — the real stakeholders there, including faculty, students and alumni, or a bunch of absentee landlords 60 miles away.”
In the same way, those of us who have no choice but to buy electricity from Alabama Power have no say about what we pay for electricity, where it comes from and how — those decisions are made by politicians who are legally corrupted by campaign donations. These decisions affect our pocketbooks and our quality of life. Transparency will help clear the air.

Stacie Propst, Ph.D., is an experienced health advocate, public policy expert, scientist and educator. She is the executive director of GASP, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to activate Alabama for clean air. stacie@gaspgroup.org

The room is packed during a public meeting on Alabama Power rates in front of the Public Service Commission in Montgomery recently. (AP file)
Recordings give insight into UAB's hiring of Clark, program's future

By: Alan Alexander

Audio recordings from a meeting of the search committee that ultimately hired Bill Clark as the football coach at the University of Alabama at Birmingham shed some light on the hiring process that occurred less than a year before the program was shut down.

According to the audio obtained by AL.com from former UAB player Izell Reese, former UAB Athletics Director Brian Mackin said in a January 2014 meeting he was only given the green light to offer candidates a three-year contract – which is shorter than the traditional four- or five-year deals.

The recording suggests that members of the committee would have preferred a longer contract and wanted to ask President Ray Watts – and possibly University of Alabama System Chancellor Robert Witt – about the potential for a longer deal.

It also suggests the search committee intended to get a blessing from at least two members of the UA System Board of Trustees, Paul Bryant Jr. and Finis St. John, for the hire.

Ultimately, Clark did get a three-year deal, which will be honored by the school.

The committee was comprised of Mackin, Reese, Senior Associate Athletics Director Shannon Ealy and CEO Bill Carr of CarrSports Consulting, the firm that did the strategic study of the UAB athletics department that led school officials to confirm football wasn't sustainable.

Members of the committee had a sense of urgency about the hire, but also seemed confident in the future of the program with Clark at the helm.
Private recordings reveal UAB football search committee felt new coach had to 'save' the program

By: Kevin Scarbinsky

In January of 2014, when UAB put together a search committee to find a new football coach, its members understood how important their choice could be.

Former coach Garrick McGee had just left after a dispiriting 5-19 record over two years to rejoin Bobby Petrino at Louisville as his offensive coordinator. The Blazers hadn't been bowl-eligible since 2004, and their attendance had dropped to a meager 10,548 a game, the lowest average in the school's Football Bowl Subdivision history.

The search committee members -- Athletics Director Brian Mackin, Senior Associate AD Shannon Ealy, Bill Carr of CarrSports Consulting and former UAB player Izell Reese -- knew the next coach had to turn things around in a hurry for the sake of the program's future. "We knew how important it was to find the right guy, not just to win but to save UAB football," Reese tells AL.com.

What they didn't know, Reese says, is that the program would face possible extinction within a year, no matter how successful the new coach might be.

Which is, we know now, exactly what happened.

On Dec. 2, UAB President Ray Watts announced the school was discontinuing its football program. New coach Bill Clark had won more games (6) than McGee had in two years to make the Blazers bowl-eligible for the first time in a decade, average home attendance had more than doubled from the previous year to 21,841 and numerous boosters had pledged to support the program going forward.

And still UAB football shut down.

Reese was particularly stunned. "In representing UAB football as a proud alum, loving that program from the bottom of my heart, I feel like I went into something not knowing the whole story," Reese said.

That feeling prompted Reese to share audio of some of the search committee's work with AL.com. As part of his standard business practice, Reese said, he recorded the committee's interviews and meetings. He shared the recording of the committee's final meeting, at which members decided to recommend Clark as the best man for the job.
"I think it's important for this to be shared," Reese said. "Everything coming out (of the university) is not truthful. UAB alums, students and the Birmingham community, everyone has the right to know."

Reached by AL.com Sunday, Mackin declined to comment.

Reese provided the search committee's agenda, which included interviews with six candidates. On Jan. 16 in Atlanta, the committee interviewed Bethune-Cookman head coach Brian Jenkins, who recently took over at Alabama State, and Cincinnati offensive coordinator Eddie Gran.

On Jan. 17 in Atlanta, the committee interviewed Clark, then the Jacksonville State head coach; former Wake Forest head coach Jim Grobe; and Atlanta Falcons assistant Chris Scelfo. On Jan. 18 in Mobile, the committee interviewed South Alabama head coach Joey Jones.

After that final interview, the committee focused its deliberations on two candidates, Clark and Jones. Discussions heard on the recording of that meeting reveal three key realities, particularly in light of the eventual decision to shut down the football program: 1) Mackin felt it necessary to run the committee's choice by University of Alabama System Chancellor Robert Witt and two key trustees, Paul Bryant Jr. and Finis "Fess" St. John, indicating at least some involvement by UA; 2) sometime between the committee's formation and its final meeting, the members learned they could not offer their chosen candidate a typical contract of four or five years, but only three, hinting that UAB did not want to be obligated for the long term; and 3) the committee felt it would be up to Clark to save the program.

Highlights of that final meeting include revealing discussions about the qualifications that ultimately tipped the committee towards Clark.

**The search committee debates Bill Clark and Joey Jones, and Brian Mackin comments on Paul Bryant Jr.**

**Shannon Ealy:** I feel like Bill would come with passion and enthusiasm, excitement. ... I think he brings an edge to him. ...

**Bill Carr:** ... But I honestly think he has enough values, and I get the sense that there are people that surround him that that sense of family is going to keep him in tow. I don't know if you can work with him or not, but I think you can. I feel that way, you know? That's not a critical comment. I'm simply saying, I thought Garrick McGee would work but it didn't and I regret that. (Carr also was a consultant on the UAB search that hired McGee.) But I feel that Bill would be not only the more likely choice to accept but the better choice. ...

**Brian Mackin:** I would be kinda going against my gut if I were to go to Joey (Jones), which was my lead guy coming in for all the right reasons. I felt like he could come in, but I was thinking five years, he could build the community up, help us facility-wise. ...

See next page
Ealy: I say, Brian, I think the two things that ... the positive is just (Jones') connections to the community, fund-raising potential, that kind of stuff, and then the dynamic with the (UA) board (of trustees), in other words, his relationship. What do you think? Would that work?

Mackin: Well, I knew (Jones) was very close to Paul Bryant. So Paul Jr. is probably a fan of his. But Paul Jr. does nothing for me. We've just got to tolerate him. No coach is going to make him change his position on UAB football. But (Jones') community involvement. He's respected in the state. He's built programs from the ground up. We're not a ground-up program, but he could build it from where it is now. Been a high school coach. Been a college coach. Proved himself from that standpoint. He's a winner. Bill (Clark) doesn't have the college wins. One year as a (college) head coach. He does bring all the energy and passion to the table. ...

I trust (former UAB player and Green Bay Packers assistant strength and conditioning coach) Zac Woodfin. That's what I do. He loves (Clark). In fact, he's gonna leave the Green Bay Packers to come work for him. That's a testament. That's a big reference for me, personally. Zac's one of my favorites. ... (Woodfin did join Clark at UAB as strength and conditioning coach.)

The search committee decides that Bill Clark is its No. 1 choice for the job to present to the UAB president.

Mackin: Well, I would say that, if you narrowed it down from all of our candidates, Bill is the best ... not just because of (the fact he might be more willing to accept) the three-year potential contract. It's because we feel like he's a better fit. He brings more to the table from the profile standpoint. ...

After the committee decided Clark was its No. 1 choice, the members discussed how to approach him with an offer. They made it clear they could offer only a three-year deal, for reasons they never stated during that meeting.

The search committee discusses the money it can offer Clark and the unusually short length of the offer.

Reese says now the reason for the unusually short offer "wasn't thoroughly explained" to him at the time, although Mackin had made it clear that "we've got to get this (hire) right."

"I took it because of Garrick McGee's quick, abrupt departure, it wouldn't be wise to lock up someone with a five-year deal," Reese said.

In this excerpt, committee members discuss how best to close the deal with Clark.

Mackin: This is why my gut is churning because now we've got to kinda get this thing positioned. It would be easy just to say Bill's our man and go offer him a five-year deal. Can't do that right now.
Ealy: What do you feel like the strategy is, to go back to the president with a recommendation?

Mackin: We've got to go and say, "OK, Bill's come out of this thing as our No. 1 choice." I have to have (Watts') words of why a three-year contract. ... Because normally you would go, "He's our man. President, I recommend it's a five-year deal. We think we're gonna offer no more than this. OK? I'm gonna call Dr. Witt, the chancellor. I'll call Paul (Bryant Jr.) I'll call Fess (St. John). This is what we are thinking is going to happen. We're going to offer him the job. Are you OK with that?" They say, "Yes," then you call the candidate and offer the job. I'm a little different now where I'm going to get with Ray (Watts), get his schtick on the three-year deal. ...

Ealy: Three (years) is non-negotiable, right?

Mackin: We mentioned four yesterday and Ray just said, "I don't know if I can give you any more than three." ...(Clark) has been offered $300,000 by Jacksonville State in a two-year contract extension. So he's got five years at $300,000. We're going to have to be creative here and maybe that's the negotiating part when we get Bill in front of the president. My opinion would be to bring him in tomorrow night to the Woodward House, (home of the UAB president). When Dr. Watts gets in, it's 5, 5:30. At 7, (Clark) is at the Woodward House, and we're up there talking with our president. Bill, I guess I'm kinda thinking out loud now, I'll get him on speakerphone, Dr. Watts, and present Bill (Clark) and give the parameters of where we are -- about the $400,000 buyout, he's at ($300,000) now, I think we're going to have to be in the 4 range, 425, 450, if you're going to go three years, that's going to be the fluid thing. And I told (UAB VP for Finance) Richard (Margison) that last night. We're going to have to be in that area. ...

And you go ahead and get the check-off from the board. Dr. Watts is going to have to tell us that. It might be too late tonight. Do you go ahead and get Fess and Paul and Dr. Witt and say, "We found the guy. This is where our parameters are. Are we locked in at three years?" He's gotta ask Witt that. He's gotta ask our chancellor that tonight.

Carr: Because we think that the fourth year could be the winning edge of getting the guy that we really want. It could make the difference. It could make all the difference in the world. ...

Ealy: To the board, I don't know that the salary is an issue.

Mackin: The money's not.

Ealy: I think that's more of a UAB conversation. You're looking at 450, 475 after negotiations.

Carr: Well, the fewer years you can give him, the more you want to pay him. So if you only can give him three, you pay him 450 to make it real, you know, plus we're paying his buyout, and you try to do it in a way that's to his best advantage, whatever that is ...
Brian Mackin proposes a phone call to Ray Watts to share the choice and get his direction on how to proceed.

Mackin: Let's get (Watts) on the phone and see what direction he wants to go. What I don't know is how much he's going to be open to everybody talking openly about this (UA) board situation.

Carr: Well, he might want to just talk with you.

Mackin: Let me just talk to him and, "Here's the plan. Here's where we are. What do you want to do?"

Carr: We'll step out in the lobby and let you talk in the privacy of this room.

The other search committee members left the room as Mackin had a phone conversation with Margison and then left a voicemail message for Watts. Mackin described the message when the rest of the committee returned.

Mackin explains his phone call with Richard Margison and the voicemail message he just left for Watts.

Mackin: Richard and I talked pretty extensively, and then I left a very detailed message with Ray and expect him to probably get back with me at some point tonight. This is what I left with Ray. We've recommended Bill Clark as our candidate. We're going to need certain parameters, a not-to-exceed dollar amount based on what Bill Clark's now new deal is, 300 over five, so it's a million and a half. I think we're going to have to have, I would suggest 550 or below, and let us negotiate and I think we're going to be, I said 450-500,000 if we stay at the three (years). So I said, plus we need to look at incentives and jack the incentives up to where the candidate sees potentially even more money. He's going to need to take tonight, I suggested, to run this up the flagpole to Dr. Witt or Paul and take his time and get in touch with those people. He's probably not going to, but I'm not going to say anything or do anything tonight to (inaudible). Just let him do his deal. It might take tomorrow morning.

Carr: Yeah, the ball's in their court. Richard (Margison) and the president.

Mackin: So then, once he gets his phone calls out of the way and gives me the idea of, it's going to be three, this is what we're going to do, I need the verbiage from him on how I need to relay that on. I'll get that in my mind and I will call Bill. I will tell him here's the parameters, my president's coming in from New York, I need for you to not say yes or no right now, this is what I'm thinking, for that reason, and we need for you to be at the Woodward House at 7 or 7:30 tomorrow night, and I want to have the president get up, and I think we're just going to have to be transparent. ....

Carr: So he doesn't get the message about the three years until Sunday night.
Mackin: No, I will tell him, and I will give the verbiage, and I will say, "I don't want you to do anything right now, but I need for you to come see our president." That's it. Step by step.

Ealy: So will you go into the explanation as to why it's a three-year deal or not?

Mackin: I will give the president's verbiage. I will do what the president tells me. ... I feel like that's about as good a place as we can be right now. Don't you think, Bill?

Carr: I do, I do.

At that point, Mackin, Ealy and Carr decided to drive back to Birmingham that night. Reese stayed before driving back to his home in Atlanta the next day. Their parting comments demonstrated a combination of urgency and optimism and discussed the need for financial supporters to step forward quickly.

Mackin: I just thought, it's just like the Jimbo Fisher thing. (UAB wanted to hire Fisher as head coach after the 2006 season but the trustees refused to sign off on the $600,000 annual contract with half the amount paid by UAB boosters.) Here it is, I've got certain people on that board preventing me from doing something that ...

Reese: I tell you what, when that happens, no different from this situation, I was telling Shannon that earlier, from a support standpoint, for me, it's all hands on deck.

Mackin: We gotta have it.

Reese: Got to. It's immediate.

Committee members comment on just how critical this hire is for the future of UAB football and how much they believe in Clark.

Mackin: (Former UAB defensive end) Bryan Thomas already said, you know what you could do, he said, I want to be on a board of directors, a former player board of directors. Get BT. Get (former UAB receiver) Roddy (White). Get you. Get your people and say, If this is important to you, and Bryan Thomas and Roddy - you might want to give the lead gift - but we have to show that there's people that care about this program and we're going to step up because we're facing it right now. This is about as close to a shut down ...

Ealy: Three years from now, we'll be toasting in champagne glasses.

Mackin: If we can get Bill Clark, I like my chances.

Reese: I do, too.

Mackin: I like 'em.
Ealy: *Let's be positive. Let's knock down hurdles. Let's go git 'er done.*

Clark agreed to a three-year deal at $500,000 a year. He got the job done as no UAB coach had in a decade, and still it didn't save the program.

The search committee will never taste that champagne.
UAB President Ray Watts answers some questions about closed meetings

By: Parrish Alleman

For the first time since announcing that the school would be cutting its football, bowling and rifle programs, UAB President Dr. Ray Watts is finally answering some of our questions about the decision.

After a closed door meeting with the school of medicine Wednesday, Watts spoke to WIAT 42 news reporter Parrish Alleman. Watt’s said the main purpose for these closed door meetings is just to make sure everyone is on the same page and actually knows what’s going on.

We couldn’t get inside the meeting, but Watts did speak to us for the first time on camera since the news conference last month. He told us he wants to have some public meetings in the future, but, for now, is focusing on clearing up what he calls misinformation that has spread around campus since last month’s major cuts.

Watts said, “Our discussions with the schools and with the faculty have been very helpful, and they are finding this very useful, and we’re going to continue and make sure we have an ongoing open dialogue.”

At this meeting, he did talk about their decision to cut the football program as well as the two other teams.

“The actual financial issues in college sports now are really changing the landscape and the cost of maintaining various Division One programs, so I explained to them how we did it, how we went about it, what we decided, and we really had to weigh what was best in the short term and the long term,” said Watts.

School of Medicine staff member Norma Stewart said, “He explained to us, and it made sense to me. To me. That’s just my opinion.” Wanting to know why past decisions were made and what it means for the future of UAB, Stewart says she’s leaving feeling confident in the school and it’s leadership.

State Representative Jack Williams doesn’t agree with the way the cuts were made, so he’s filing three pieces of legislation that deal with UAB. One would reinstate the football program, another would allow the governor, as well as the mayors of the cities of Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, and Huntsville to appoint different board members for each UA campus.
Dr. Watts speaks at SOM town hall meeting at UAB

By: Clare Huddleston

UAB President Dr. Ray Watts held a town hall meeting Wednesday morning with the School of Medicine faculty and staff.

The town hall meeting was closed to the public and the media was kicked out right before it started. However, President Ray Watts did agree to answer a few questions when it was over.

"In short, what I shared with them was each unit within the university had a strategic plan," Dr. Watts said. "The actual financial issues in college sports now are really changing the landscape the cost of maintaining various Division I programs."

Dr. Watts stands by his decision to cut the football, rifle, and bowling teams, citing financial issues.

He took his message to the School of Medicine, saying he wanted to dialogue with a smaller group rather than a large meeting with all of the faculty at one time.

"We really felt like in the immediate short term that we need to get our internal UAB community on the same page because there's been a lot of misinformation, misconstruing of information, so I tried to do that but of course we're going to reach out to the public and we'll have more interviews and discussions very soon," Dr. Watts said.

One woman left the meeting satisfied with answers she heard.

"I came looking for a reason to leave with an appreciation of what his decisions are, what the University goals are. That's why I say I am leaving appreciating because he explained to us and it makes sense to me," Norma Stewart said.

But those not allowed inside the closed door meeting still have questions.

"We're kind of like the football and rifle and bowling and cheer and band, we're all out in the cold and that's the problem that exists, there's secrecy veiled over the UA System," State Representative Jack Williams said.

Williams is hoping this issue will spur change. But others, like Norma Stewart, are hoping to put this issue behind them and move forward.

"Like he said, we're going to move forward. What went on in the past is the past. All we can do is work forward and if there was anything anyone felt was wrong, at least we can work to move forward," Stewart said.

Williams is introducing three bills in the upcoming Alabama Legislature. They would expand the UA System Board of Trustees and require training for new members. Another one would bring back UAB football.

See next page
The UAB faculty senate will meet next Thursday to vote on two proposed resolutions. One would support UAB athletics. The other would be a vote of no confidence in President Ray Watts.
UAB President Ray Watts speaking at school town hall meetings

By: Sherrie Evans

UAB President Dr. Ray Watts addressed faculty of the School of Medicine during a closed town hall meeting.

It gave faculty an opportunity to ask questions and have an open dialogue about issues across campus.

President Watts has been meeting with faculty of different schools since last month to talk about strategic plans and accomplishments. But, the town hall meetings are also giving faculty an opportunity to address concerns.

Dr. Watts says he did explain the process behind cutting the football program saying the financial issues in college sports are really challenging. He explained it was a hard decision. Watts says the town hall meetings have been about getting the UAB community on the same page because of mis-information. He also wanted to give a perspective of where the school's strategic plan fits in the overall university's plan. Here's what he had to say about the football cuts as well as reaction from a faculty member about the meeting.

Watts says, "I explained to them the process of how we went about it, how we looked at it, how we did the analysis and we really had to weigh what was best, both in the short term and long term. But the overall goal and plan is to help our athletics programs be more successful, not less."

Faculty member, Norma Stewart, says "I came looking for a reason to leave with an appreciation of what his decisions are, what the university's goals are, so that's why I am leaving appreciated because he explained it to us, it made sense to me."

Norma Stewart is asking people to support UAB leadership. President Watts says the university is talking about possibly having an open forum for the public.
UAB President Ray Watts breaks silence, says he's not campaigning before no-confidence vote

By: Lauren Walsh

One week from today, UAB's Faculty Senate is expected to take a vote of no confidence in President Dr. Ray Watts.

Watts has sent out emails to faculty and to the student body saying the administration is working to improve communication. All of this follows his decision to do away with the school's football program.

Watts is expected to meet with the faculty of every school on campus to talk about the strategic plan moving forward. He met with the Medical College and the School of Optometry Wednesday.

Many wonder if he is campaigning, trying to ward off a no confidence vote. President Watts emphatically told ABC 33/40 "no."

He claims these meetings are to respond to the needs of the faculty.

Some members of the faculty senate aren't buying it. This week, they'll continue to get input from their constituents about how to vote on the resolutions next week.

"The problem is it's as if six inches of gasoline have been sloshing around the floor and somebody dropped a match,” said Dr. Michael Loop, an alternate on the UAB faculty senate.

When it comes to the resolution of no confidence, Loop says his decision is clear.

"Mostly what I'm doing is I'm sending out emails and what I'm hearing back, which are uniformly in favor of a vote of no confidence. What I'm hearing back from them is keep up the good work."

Faculty members still have one week before the vote.

We talked to Watts exclusively after his visit with the School of Optometry.

"Well we met today, just now with the school of Optometry, discussed their strategic plan for moving forward, how it relates to the overall university strategic plan and I can tell you we've got more opportunities to do great things toward our mission than ever,” Watts told ABC 33/40.

A university spokesperson says this is the first time watts has scheduled town halls with each college.

"Some believe you're campaigning ahead of the vote of no confidence- what do you say to that?” questioned ABC 33/40's Lauren Walsh.

“No,” answered Watts. “I'm responding to the needs of our faculty and students and constituents. We're a university and we will work together."
"There's no question that's what's going on," Loop said about the idea of a campaign. "And apparently it's not going well. I heard from one person that he was over at College of Arts and Sciences and he lost ground."

Others are more forgiving.

Norma Stewart was in the meeting this morning with the college of medicine.

"I did leave with an appreciation, pleasant appreciation of information," said Stewart.

Each senator can choose how to gather input leading up to the vote. Some are doing town halls. Others are sending emails. Some are using electronic ballots.
Vestavia Hills lawmaker pushes bill to save UAB football

By: Ryan Phillips

State Rep. Jack Williams has been vocal in his support of the cancelled UAB football program and wants the legislature to enter the ring in the fight to restore it.

Williams plans to introduce a bill in Montgomery that would place restrictions on the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees, according to a report from Fox 6. The report said this could eventually lead to friction with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, or SACS, which holds sway over the accreditation of the UA System.

"It would require annual SAC's training for any public university or college board member and it will create a mechanism for removing from the board anyone who violates SAC's guidelines," Williams said.

Williams pointed to the possible encouragement of Ray Watts by the board of trustees to cancel the program as the inspiration behind this bill, the report said.

"If he [was] instructed by board members or his hiring was contingent upon or his salary was contingent upon the removal of football, I would think those board members violated SAC's guidelines," Williams said in the report.

As we reported last month, Williams spoke out against the program cancellation, in addition to saying the decision could affect developers moving forward on future projects in the area.

"I had a developer call me today and express real concern about how this is going to impact enrollment at UAB," Williams told the BBJ in December 2014. "Some of these developments at midtown have narrow margins but they're based on UAB's growing enrollment."
Bill to reverse UAB football decision part of a package of legislation Rep. Jack Williams plans to introduce

By: Madison Underwood

An Alabama legislator is mulling a bill to reverse the recent decision by University of Alabama at Birmingham President Ray Watts to end the football, bowling, and rifle teams at the university.

Rep. Jack Williams, R-Vestavia Hills, has been an outspoken opponent of that decision, and held a press conference Thursday to discuss a package of bills he plans to introduce in the next legislative decision. Two other bills - which he has previously mentioned - would restructure the makeup of the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees, which oversees operations at UA, UAB, and UAH, and require training in accreditation standards for those board members.

"In 1948, the Legislature forced Alabama and Auburn to play again, and our state is a richer state because of that rivalry," Williams said Thursday. "There are many, many people - the overwhelming majority in this community think that the City of Birmingham, Jefferson County, the metropolitan area is a richer place because of having an amenity such as UAB and UAB football, and having the college experience that provides for college students."

"I'm hopeful that we'll be able to turn this decision around," he said.

Williams said his colleagues in the legislature have been supportive of UAB legislation because parents, students, and alumni have been contacting their legislators.

"I think I can build a coalition, and I think it will be a tough fight," he said. "I've heard from legislators from the coast to the Tennessee state line who have said, 'Hey, I've got people calling me, I'm going to help you with UAB.'"

Williams says UAB has "grown beyond being just a commuter college." Its health affects that of the city and the region.

"The tax dollars from this midtown redevelopment go beyond the City of Birmingham," Williams said. "Any sales tax or property tax helps stabilize Jefferson County, and the property taxes even go to help fund schools throughout Jefferson County. In a time that we're fighting for every dollar, we don't need to be doing things that damage economic growth in the community."

The board restructuring bill would diversify the representation on the UA System Board, which is currently heavily dominated by University of Alabama graduates.

"I doubt very seriously they [the UA System trustees] go into these meetings and say, 'Well, what can we do to screw UAB,' but I think they go in and they're thinking about what's best for Tuscaloosa," Williams said. "If it's close, they're always going to side with Tuscaloosa. I want to see the Tuscaloosa campus grow and flourish, but it doesn't have to grow and flourish at the expense of UAB and UAH."

See next page
That bill would add 11 more trustees to the Board, including two at-large members, the mayors of Tuscaloosa, Birmingham, and Huntsville, county managers or county commission presidents from Tuscaloosa, Jefferson, and Madison counties, and one alum each from UAB, UAH, and UA. It would also eliminate one board member from the 7th Congressional district.

That bill would be a constitutional amendment, and would require "62 votes in the House, 21 votes in the Senate, and a majority vote of the public probably in the 2016 primaries" to pass, Williams said.

Williams' third bill would require "all board of trustees members at public colleges and universities to receive mandatory training in Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) standards and compliance," according to a release. That training would be annual. The bill will also allow for board members to be removed if they violate SACS guidelines.

SACS sets accreditation standards for its member colleges, including standards for the conduct of boards of trustees. Under SACS rules, boards set policy for the college, evaluate the school's president, sign off on budgets and maintain the financial stability of the school. But the board's policy-making role has to be distinct, "in writing and practice," from the implementation and execution of those policies by the administration. In other words, board members aren't allowed to meddle in the college's everyday affairs.

SACS also requires that the board not be controlled by a minority of members.

UAB Pres. Ray Watts has said that he - and not the UA System Board - made the decision to cut athletic programs, but some continue to believe that board heavyweight Paul Bryant Jr. had a hand in the death of the programs.
State Rep. proposes constitutional amendment to bring back UAB Football

By: Sarah Killian

One state legislator is hoping to use his office to bring the football back to the University of Alabama at Birmingham this legislative session.

When it comes to the well-being of college football in Alabama, the State Legislature has a history of getting involved.

"In 1948 the Legislature threatened to withhold funds from Alabama and Auburn if they chose not to play," said State Rep. Jack Williams of Jefferson County.

More than 60 years later, Williams hopes the Legislature gets involved with the UAB situation.

"I do have legislation that I’m going to introduce that would reverse the decision on football," Williams said.

This is one of three bills Williams plans to introduce in the upcoming legislative session concerning UAB. The other two focus on restructuring the University Of Alabama Board of Trustees and requiring all board members to undergo SACS accreditation training.

Williams says his ultimate goal is to better all schools in the UA system.

"I want to see the Tuscaloosa campus grow and flourish. But, it doesn't have to grow and flourish at the expense of UAB and UAH," he explained.

Right now, these are just proposed ideas, but Williams thinks he has the support to make them a reality.

"I've heard from legislators from the coast to the Tennessee state line who have said 'Hey, I've got people calling me, I'm going to help you with UAB,'" he said.

All three pieces of legislation Williams is proposing are constitutional amendments. This means if they’re passed by the State Legislature, they must also receive a majority vote from the public. That would likely not happen until the 2016 presidential primary in Alabama.
Legislator leads drive to save UAB football

Barnett Wright
bwright@al.com

Long before the decision was made to abolish the UAB football program, state Rep. Jack Williams would sit among the faithful at Legion Field sending out tweets each time the Blazers scored. This was before the birth of the #SaveUAB movement, when only family, friends and a handful of others would frequent UAB's football games.

These days Williams (@reppjack on Twitter) is tweeting and retweeting more than ever, speaking to all segments of the community about UAB football and what's left of it.

No one single elected official has shown as much determination to reinstate UAB football as the Vestavia Hills Republican, who refuses to let the issue die.

"There is enough anger and frustration in this community that we are not going to allow it to blow over," Williams said of his efforts and those of many others mobilizing on social media to save the program.

"This issue is going to be debated, it's going to be debated vigorously and steps are going to be taken to bring the people together to work out compromise and work out what our other options might be," he said. "And if that won't work, we're going to debate this vigorously in the Legislature and maybe let the Legislature have the final say so on this decision."

Williams recently held a meeting of local business and real estate professionals, along with some elected officials, to discuss how the decision to end football will have an economic impact on the area.

In early December, Williams said he received a call from a real estate broker who said that the midtown redevelopment, one of Birmingham's great success stories, was predicated on UAB's growing undergraduate population and "there is real concern that that growth could stagnate or possibly even decline" after the announcement to end the football program, Williams said.

"Developments go where the people are and if there is not a growing population here than this is a less attractive place to develop," Williams said. "All of a sudden you're making it more difficult for people to recoup investment in the city of Birmingham, particularly in the midtown area."

Alumni engaged

Williams said his passion for UAB athletics dates back two decades to a meeting with former UAB basketball coach Gene Barrow.

"If you go on the concourse at UAB (arena) there is a bust of Gene Barrow and I raised the money for that," Williams said. "Every day I put on a watch that he gave me from one of UAB's basketball tournaments and it's one of my most prized possessions."

Williams is a graduate of Southeastern Bible College, but is such a fan of UAB that he publishes BlazersSportsReport.com, a part of the Rivals.com network.

Williams, who represents the cities of Hoover and Vestavia in District 47, said he expects UAB to be among the most discussed topics during the upcoming session of the Legislature.

He was elected during a special election in 2004 and has been re-elected to three full terms since.

"You're going to see an interest on behalf of the Legislature that you haven't seen previously," he said. "We're going to keep telling the story; we're going to tell it with passion; and we're going to tell it with honesty and integrity."

This might be one issue that lawmakers want to address and not avoid, he said.

"When you get an alumni base engaged, particularly the 25-40 crowd, and they start calling legislators and say, 'We live in your district and we vote,' all of a sudden folks are interested in taking a stand...I think anybody that would not stand up for the folks at UAB and these kids would be doing so at their own political peril," Williams said.
UAB football program gets support from Pelham, Helena leaders

By: Martin J. Reed

City leaders in Pelham and Helena tonight showed their support of the University of Alabama at Birmingham's shuttered football program with separate actions.

The Helena City Council unanimously approved a resolution tonight calling on the university's leaders to continue the football program at the Birmingham institution after the recent decision to discontinue that and other programs including the bowling and rifle teams.

The resolution states that "the elected officials of the City of Helena believe in the wholesome values and positive impact in which football and all athletics, including cheer squads and the marching band provide and contribute to the UAB student environment and overall college experience."

The city leaders "and many citizens of Helena, strongly encourage and recommend that the University of Alabama at Birmingham President and the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees immediately pursue the reestablishment of the University of Alabama at Birmingham football program and do all in its power to support all the University of Alabama at Birmingham athletic programs and other student groups that will be immediately affected in a positive manner by the reestablishment of the UAB football program," according to the resolution.

Mayor Mark Hall in an email said UAB's football program provided a benefit to the greater Birmingham area.

"I am of the opinion that the UAB football program is a vital part of a good overall college experience and has a positive impact in many ways on the entire metro area," Hall said.

"The UAB football shutdown has had a negative impact on other UAB programs such as the marching band, cheering and student support roles like team managers and student trainers, not to mention the loss of coaching jobs as well. I highly support the reestablishment of the program," he said.

In Pelham, Mayor Gary Waters read a proclamation in support of the program with UAB football team member Timothy Alexander at his side. Alexander, a strong supporter of the team who was paralyzed in a car crash in high school, is in a wheelchair.

"We do understand this that without the City of Birmingham and without Pelham being behind us that this cannot be possible," Alexander said. He added that "as I tell everyone all the time, it's not just about football, bowling and rifle. It's about UAB as a whole, you know, and Birmingham supports UAB and UAB supports Birmingham."
Waters said "the economic impact of the University of Alabama at Birmingham benefits in a positive way not only the City of Birmingham but surrounding municipalities including the City of Pelham."

The mayor said he "along with many citizens of Pelham urge the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees and the University of Alabama at Birmingham president to ensure the uninterrupted continuation of the University of Alabama at Birmingham football program -- including its coaches, staff and players -- to do all in its power to support the uninterrupted continuation of the University of Alabama at Birmingham football program."
Free UAB movement continues with lawmakers, students, and faculty working for change

By: Lauren Walsh

It's a new year and a new semester at UAB, but its problems are not going away. Students continue to rally against President Ray Watts' decision to cut the football program. The faculty senate will take up a "no confidence" vote in his leadership next week. Some state lawmakers are also joining the fight.

Students formed a "Free UAB" committee with the Undergraduate Student Government Association. A reported six hundred people came out to their first rally of the semester Sunday night. Students say their fight is just beginning.

"We just want to get our voices heard and make sure that Dr. President Watts knows that we're not going to stop. We do care about UAB and it's all about the blazers," said Cece Chavez, a senior on the new "Free UAB" committee.

"We're just trying to get all the students together in order to keep the fire going," said Chavez.

Some state lawmakers are also fueling the fire of change.

"This is going to be a very serious push this year for what we've been trying to do for a long time," said Representative John Rogers, a Democrat in Birmingham.

Rogers is sponsoring two bills in the upcoming legislative session. The first is called the "five-five-five."

"Which would be five people on the board of trustees from UAB, five from Huntsville and five from Tuscaloosa," explained Rogers.

The goal: "If we got somebody representing our interest on the board of trustees, we should get fair treatment from the board of trustees instead of being treated like a step child," he added.

But his preferred bill is the "Free UAB" bill, which would allow UAB to create its own, separate board of trustees.

"We'd form out own ideas, our own board," said Rogers. "We don't have to worry about begging for mercy. We can do our own thing. That way we start our own football program."

Rogers says all eighteen members of the Jefferson County Legislative Delegation support some type of change to the UA Board of Trustees.

"Entire eighteen members of the house delegation, and we work with the senate, to pass this bill. We got unanimous support. It's both republican and democrat, black and white," said Rogers.
Students say they'll take their fight to Montgomery if the bills reach the floor. They also plan to attend next week's faculty senate meeting for the vote of "no confidence."
Fight to bring back UAB football continues with rally

By: Sarah Killian

It's been just over one month since UAB ended football forever, but supporters are still fighting.

Sunday night supporters held a rally on campus to show support for the football program.

The #FreeUAB committee -- a group of students, alumni and UAB supporters -- organized the rally.

"It's all about unity tonight," committee member and former UAB football player Timothy Alexander said. "We're getting the whole community involved."

Hundreds of people dressed in their green and gold.

The group chanted and raised signs expressing their anger over the administration’s decision to shut down the football program. It’s a message many city and state leaders support.

"We have to let the Board of Trustees know that we're not happy with them being the Geppetto to the Pinocchio here in Birmingham," Birmingham City Council President Johnathan Austin said. "We need to let them know that we are not happy about it and we're not going to sit back and be quiet about it."

Not only do these leaders support the message, they’re doing something about it.

State Rep. Jack Williams said he and other legislators are already working on legislation to resolve this issue of no football at UAB.

"If we work together and decide we're going to do something, we will change this situation because we have the strongest voice in Montgomery when we speak together," Williams said.

Organizers of tonight's rally said the event is a kickoff for many events to come.

One of the next events the #FreeUAB committee has planned is Saturday night.

They plan to hold an event at Birmingham's Iron City to honor Coach Bill Clark -- the man who led the Blazers to a 6-6 season and was named Conference USA Coach of the Year.
More than football: Free UAB supporters worried about school's future, want voices heard
By: Kelsey Stein

On Sunday evening, about 400 supporters of the Free UAB movement, their energy palpable, gathered on the campus green.

Each person who addressed the crowd reflected on the passion they had seen so far, but also emphasized the importance of continuing that momentum.

"This is just the beginning," said Justin Craft, a UAB alumnus and former football player. He asked students to reach out to faculty members, saying their voices must be heard to enact change.

"We're talking about football but that's just the first domino," he said. They also must consider the effects on the conference, undergraduate programs, future enrollment at UAB and the entire city.

Anjali Wagle, president of the UAB Undergraduate Student Government Association, said that students "have a sense of worthlessness" in the wake of the decision to cut the teams.

The last rally in December had so much energy, and she was heartened to see that same spirit return to campus Sunday, despite the cold weather and the weeks that have elapsed.

"At first, people were upset about football, but then students and the community realized it wasn't the first time this had happened," Wagle said after the rally. "Football is just the straw that broke our backs."

Students, faculty and staff have opposed other recent decisions but were disappointed that their concerns weren't valued, she said. In 2013, administrators discussed shutting down the honors program. Recent changes to employee benefits were met with anger and frustration.

"In Dr. Watts' emails, he's said we've got to do better next time," Wagle said. "But his track record doesn't show that he gets input from students and faculty."

Despite these issues, she said, UAB is still a "phenomenal" school, and there are a many administrators who want to see students succeed.

"We just want to make sure voices are heard," she said.

Local officials encouraged the crowd to let their votes and their dollars speak. Birmingham city council members Sheila Tyson and Johnathan Austin encouraged them to reach out to legislators in Birmingham and throughout the state.

See next page
Rep. John Rogers already has outlined his plan to introduce two bills in the upcoming legislative session. One would restructure the board of trustees that oversees the University of Alabama, UAB and University of Alabama Huntsville to require equal representation from graduates of all three schools. The other would sever UAB's connection to the UA system board, allowing it to form its own board.

UAB supporters continue momentum at #FreeUAB kickoff rally UAB supporters continue momentum at #FreeUAB kickoff rally to honor rifle, bowling, and football.

"Flex your muscles," Tyson said. "Go down to Montgomery and demand that they give you your own board."

All of UAB is in her district, and Tyson's support for the Free UAB movement coincides with concerns expressed by her constituents. After the Birmingham Business Alliance selected UAB President Ray Watts as its chairman-elect, her office received more than 900 calls from residents, angry that an organization receiving taxpayer money would do something that was "a slap in the face to Birmingham," she said.

After the rally, she had kind words for the football team and Head Coach Bill Clark, who was active in the community.

"The UAB football team helped my youth teams in my neighborhood," she said. "They came to my summer program. They gave motivational speeches."

Sunday's rally ended with a candlelight ceremony, as everyone cupped flickering flames in their hands. An alternating chant of "green" and "gold" was followed by everyone shouting "Family!" in unison.

Rep. Jack Williams has spoken loud and clear in support of UAB football, saying that he thinks the issue will be discussed often during the legislative session. He said anyone who ignores it would do so "at their own political peril."

"The past is behind us - bankruptcy, corruption and bad football teams are yesterday's news," he said at the rally. "We can have a new Jefferson County, a new Birmingham and a new UAB."
“Free UAB” rally held on campus

By: Darcelle Hall

Despite the chilly temperatures, students, band members and even Birmingham city council members bundled up and showed up in support of bringing football back to UAB.

Sunday’s rally on the UAB campus green was part of the “Free UAB” movement. The Free UAB committee has a number of events lined up for the month of January in order bring attention to the effort to restore football and two other sports, as well as call for the university to form its own board of trustees.

The committee plans to send representatives to Montgomery when the legislative session begins in March to help gain support for the school breaking away from the UA system.
Clark was hired as coach — and savior

Kevin Scarbinsky  kscarbinsky@al.com

In January 2014, when UAB put together a search committee to find a new football coach, its members understood how important their choice could be.

Former coach Garrick McGee had just left to rejoin Bobby Petrino at Louisville as his offensive coordinator after a dispiriting 5-19 record over two years. The Blazers hadn’t been bowl-eligible since 2004, and their attendance dropped to a meager 10,548 a game, the lowest average in the school’s Football Bowl Subdivision history.

The search committee members — Athletics Director Brian MacKain, Senior Associate AD Shannon Ealy, Bill Carr of CarrSports Consulting and former UAB player Izell Reese — knew the next coach had to turn things around in a hurry for the sake of the program’s future.

“We knew how important it was to find the right guy, not just to win, but to save UAB football,” Reese tells AL.com.

What they didn’t know, Reese says, is that the program would face possible extinction within a year, no matter how successful the new coach might be.

Which is, we know now, exactly what happened.

On Dec. 2, UAB President Ray Watts announced the school was discontinuing its football program, along with the bowling and rifle programs.
New coach Bill Clark won more games (6) than McGee had in two years to make the Blazers bowl-eligible for the first time in a decade, average home attendance more than doubled from the previous year to 21,841 and numerous boosters had pledged to support the program going forward.

Still, UAB football shut down. Reese was particularly stunned.

"In representing UAB football as a proud alum, loving that program from the bottom of my heart, I feel like I went into something not knowing the whole story," Reese said.

That feeling prompted Reese to share audio of some of the search committee's work with AL.com. As part of his standard business practice, Reese said, he recorded the committee's interviews and meetings. He shared the recording of the committee's final meeting, at which members decided to recommend Clark as the best man for the job.

"I think it's important for this to be shared," Reese said. "Everything coming out of the university is not truthful. UAB alum, students and the Birmingham community, everyone has the right to know."

Reached by AL.com Sunday, Mackin declined to comment.

Reese provided the search committee's agenda, which included interviews with six candidates. On Jan. 16 in Atlanta, the committee interviewed Bet-hune-Cookman head coach Brian Jenkins, who recently took over at Alabama State, and Cincinnati offensive coordinator Eddie Gran.

On Jan. 17 in Atlanta, the committee interviewed Clark, then the Jacksonville State head coach; former Wake Forest head coach Jim Grobe; and Atlanta Falcons assistant Chris Scelfo. On Jan. 18 in Mobile, the committee interviewed South Alabama head coach Joey Jones.

After that final interview, the committee focused its deliberations on two candidates, Clark and Jones. Discussions heard on the recording of that meeting reveal three key realities, particularly in light of the eventual decision to shut down the football program:

- Mackin felt it necessary to run the committee's choice by University of Alabama System Chancellor Robert Witt and two key trustees, Paul Bryant Jr. and Finis "Fess" St. John, indicating at least some involvement by UA.
- Sometime between the committee's formation and its final meeting, the members learned they could not offer their chosen candidate a typical contract of four or five years, but only three, hinting that UAB did not want to be obligated for the long term.
- The committee felt it would be up to Clark to save the program.

Highlights of that final meeting include revealing discussions about the qualifications that ultimately tipped the committee toward Clark.

Clark agreed to a three-year deal at $500,000 a year. He got the job done as no UAB coach had in a decade, and still it didn't save the program.

The search committee will never taste that champagne.
Bill Clark accomplished UAB’s goal, and the program still was shut down

By: JJ Stankevitz

UAB’s search committee set out to find a coach who could save its football program a year ago, and let’s be honest, it found one in Bill Clark. But no matter who the search committee hired and what the new coach did, the program was going to be shut down.

That’s what AL.com reported Monday after obtaining recordings of the search committee’s proceedings. It was a futile effort to identify a quality coach — which the search committee did — given UAB President Ray Watts was already considering shutting down the program.

From the AL.com story:

The search committee members — Athletics Director Brian Mackin, Senior Associate AD Shannon Ealy, Bill Carr of CarrSports Consulting and former UAB player Izell Reese — knew the next coach had to turn things around in a hurry for the sake of the program’s future. “We knew how important it was to find the right guy, not just to win but to save UAB football,” Reese tells AL.com.

We all know the outcome: Clark led UAB to a 6-6 season, its best season in a decade, before the football program was axed in December. After the announcement, UAB wasn’t picked for a bowl game, a child sent his allowance to try to save the program, and there was this gut-wrenching video of UAB players pleading with Watts.

There’s a lot more in the AL.com article — including some really interesting stuff from the search committee on the unusually short length of Clark’s contract. And one the search committee members saying they have to “tolerate” Paul Bryant Jr. Good stuff.
WITH BIRMINGHAM BOWL OVER, IT'S DOWN TO JUST ONE MORE GAME IN 2015. DEBATE NOW TURNS TO STADIUM'S FUTURE.

HAS ITS TIME EXPIRED?

Amy Yurkanin » ayurkanin@al.com

The ghostly imprint of UAB's final game at Legion Field still remained at the 50-yard-line last week. Workers remaking the end zones and yard lines for Saturday's Birmingham Bowl hadn't yet reached the faint outline of Blaze the Dragon, which was eventually stamped out by the bowl game's logo.

The UAB logo, and the football team, won't return to Legion Field next year. Along with the profile of Blaze, the stadium will lose six home games and a regular tenant, which raises the possibility that Legion Field could have just two events this year: the Birmingham Bowl and Magic City Classic.

The absence of UAB either opens space for new opportunities or creates a critical void in the stadium schedule—depending on whom you ask. It has sparked a conversation in City Hall about the future of the Old Gray Lady, and whether her days might be numbered.

'Full speed ahead'

Kevin Moore, director of the park and recreation board, falls firmly on the side of reinvention. The departure of UAB football simply accelerates the process of finding new events and regular tenants for the historic venue. He said the board is already engaged in negotiations that could bring new con-

LEGION FIELD . 13
LEAGUE FIELD
From Page 1

certs and festivals to Legion Field as soon as the summer.
"We're moving full speed ahead," Moore said. "We're not just sitting around waiting for events to come to us."
In addition to concerts, the facility could host more college football games and soccer games, Moore said. The city is not just interested in one-time events, he added.
"We don't want to have quick hits," Moore said. "We want something that stays and really has an impact on the economy."

Losing proposition?
Mayor William Bell and City Councilwoman Kim Rafferty have said the city should commission a feasibility study to determine the best fate for the aging facility - even if it means closure.
Considering the city lost money on UAB games - according to Gene Hallman of Bruno Event Team, a sports promotion company - the city now can redirect all of that money toward efforts to attract new tenants.

City Council President Johnathan Austin said there is a benefit to having an anchor tenant who will make a consistent investment in the facility. Bryant-Denny Stadium in Tuscaloosa is only two years younger than Legion Field, but has had several upgrades to compete with new stadiums in college football.
Austin said Legion Field might need several upgrades to compete with other stadiums for events, but the city will need to carefully weigh the costs against the benefits.
"I definitely would like to keep the Old Gray Lady," Austin said. "But we need to ask what makes the most financial sense for the city before we invest into the upkeep."
And the heart of that question is whether it makes financial sense to maintain and staff a stadium that only hosts a couple events a year.
Hallman said the Magic City Classic (promoted by his company) and the Birmingham Bowl generate enough revenue to offset any costs to the city. The city has 35 employees at Legion Field.

'Zero chance'
Hallman said it doesn't make sense for the city to close Legion Field, since it provides the city with a facility for hosting football games and other events.
"There's zero chance it is going to be shut down," he said.
"It's already built and the maintenance of the facility is manageable."
Hallman said he has never considered moving the Magic City Classic. The game drew more than 80,000 spectators this year, nearly filling the stadium to capacity.
But Hallman is a staunch proponent of a dome, which would replace Legion Field if it were built. Legion Field may not meet the city's needs forever, but it will work just fine for the next several years, Hallman said.
There have been concerns about the condition of the stadium in the past. Although she isn't flashy, Moore said the stadium is in good repair, and improvements have recently been made to luxury suites and lower level bathrooms.
"A lot of people talk negative about Legion Field," he said. "And I always ask them the same thing. 'When was the last time you were here?'

The city removed the upper deck in 2004 due to concerns about the structural integrity and made emergency repairs to the north end zone just six years before that. Unless the stadium can find more tenants, it might be more difficult to justify making the next major repair. But so far, the stadium seems to be holding up without the need for major renovations.
The stadium might not have high-definition screens or gourmet concessions, but it has the fundamentals, Moore said.
"When you have a football game, what's the most important thing? The field," Moore said.
"And we have the best field in the country."
But an open stadium - even one with a great field - can only host certain types of events. Hallman said the city would ultimately be better served by a dome that could accommodate trade shows and conventions alongside sports and concerts.
"At some point as a community, we have to evaluate what we really need," Hallman said.
"There's only so much we can do with Legion Field."

Gene Hallman
Bruno Events Team
Outrage over UAB athletic situation should be directed at UA trustees: opinion

By: Luke Meadows

My name is Luke Meadows and I am currently pursuing a PhD at UAB in Biostatistics. I received my degree in mathematics from UAB and feel that I also received a world class education. I have a deep loyalty to the university and the chaos surrounding the decision to end the football program is deeply disturbing to me.

There are many perspectives on this issue and only one is being heard and reported that is a story of outrage. I believe that this outrage is misdirected and frankly will not accomplish anything. If the football program is to return, we must be free of the University of Alabama board of trustees. This is the central issue anything else is simply hand waving to cover that the governing system for UAB is outdated and needs revision, badly.

Starting with the facts, UAB brings in more research dollars than every other university in the state combined. UAB is a world class medical center and the research that comes from this place saves lives every day. UAB is the largest employer in the state and has served as the conduit for an ongoing transformation of Birmingham. UAB is one of the most diverse schools in the entire country and has proven to be top flight institution. UAB was founded in 1969 UA was founded in 1831, this means that even with a 138 year head start UA has failed to become a better institution than its brilliant Birmingham spin off.

If one looks at the decision to end the football program, it was made (behind the scenes) by the board of trustees. Our current president, Ray Watts, is taking the heat for this decision while having admirably served this university in many capacities for many years. I have full faith and confidence in the man. Read his bio and then decide if you think that he is a poor decision maker.

However, his communication skills are somewhat lacking but that is largely due to his training. He is a world class neurologist. He is most accustomed to being in situations that demand high level executive decision making and he exercised that skill in a way that felt a little less than tactful. Fundamentally, however, the decision was never his to make and he was the messenger to the will of the Alabama Board of Trustees.

The board is composed of 15 members 13 of which have direct and long standing ties to the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. This board frankly has no business running an institution as great as UAB and the shoddy politics surrounding the decision to end the football program make this abundantly clear.

We in Birmingham are being held back by a group of old white men intent on the status quo.

If UAB means anything to me it is simply this, we are the hope for this state. In a city scarred by radical violence, racial tension, and tremendous poverty the only way to solve these problems is
through education. UAB offers the greatest hope for resolution to these issues in this state. We are the greatest institution in the state and it breaks my heart to see division within it.

If there is anything that I want to communicate it is this: anger is fine, but direct it correctly. If we want our football program back, we must not be held back by the UA board of trustees any longer. I appreciate the difficult situation that many of our student athletes are now facing and I feel as though their anger is understandable.

I just wish that this anger and outrage was directed towards those who are fundamentally responsible for this decision.
JANUARY 8

ARTICLES OF INTEREST
JANUARY 2, 2015 – JANUARY 8, 2015

FOR SPECIFIC NEWS STORIES, SEE THE FOLLOWING PAGE NUMBERS:

NEWS ABOUT

STATE ISSUES 2

UA CAMPUS ISSUES 9

UAB CAMPUS ISSUES 17

UAH CAMPUS ISSUES 21

OTHER STATE UNIVERSITIES 36

SPORTS 40

NATIONAL NEWS 47
Alabama continues trend, receives F for higher education spending

By: Ryan Phillips

The Alabama education system continues to play catch-up as other states find new ways to finance state-funded institutions, but one recent ranking still has the state among the nation's lowest in terms of spending on higher education.

In a recent study by U.S. News & World Report, more than 30 states—including Alabama—received an F for higher education spending per student. Alabama was the only Southeastern state to receive a failing grade, with the next-closest in proximity and quality being found in Florida, which received a D.

The study tracked trends in higher education funding for each U.S. state, grading each based on tuition costs, state funding per student, state financial aid to students, family finances and higher education spending.

Only four states—Wyoming, New York, Alaska and Oklahoma—received a total grade of an A.

This certainly is not new territory for the Alabama education system, as I have reported in the past.

See next page
In October, we highlighted a similarly low ranking national ranking of state education funding, when it was announced that state spending per student had dropped $1,128, or 17.8 percent. In this category, Alabama ranked second only to Oklahoma.

The recession of 2008 caused growing pains at the state level that have yet to be overcome, with the Alabama Education Trust Fund dropping by $1.5 billion from 2008 to 2010, as we reported.

"When the revenue dries up states basically have two options: they can raise taxes, which is politically distasteful, or cut spending," said Tom Allison, policy and research manager for Young Invincibles. "Higher education was a big target for state legislators across the country, mainly because it's usually a large ticket item and it's got alternative sources of revenue, which is tuition."

Tennessee, North Carolina, Kentucky and Arkansas were the best performing Southern states in terms of education funding—all receiving B's.
Which Alabama colleges have the best value?

By: Alan Alexander

Three Alabama universities, including one in Birmingham, were ranked among the top 300 in the nation for best value, according to a new report.

The University of Alabama (No. 182), Samford University (No. 214) and Auburn University (No. 262) made the list, which was compiled by Kiplinger and consists of private universities, public universities and liberal arts colleges.

The rankings were based on a mix of financial and quality measures such as competitiveness, graduation rates, academic support, overall cost and financial aid, and average student debt.
Court rules in favor of RSA in dispute over investments

Kent Faulk • kfaulk@al.com

The Alabama Supreme Court, in a divided opinion, ordered the dismissal of a 2011 lawsuit that claims the Retirement Systems of Alabama illegally and improperly invested billions of dollars in funds that earned lower-than-average returns, in part by favoring state investments.

RSA manages the retirement funds for state employees and teachers.

In their opinion, justices stated they are not equipped to oversee the investment decisions of boards, such as the RSA, that have been granted broad authority by the Alabama Legislature.

"The doctrines of sovereign immunity and separation of powers require that the judicial branch honor that delegation and not take upon itself the task of reviewing the investment strategies and decisions of the boards of control, at least not under the circumstances presented here," justices wrote.

A Montgomery circuit court judge had denied a request by RSA to dismiss the lawsuit that had been brought by two named plaintiffs — a state employee who is a member of the Employees' Retirement System of Alabama, and a member of the Teachers' Retirement System of Alabama. The Alabama Supreme Court ordered the judge to vacate the order and grant RSA's motion to dismiss the complaint.

The decision wasn't unanimous. Three justices — Lyn Stuart, Tom Parker and Kelli Wise — concurred in the opinion written by Justice Glenn Murdock.

Justices Michael Bolin and Tommy Bryan concurred in the result, but with no separate opinions. And Chief Justice Roy Moore and Greg Shaw dissented, saying it was premature for them to "supplant" the judgment of the trial judge.

Justice James Allen Main recused himself.

The lawsuit claims the RSA made bad investments in Alabama golf courses, office buildings, condominiums, hotels, resorts and companies when managers knew they could earn higher returns with other investments. The lawsuit specifically noted a $500 million loan to a Canadian company that planned to build railcars in Alabama and a $2 billion investment in Montgomery-based Raycom Media and Birmingham-based Community Newspaper Holdings Inc.
HudsonAlpha scientists discover new genetic markers for most common kidney cancer

By Lee Roop

Researchers at the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology have discovered new genetic "biomarkers" that could lead to early diagnosis of the most common type of kidney cancer in adults.

"Most people don't find out they have kidney cancer until it's already progressed, so we want to be able to develop an easy assay to test a patient's urine or blood that could serve as a screening test for the general population over a certain age, or people who are at risk for kidney cancer," said researcher and institute President Dr. Richard Myers.

The new biomarkers - a set of 20 positions in the human genome - are "very strong predictors of renal cell carcinoma," HudsonAlpha said in a press release today. Most patients with early stage renal tumors do not have symptoms, and the disease is often undiscovered until it has spread and is harder or impossible to treat. These genetic biomarkers could not only detect the cancer early when it can be treated, the institute said, they can also be used to monitor patients for recurrence after treatment.

The research team initially examined tissues from tumors and normal tissue from 96 kidney cancer patients under the care of Stanford University urologist and researcher Dr. James Brooks.

"In our data, the model was 99 percent accurate in determining tumor from normal, and we were able to validate that in more than 1,000 tissues from a publicly-available data set from The Cancer Genome Atlas," said HudsonAlpha researcher Dr. Brittany Lasseigne.

The full research team included Myers, HudsonAlpha faculty investigator Dr. Devin Absher, Brooks, and Lasseigne. The research results were published this month in the online medical journal BMC Medicine.

The project was funded by The Daniel Foundation, HudsonAlpha, and the NIH Early Detection Research Network.
100 workers to lose jobs as Cinram shuts plant

Employees sent home Tuesday from Cottondale's former JVC

By Patrick Rupinski
Business Editor

Cinram Operations Inc., formerly JVC America, is closing its Cottondale plant, permanently laying off at least 100 employees.

The company informed its employees of its decision Tuesday and sent workers home at 2 p.m.

Cinram has a 100-acre site with two large plants located just off Interstate 20/59. It most recently made and packaged compact discs—products whose demand has decreased with changing technology.

Cinram bought JVC America last spring from JVC Kenwood Holdings of Japan for an undisclosed amount. At the time, the Cottondale facility had about 175 employees.

In the mid-1980s, JVC became the first foreign manufacturer to open a new plant in Tuscaloosa County. It initially manufactured videotapes.

When Japanese officials broke ground for a plant to manufacture videotapes in April 1986, they surprised those in attendance by announcing they would build a second plant at the site to make compact discs. The first plant opened in fall 1986, and the second plant opened a year later.

JVC's early success in Tuscaloosa was touted by industry recruiters to attract other foreign companies—including Mercedes-Benz—to Tuscaloosa County over the next two decades. But rapidly changing technology has been less kind to JVC in recent years.

Before last year's sale to Cinram, JVC America had already curtailed its workforce and production. Earlier, as videotapes became obsolete, JVC America ended their production and closed one of the two plants.

See Closing | 8A

See next page
"Now that this decision has been made, we're going to have to double down our efforts toward job growth in other sectors."

Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox on Cinram's closing

In 2010, declining consumer demand for CDs resulted in a 10 percent reduction in the company's workforce here.

And in June 2012, JVC America outsourced part of its workforce in a move that it said would make it more flexible and competitive in the changing marketplace.

JVC's problems continued. When JVC Kenwood sold the Tuscaloosa facility for at least six of the last 12 months. When Cinram bought JVC America last year, the facility employed about 175 people. It is unknown how many temporary or outsourced workers are affected by the closing.

Cinram was using only the 225,000-square-foot plant in Cot indale. A larger 250,000-square-foot manufacturing facility was no longer used, and some of its space was leased to other companies for warehouse use. It is unknown what plans Cinram has for the property.

Calls and emails Tuesday afternoon to the offices of Cinram and Najafi, an international private investment firm based in Phoenix that owns Cinram, requesting additional comment were not returned by Tuesday evening.
New UA Gallery exhibit features illustrations of Alabama fish

Staff report

A free exhibit of illustrations of fish species native to Alabama will be on display at the University of Alabama Gallery in the Dinah Washington Cultural Arts Center in downtown Tuscaloosa until Feb. 2.


The detailed illustrations are visual references included in the book "Fishes of Alabama," a catalog of the state's fresh and saltwater species written by Herbert T. Boschung Jr., a UA professor emeritus of biology, and Richard L. Mayden, endowed chair of natural sciences and chair of the department of biology at St. Louis University and a former UA faculty member. UA alumna Ilouise Hill of Montgomery helped fund the book's publication.

The book, which also will be on display as part of the exhibit, included almost 150 illustrations, but the exhibit will feature a sampling of about 50, gallery director Katie McAllister said.

The illustrations were donated to the university in 2011 by the Westervelt Co. The illustrations on display represent a sampling of the more than 200 prints by Tomelleri in the collection housed in UA's College of Arts and Sciences.

The gallery at 620 Greensboro Ave. is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and until 8 p.m. on the first Friday of the month.

The illustrations, which also appear in the book "Fishes of Alabama," were donated to the University of Alabama by the Westervelt Co.
Second partner named for UA business analytics lab

By Patrick Rupinski
Business Editor

A Birmingham-based health care company is partnering with the University of Alabama's business school and will provide expertise and financial backing for a new business analytical lab that will be located in Bidgood Hall.

On Tuesday, Healthcare Business Solutions, a subsidiary of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama, became the second company to sign on as a partner in UA's Business Analytics Lab, which will be built in Bidgood Hall and is expected to open later this year.

Lockheed Martin, an aeronautics company, became the first partner last year, and J. Michael Hardin, dean of the Culverhouse College of Commerce, said a third business is expected to become a formal partner soon.

The partnerships will enhance the learning opportunities for graduate students interested in careers in the rapidly growing field of business analytics, according to Carl Pinkert, UA vice president for research and economic development.

"Students will have an opportunity to work with real-world situations at the university and get to see the relevancy of what they are learning in the classroom," he said.

The business partners in some cases will provide the expertise and instruction and help finance the center, he said. Graduate students interested in business analytics — mining through data to develop strategies and solutions to problems — will gain a valuable experience in a growing field.

Hardin said a minimum of three to four lucrative job offers exist for every graduate with a solid analytics background and the demand for such a background is increasing.

More universities are adding analytics to their curriculum each year, he said, noting UA has had such instruction since 2002. UA's business school has around 100 graduate students interested in analytics, Hardin said. Most are seeking master's degrees, but some are Ph.D. candidates. Increased instruction at the undergraduate level is being looked at, too.

Sherrie LeMier, president and chief operating officer of Healthcare Business Solution (HBS), said her company was excited about becoming a partner with the business analytical lab, calling it a "cutting-edge, first-of-its-kind facility dedicated to the field of data science."

LeMier, a 1979 UA graduate, noted that when she was earning her accounting degree, UA students used a 5-foot by 8-foot room in the basement of Bidgood where they "entered data into key punch machines that would spit out punch cards housing the data." A batch of computer cards would then be taken to the computer lab for overnight processing.

"So to quote one of the oldest advertising lines, 'You've come a long way baby,'" she said.

The new computer lab will cover about 1,500 square feet and will be a focal point upon entering Bidgood. It will have meeting areas for analytics teams working on projects whose data can be electronically displayed and analyzed.

LeMier said HBS's five affiliated companies' goal is to better understand health care and provide effective answers to solve health care administration challenges.

Those affiliates serve Medicare, Medicaid and veterans health care recipients as well as an affiliate that uses analytics to detect potential fraud, waste and abuse of health care dollars and an affiliate working with Medicaid beneficiaries in a 10-county region of north Alabama.

LAB
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6B

The Tuscaloosa News
Wednesday, January 7, 2015
Healthcare Business Solutions partners with UA's Culverhouse on analytics lab

By: Alan Alexander

In an increasingly digitized economy, processing large amounts of data will become more important for companies looking to optimize efficiency.

That's particularly true for the health care industry due to the emergence of electronic medical records and other changes under the Affordable Care Act.

Those signs point to why Birmingham-based health care marketplace consulting firm Healthcare Business Solutions is joining an existing partnership between the University of Alabama's Culverhouse College of Commerce and Lockheed Martin on an analytics lab that will open in the business school this spring semester.

"Our partnership with The University of Alabama's Culverhouse College of Commerce Business Analytics Lab promises to further advance the data analytic capabilities of our family of companies in the healthcare arena," said HBS President Sherrie LeMier Potts.

The lab will serve as a research center to study data across multiple industries, improve business efficiency and provide real-world experience and skill development for students preparing to enter the business analytics workforce.

"The University of Alabama and the Culverhouse College of Commerce have become recognized leaders in business analytics and innovation. We are excited that this lab will provide research to businesses that will help them become more effective not only locally, but globally as well," said UA President Judy Bonner.
Bonner announces resignation

President Judy Bonner to step down this year

By Collin Burwinkle | Contributing Writer

University of Alabama President Judy Bonner announced over the semester break that she would resign from the presidency by Sept. 30. Bonner, the first woman to hold the University's presidency, has held the office since 2012.

In a letter sent to UA students, faculty and staff, Bonner wrote she was stepping down because she wanted to return to teaching, which she called her "first love."

In a letter to Chancellor Robert Witt, Bonner indicated that the Board of Trustees would open a search for a new president in January. Bonner wrote she would work with the new president to ensure a "seamless transition."

Some students were surprised by Bonner's resignation.

"It was a little bit of a shock to learn Dr. Bonner was stepping down as president, however, there is no question that she has helped the school in many different ways and has left a great legacy," said Dalton Robinson, a freshman majoring in criminal justice.

Sloan Lewandoski, a freshman majoring in communications, said she looks forward to seeing who the next president is going to be.

"It was stunning that she resigned so quickly after taking the presidency," Lewandoski said. "I look forward to seeing who the next president is"

See Bonner Page 2
Next president will be the University’s 4th since 2012

Going to be and see what they can do for UA.

Others were not surprised by the resignation, given the controversy Bonner faced during her presidency.

"With all the controversy from her first term, whether she was at fault or not, it was not too unexpected for me," said Melanie Viering, a junior majoring in advertising.

Bonner wrote in her letter to the student body that resigning as the president of The University of Alabama was not an easy decision.

"To all who know me – my faculty colleagues, our dedicated staff, our outstanding students, and our loyal alumni – you can imagine that this was not an easy decision to make. Like many other Alabama families, ours, too, has a long and deep connection to this special place. More than 100 years ago, our grandfather graduated from The University of Alabama and, earlier this semester, my niece began her freshman year. Four generations of my family have called the Capstone home, and Alabama’s first university has been – and will always be – an integral part of my life."

After the new president takes office, Bonner said she would begin a yearlong sabbatical on Oct. 1, 2015 to prepare to return to teaching.

The candidate who is chosen will be the school’s fourth leader since 2012.
Alabama universities join in battle to address hunger, food insecurity

Auburn University's Hunger Solutions Institute was recently recognized for leading an initiative to unite universities from across the world to address food insecurity.

An article published by AL.com earlier this month describes how more than 60 university leaders gathered at the United Nations to sign a pledge — the Presidents' Commitment to Food and Nutrition Security — agreeing to "acknowledge hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity to be a critical threat to a sustainable world" and making food insecurity a priority moving forward. The University of Alabama, Troy University and Tuskegee University also joined in signing the pledge.

Auburn has been on the forefront of the hunger issue within higher education for a decade. When Auburn launched Universities Fighting World Hunger in 2004, it was the first movement of its kind to educate, organize and mobilize students, administrators and faculty in the war against hunger. It has grown to include nearly 300 universities worldwide. The ability to conduct innovative research and an energetic student body make college campuses an ideal environment for the movement to thrive.

In 2012, Auburn launched End Child Hunger in Alabama, a campaign for which I’m pleased to serve as spokes-person. The initiative has taken off and gained the attention and support of pro-couger and Auburn alumnus Jason Dunner and the entire Auburn Athletics Department.

Unfortunately, the issue of hunger is not new. Various worthy ministries and nonprofit organizations have been around for years working to address the problem. What's changed, and what Auburn has been instrumental in facilitating, is that people are talking about it. Like many sensitive subjects, it was often avoided because it's not easy to discuss. But now the issue of hunger is permeating the public conversation. At the grocery store, on the news and social media, at church and work, you'll see the message. People are realizing that hunger is not only a challenge in countries hundreds of miles away, but it's a hometown issue. Families in your own community may not know where their next meal will come from.

The message is out; the next step is taking action. Hunger may seem like an issue you feel is too big to tackle on your own.

Kay Ivey is the lieutenant governor of the State of Alabama.
Alpha Phi house on UA campus demolished

UA plans new houses for the sororities on Colonial Drive

Staff report

Construction crews are demolishing the old Alpha Phi sorority house at the University of Alabama, part of a campus master plan to build two larger chapter houses on the lots where three existing buildings sit.

The demolition of the old Alpha Phi house on the corner of Colonial Drive and Paul W. Bryant Drive began in late December. The chapter is relocating to a new house on Bryant Drive. Kappa Kappa Gamma and Phi Mu chapters will remain adjacent to Bryant-Denny Stadium as part of the campus’ sorority master plan, which calls for construction of new 40,000-square-foot houses for the sororities on Colonial Drive across from the stadium.

The UA board of trustees gave approval in November for construction contracts to be awarded to the future low bidders on the roughly $14 million Phi Mu project.

The construction of the new Kappa Kappa Gamma house is estimated to cost roughly $13.4 million.

Part of Colonial Drive from Eighth Street to Paul W. Bryant Drive is also closed until Jan. 15 for ongoing utility work. Crews are installing new underground utilities for the new sorority houses.
UA unveils new collegiate license plate

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama and the state Department of Revenue have unveiled a new UA collegiate license plate.

The new series began this month, according to the Alabama Department of Revenue website.

In the new design, the tag number is bracketed by crimson bands on the top and bottom. The top band includes the state name in white, while the bottom band includes "Roll Tide." The design includes a script A logo to the left of the registration number.

The proceeds from the collegiate tags sold in the state are used to fund undergraduate and graduate scholarships. Annually, the tag sales generate about $4.5 million for scholarships at UA, according to David Wilson, director of alumni funds with the Alabama National Alumni Association.

State law requires the collegiate tag designs to be updated every five years. The university received approval for its new design in fall 2014, Wilson said, adding that the design process took eight to nine months.

Wilson said the alumni association consulted with fans and members of the UA community on the design.

"We went everywhere we could to get second looks," Wilson said. The design suggestions included Denny Chimes, elephants, crystal trophies and other symbols associated with UA.

"We probably had 100 different-looking tag designs. We worked with the alumni association executive committee board to narrow it down," Wilson said.

The association chose a script A and "Roll Tide" because the design and phrase seemed to resonate best with fans, Wilson said. The previous incarnation of the tag also

SEE LICENSE | 4B

LICENSE
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

included the script A, along with "Roll Tide Roll."

Most of the tags are purchased by fans, Wilson said.

"We wanted to make sure we had something that related to fans," he said.

The new UA plates, available at local county license offices, are available both as standard and personalized tags. The collegiate tags cost an additional $50 on top of the standard registration fees.

Standard numeric tags are available immediately, but personalized tags will take three to four weeks for delivery, according to the alumni association’s website.

In fiscal year 2014, the state sold 102,606 UA collegiate tags, according to Department of Revenue records.
UAB launches Innovation Boot Camp for local executives

By Alan Alexander

Local executives looking for new ways to innovate their company can enroll in the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Innovation Boot Camp for a five-session course at McWane Science Center.

For $800, participants will be part of a small interdisciplinary team engaged in a hands-on innovation challenge from start to finish. As a result, they will leave the boot camp with a strong understanding of design thinking and a new mindset about how to break through barriers to innovation, according to a press release.

Those five sessions will cover ways to empathize, define, ideate, create and test a prototype. They will be held every Sunday from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. starting Jan. 11.

Course instructors are Molly Wasko and Joel Berry, both UAB faculty. Wasko heads the Invention to Innovation program and is actively involved in the Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Berry is an associate professor of biomedical engineering and teaches techniques of technical innovation in UAB's Science and Technology Honors program.

The program is modeled after the Stanford Design School's Principles of Design Thinking.
Birmingham execs can learn to foster new ideas at UAB’s Innovation Boot Camp beginning Jan. 11

By Jesse Chambers

Birmingham-area executives who would like to learn to foster new ideas at their firms are invited to attend an Innovation Boot Camp to be hosted by The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Collat School of Business at the McWane Science Center downtown on five consecutive Sundays from 1-5 p.m. beginning Jan. 11.

The Innovation Boot Camp will consist of intensive, hands-on sessions meant to give participants practice with innovation techniques that can be applied to products, services and business design.

Total cost for the camp is $800, and the registration deadline is Jan. 8, according to a news release today from UAB.

During each session, participants will be part of a small interdisciplinary team engaged in an innovation challenge from start to finish and should leave the boot camp with a new mindset about how to break through barriers to new ideas.

Course instructors are UAB business faculty members Molly Wasko and Joel Berry. Wasko heads the Invention to Innovation program and is involved in the UAB Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Berry teaches techniques of technical innovation in the UAB Science and Technology Honors program.

This program is the first of its kind in Birmingham and is modeled after a popular class at the Stanford Design School called Principles of Design Thinking.
Alabama law blocks specific medical treatments

**CBD Oil**: Ulcerative Colitis Sufferer Forced to Have Colon Removed.

Brian Lawson  blawson@al.com

A young Huntsville man suffering from a debilitating disease had surgery to relieve the condition, but still laments that a potential treatment was denied under Alabama law.

The Dec. 19 surgery has not lessened Vanderbilt University graduate Itamar Shapira's frustration that CBD oil, a derivative of the marijuana plant, was not available to him. CBD oil does not have any psychotropic effect because it is low in THC, the chemical that gets a marijuana smoker high.

Shapira, 21, was diagnosed in January 2014 with ulcerative colitis, an excruciatingly painful intestinal disorder that produces so many ulcers in the colon that the body cannot properly absorb food.

Access to CBD oil might have reduced his symptoms and prevented the need for the removal of his colon, Shapira believes.

"In terms of just myself, I want people to understand, I've been through a lot and it's regrettable what I've gone through. But now there is a light at end of tunnel. It is not the route we wanted but this was the final line in the sand."

"I'm now dealing with both physically and emotionally and also figuring out my own life again."

The same CBD oil has been approved by the Alabama Legislature as part of an experimental program for children suffering from epileptic seizures. But the measure, known as Carly's Law, did not allow access to the program for patients suffering from other afflictions who might benefit from the use of CBD.

The CBD oil program slated to be run through the University of Alabama-Birmingham is still going through government review and is not yet distributing any CBD oil for the children, many of whom suffer daily seizures, and their desperate families.

Shapira had resisted surgery for months, using antibiotics and an incredibly restricted diet to try and avoid the surgery that would remove his colon. Shapira studied biomedical engineering at Vanderbilt and found studies showing the effectiveness on CBD for people with a number of different conditions, including ulcerative colitis.

He was released from the hospital in Weston, Fla., on Dec. 31. He had two parts of a typically three-part surgery during an eight-hour procedure. His colon was removed and a J-pouch was formed using part of his small intestine. The pouch will be connected through another surgery to replace the loss of his large intestine.

A former cross-country runner at Grissom High School, Shapira must still take it slow.

"I expect a period of weeks of recovery," he said. "Of physical activity, I'm not supposed to do much beyond walking for six weeks and I'll be on a restricted diet for four weeks and then I have to come back and have the second surgery."

**CBD Oil**

CBD oil is derived from another variety of cannabis plant, which is used for making hemp. You cannot get high from CBD oil because it has no psychoactive properties. Hemp plants are high in CBD and low in THC, the substance that makes a marijuana smoker high. Marijuana plants are high in THC, low in CBD.
Birmingham is lucky to have Ray Watts

Dear Editor: Ray Watts is in a tough spot. As the leader of our state's largest employer, now more than ever he is faced with difficult decisions every day. As a business owner, I understand some of these difficulties. And as Dr. Watts' patient, I understand who he is as a person.

Upon my diagnosis of Parkinson's disease in 2008, Dr. Watts became my physician. His reputation as a world-renowned neurologist was often mentioned to me. Dr. Watts has counseled me on this disease the past six years and that has allowed me to really know this man. He is a gentleman of utmost integrity and a superb doctor. But he is also the leader of an academic institution. Running an organization as complex as UAB is a challenge. Given today's economy, it's also a tough time to keep a business going. In his decision regarding the athletic department, Dr. Watts did what he had to do to keep UAB running successfully.

No business leader wants to see their endeavors fail, and Dr. Watts wants only the best for UAB and Birmingham. He's had to set emotion aside to make a hard decision to support the institution he wants to see thrive. Business leaders who make tough decisions are the kind of leaders we need to move forward. Under Dr. Watts' leadership, the future of UAB is in excellent hands.

Bob Luckie III
Birmingham
Huntsville Set To Host 'Future City' Competition

Future generations of scientists and engineers will be competing in the Rocket City next month in the Future City Competition.

The Alabama regional finals for the 22nd annual Future City Competition will take place at UAH on January 17, 2015.

DiscoverE, a coalition of engineering professional societies, government agencies and companies, is hosting the event again this year.

Each year competitors are asked to weigh a problem and come up with solutions that could benefit the world.

This year the challenge focuses on finding a way to increase urban agriculture.

Students will use software to create their virtual cities to incorporate their ideas. Then, they will create a physical model with materials costing less than $100.

Regions across the country will hold similar competitions with the winners from each qualifying for the national finals in Washington D.C. in February.

The grand prize winner at nationals gets $7,500 for the organization's STEM program and a trip to Space Camp here in Huntsville.

Some of the participating schools and clubs in the area are Cedar Ridge Middle School in Decatur, Central School in Huntsville, Discovery Middle School in Madison, Monrovia Middle School in Huntsville and Sparkman Middle School in Toney.
Terrestrial Gamma-ray Flashes, More Common Than Previously Thought?

By: Dr. Tony Phillips

Each day, thunderstorms around the world produce about a thousand quick bursts of gamma rays, some of the highest-energy light naturally found on Earth. By merging records of events seen by NASA's Fermi Gamma-ray Space Telescope with data from ground-based radar and lightning detectors, scientists have completed the most detailed analysis to date of the types of thunderstorms involved.

"Remarkably, we have found that any thunderstorm can produce gamma rays, even those that appear to be so weak a meteorologist wouldn't look twice at them," said Themis Chronis, who led the research at the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH).

The outbursts, called terrestrial gamma-ray flashes (TGFs), were discovered in 1992 by NASA's Compton Gamma-Ray Observatory, which operated until 2000. TGFs occur unpredictably and fleetingly, with durations less than a thousandth of a second, and remain poorly understood.

In late 2012, Fermi scientists employed new techniques that effectively upgraded the satellite's Gamma-ray Burst Monitor (GBM), making it 10 times more sensitive to TGFs and allowing it to record weak events that were overlooked before.

"As a result of our enhanced discovery rate, we were able to show that most TGFs also generate strong bursts of radio waves like those produced by lightning," said Michael Briggs, assistant director of the Center for Space Plasma and Aeronomic Research at UAH and a member of the GBM team.

Previously, TGF positions could be roughly estimated based on Fermi's location at the time of the event. The GBM can detect flashes within about 500 miles (800 kilometers), but this is too imprecise to definitively associate a TGF with a specific storm.

Ground-based lightning networks use radio data to pin down strike locations. The discovery of similar signals from TGFs meant that scientists could use the networks to determine which storms produce gamma-ray flashes, opening the door to a deeper understanding of the meteorology powering these extreme events.

Chronis, Briggs and their colleagues sifted through 2,279 TGFs detected by Fermi's GBM to derive a sample of nearly 900 events accurately located by the Total Lightning Network operated by Earth Networks in Germantown, Maryland, and the World Wide Lightning Location Network, a research collaboration run by the University of Washington in Seattle. These systems can pinpoint the location of lightning discharges -- and the corresponding signals from TGFs -- to within 6 miles (10 km) anywhere on the globe.

From this group, the team identified 24 TGFs that occurred within areas covered by Next Generation Weather Radar (NEXRAD) sites in Florida, Louisiana, Texas, Puerto Rico and Guam. For eight of these storms, the researchers obtained additional information about

See next page
atmospheric conditions through sensor data collected by the Department of Atmospheric Science at the University of Wyoming in Laramie.

"All told, this study is our best look yet at TGF-producing storms, and it shows convincingly that storm intensity is not the key," said Chronis, who will present the findings Wed., Dec. 17, in an invited talk at the American Geophysical Union meeting in San Francisco. A paper describing the research has been submitted to the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society.

Scientists suspect that TGFs arise from strong electric fields near the tops of thunderstorms. Updrafts and downdrafts within the storms force rain, snow and ice to collide and acquire electrical charge. Usually, positive charge accumulates in the upper part of the storm and negative charge accumulates below. When the storm's electrical field becomes so strong it breaks down the insulating properties of air, a lightning discharge occurs.

Under the right conditions, the upper part of an intracloud lightning bolt disrupts the storm's electric field in such a way that an avalanche of electrons surges upward at high speed. When these fast-moving electrons are deflected by air molecules, they emit gamma rays and create a TGF.

About 75 percent of lightning stays within the storm, and about 2,000 of these intracloud discharges occur for each TGF Fermi detects.

The new study confirms previous findings indicating that TGFs tend to occur near the highest parts of a thunderstorm, between about 7 and 9 miles (11 to 14 kilometers) high. "We suspect this isn't the full story," explained Briggs. "Lightning often occurs at lower altitudes and TGFs probably do too, but traveling the greater depth of air weakens the gamma rays so much the GBM can't detect them."

Based on current Fermi statistics, scientists estimate that some 1,100 TGFs occur each day, but the number may be much higher if low-altitude flashes are being missed.

While it is too early to draw conclusions, Chronis notes, there are a few hints that gamma-ray flashes may prefer storm areas where updrafts have weakened and the aging storm has become less organized. "Part of our ongoing research is to track these storms with NEXRAD radar to determine if we can relate TGFs to the thunderstorm life cycle," he said.
Gamma Ray Storms... in Your Backyard

By: Christina Boyes

Thunder and lightning inspire awe, imagination, and deep respect. They number among Nature’s most visible and powerful forces. The raw power of electrical bursts in thunderstorms inspired man’s use of electricity. That’s not the only energy these storms produce, however; these storms also create gamma rays – something science only discovered in the 1990s.

But how often?

Physicists studying the existence of gamma ray bursts, also called TGFs or terrestrial gamma-ray flashes, tackled this question head-on. Dr. Themis Chronis, a research associate at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, is one of the scientists pursuing answers to this question. His findings are eye-opening.

“Radar provides the answer. Any garden variety storm produces TGFs. Even tiny ones that no-one would expect,” he stated in a recent interview. He based his assertion on the research his team conducted using Very Low Frequency lightning detection networks and nine NEXRAD Doppler radar units, as well as data from NASA’s Fermi Gamma-ray Burst Monitor. Chronis, together with Dr. Michael Briggs and a team of researchers including experts from NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center, Max-Planck Institute in Germany, and numerous other institutions, examined the data from two dozen coastal storms that showed gamma ray emissions.

The convective strength of storms that produced gamma ray emissions varied from marginal to deep. In short, no characteristic set storms with TGFs apart from those without. The researchers theorize that every storm may produce these flashes, but that the atmosphere may prevent their detection. Most TGFs reported arose from the highest parts of a storm – between 7 and 9 miles high. This may be because TGFs only occur at these heights, or because the equipment could only detect them at these heights.

It’s possible that all intracloud lightning produces TGFs. If true, this could radically change our understanding of thunderstorms. It’s not the first scientific finding about thunderstorms to shake the scientific community in recent years, either. Researchers recently found that beams of antimatter occur above thunderstorms. Briggs and his team found something else of interest in their recent study, as well. TGF bursts produce radio waves similar to those generated by lightning. This finding can help accurately track the existence of TGFs in future storms.

What scientists aren’t clear about is the mechanism behind gamma ray bursts. These powerful events normally take place in space, and the reason they transpire on Earth is unknown at present. Lightning just got a little more exciting...
AMC partners with local university

By Megan Cotton

A new work-share initiative will allow supply chain management employees to take classes in the morning and work in the afternoon.

The U.S. Army Materiel Command and The University of Alabama in Huntsville hosted a signing ceremony at the Bob Jones Auditorium Jan. 7, launching the first for-credit graduate certificate program in supply chain management.

"We believe it is very smart to partner with academia to further develop our government employees," said AMC Deputy Commander, Lt. Gen. Patricia McQuistance. "This program offers an immediate and significant return on investment. Throughout the course the students will gain knowledge from the classroom, guided by the faculty and their mentors, and be able to immediately apply it to their everyday operations."

The collaboration between AMC and UAH will train 20 selected civilians beyond Army specific-logistics to the greater supply chain management process using best practices from industry. The three-semester program will start Jan. 14, and end in December 2015.

"This program directly supports AMC's strategic priorities, particularly optimizing the global supply chain and developing adaptive Army leaders," said Clay Bradley, AMC Logistic and Technology Program Manager. "We expect individuals to become more innovative in developing and sustaining readiness solutions through the world-class supply chain management practices explored in the program."

The program will go beyond traditional logistics and focus on developing critical thinking skills in order to understand the whole process and develop solutions before problems form.

"We want people to have a better understanding of the end-to-end supply chain and see the problems or gaps to correct those before they become an issue," said Bradley. "By investing in AMC's human capital, we ensure the workforce, organization, and the Army is equipped to meet future readiness challenges."

At the conclusion of the AMC--UAH certificate program, the academic credit earned may then be applied to a M.S. in Supply Chain and Logistics Management for those candidates who choose to continue studies on their own.

"The collaboration that exists among the Army, Redstone Arsenal and UAH has been built on decades of quality results and trust," said UAH President Robert Altenkirch. "Our faculty understands the important role that UAH has with its academic and research partners, and they work extremely hard to ensure the success of our graduates, as well as the value our alumni bring to the workplace by making immediate contributions to the workplace."

See next page
Caron St. John, dean of the university's College of Business Administration, said UAH is ideally suited to provide the quality instruction needed by the Army and contractors in the region. She cites the college's extensive capabilities and experience in supply chain management.

"Our college has deep research capability in supply chain and logistics management and experience working with AMC on supply chain matters. Also, we have been involved in supply chain and logistics education for many years, with particular focus on working professional graduate students," St. John said. "These capabilities, coupled with our accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International) prepare us to be a strong collaborator with AMC on the custom delivery of this graduate certificate."

AMC officials said this certification program will be focused on, but not limited to, Army DoD civilian career programs - supply management, materiel maintenance management, transportation and distribution management, as well as ammunition management.
New agreement: UAH teaches supply chain management to Arsenal employees

By Shevaun Bryan

Leaders from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and the United States Army Materiel Command (AMC) signed an agreement to put Arsenal employees back in the classroom. “We’re executing an agreement to offer a supply chain management certificate program,” said Robert Altenkirch, president of the university.

“We have got incredible technology that we’ve invested in,” said Patricia McQuistion, Deputy Commanding General for the AMC. “This is the complementary investment in our workforce to really get the best out of that technology.”

Twenty AMC employees self-nominated, and were then approved by their superiors and had to meet UAH criteria to be accepted. The program takes a year to complete, and once they get their certification, they can put it towards a higher degree.

“It’s a standalone program that feeds into the masters program,” said Altenkirch.

The program is fully funded by the Army Materiel Command.
Army, UAH begin new supply chain management graduate program

By Bayne Hughes

The U.S. Army Materiel Command and the University of Alabama in Huntsville announced today the first for-credit graduate certificate program in supply chain management. AMC and UAH’s College of Business Administration are reviewing applications for the three-semester program that begins with spring semester at Redstone Arsenal.

The program will train the Army civilian workforce beyond Army specific-logistics in the greater supply chain management process, using best practices from industry. The program will go beyond traditional logistics. It will focus on developing critical thinking skills in order to understand the whole process and develop solutions before problems form. AMC officials said this certification program will be focused on, but not limited to, Army Department of Defense civilian career programs in supply management, materiel maintenance management, transportation and distribution management, as well as ammunition management. Academic credit earned in the graduate certificate program may then be applied toward a master’s degree in supply chain and Logistics Management.
Regina Benjamin, former U.S. surgeon general, to be MLK ceremony keynote speaker at UAH

By Paul Gattis

Dr. Regina Benjamin, who served as U.S. surgeon general from 2009-2013, will be the keynote speaker for the annual Martin Luther King Jr. program at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Benjamin, a native of Mobile, will speak at UAH on Jan. 15 at the University Center. The event will include a luncheon and, from 2-3 p.m., an audience Q&A.

Benjamin was appointed the 18th surgeon general by President Obama, overseeing the operational command of 6,700 uniformed public health officers around the world. According to the surgeon general's website, Benjamin focused her attention on prevention. Under her leadership, implementation of the National Prevention Strategy in 2011 became a reality, providing an unprecedented opportunity to shift the nation from a focus on sickness and disease to one based on wellness and prevention.

Benjamin is the founder and former CEO of the Bayou LaBatre Rural Health Clinic located in Mobile County.

She is former associate dean for Rural Health at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine in Mobile and past chair of the Federation of State Medical Boards of the United States. In 1995, she was the first physician under age 40 and the first African-American woman to be elected to the American Medical Association Board of Trustees.

She served as president of the American Medical Association Education and Research Foundation and chair of the AMA Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs. In 2002, she became the first African-American female president of a state medical society in the United States when she assumed leadership of the Medical Association State of Alabama.

The program is free to UAH students and all other north Alabama college students, though students must register to attend. Tickets for UAH employees are $15 while general public tickets are $25.
UAH biologists pour over results from successful crystal experiment from ISS

By Beth Jett

A team of biologists from UAH is hoping for the start of big things this year from an experiment they sent to the International Space Station last April.

The results came back in October and the team has been working feverishly to process them. It’s a huge amount of data for a project aimed at improving drugs to stop various common diseases.

UAH Biology Professor Joe Ng and his colleagues are breathing easier now after working non-stop over the holidays with the present from space.

“It was a mixed blessing,” said Ng with a nervous smile.

He’s talking about a huge cache of results from microscopic crystals he and his team sent last April to grow at the ISS.

“This is the first time we’ve actually sent hundreds of samples up there and over 90 percent of them actually gave out terrific results,” said Ng.

It’s what he and his colleagues were hoping for as they try to dissect the molecular composition of bacteria that cause several miserable human diseases.

Unfortunately, the results came in at the beginning of the holidays.

“It was a little bit difficult to focus and get things done very rapidly,” said Ng.

The team had 30 days to process the results and turn around a report of the findings to their colleagues.

In short, the crystals grew for six months in microgravity, absent of convection, gravity and other variables on earth.

Now, the biologists are using X-rays to defract the crystals. Then, they’ll use mathematical calculations to figure out the composition of the molecules.

Understanding that composition could give scientists what they need to create blockers to stop the molecules from going rogue and causing sickness in humans.

See next page
“This is the making of an antibiotic,” said Ng. “This is a pretty competitive field as well too and any type of molecules or work that has a potential drug target is of big pharmaceutical interest.”

He added this is a significant development in a race against other countries, such as Japan and China, trying to come up with better medicine to benefit the world.

The team plans to submit applications and paperwork to send up another experiment aimed at the Ebola virus.

The biologists would work to figure out the weaknesses in the Ebola virus that could be manipulated in order to kill it.
2015 should be the 'Year of the Innovator' in Huntsville/North Alabama: opinion

By: Bob Gathany

Advanced manufacturers such as Remington Outdoors and the ever-expanding Toyota Motor Manufacturing engine plant are beginning to bring the diversity that the North Alabama economy needs to insulate itself from an expected downturn in defense spending and overall government belt-tightening.

Chamber of Commerce CEO Chip Cherry told AL.com this week that Huntsville is in competition for 44 major projects, meaning the region has meaningful potential in the job recruitment pipeline.

But of equal or greater importance, Huntsville has laid the groundwork to make innovation and entrepreneurship a key part of the area's overall economic growth in 2015.

Consider these developments:

- BizTech, the granddaddy of Huntsville incubators, has found new life under interim director Bob Ludwig and new landlords Larry and Kimberly Lewis of PROJECTXYZ. Its cooperation with the Women's Business Center of North Alabama and MindGear Labs enables it to provide a quality launchpad for small business.

- Huntsville West, a small-business incubator started at the former West Huntsville Elementary by 24-year-old inventor Brandon Kruse, will be up and running as well.

- Rocket Hatch, a non-profit created to encourage out-of-the-box innovators, took wing with its "Will This Fly?" startup pitch competition in November.

- The Clinton Row Project transformed a once-ugly storage facility downtown, bringing new retail options to the city's center thanks to Downtown Huntsville Inc. and Redstone Federal Credit Union.

- The University of Alabama in Huntsville, which has demonstrated great success in its relationships with companies in nearby Cummings Research Park, is starting a high-tech business incubator on campus, supported by the university's expansive business development, technical and scientific resources.

Perhaps the most exciting story of 2015 will be the City of Huntsville's effort to give existing business and high-tech startups a literal boost by creating a high-speed fiber-optic Internet network that will offer the kind of bandwidth that Chattanooga has used to attract tech companies.

Huntsville, after all, has a well-deserved reputation for innovation. The genius gathered here in the Apollo era grew garage companies into major employers that power our economy even today. The late Mark Smith's tinkering with modems blossomed into Adtran, a world leader in

See next page
telecom technology. Jim Hudson's vision has made Huntsville a petri dish for startups at the HudsonAlpha Center for Biotechnology.

We urge city leaders move ahead with all deliberate speed on our own "Gig City" project, and all the local governments and business support organizations in our region to work in partnership to create a new atmosphere of excitement for entrepreneurism.

Such jobs, created handful by handful in small companies with large potential, will boost our Rocket City to new levels of success.
Georgia Tech, Clemson get behind UCF-led manufacturing project

By Paul Brinkman

Five key research universities have signed up to support a project spearheaded by University of Central Florida aimed at getting a $110 million federal photonics contract that would be centered in Osceola County.

The consortium of universities includes Georgia Tech, Clemson, University of Alabama-Huntsville and University of Illinois.

The photonics project is related to the recent awarding of a contract from Osceola County to Skanska USA to build a $70 million facility, the Florida Advanced Manufacturing Research Center, near Kissimmee. There are high hopes for the center, with some estimates projecting it could attract up to 80,000 jobs to the area over the coming years.

The photonics portion of the project would be a federal program called the Integrated Photonics Institute for Manufacturing Innovation. (IMI)

The IMI project has several other teams lined up nationally to compete for it, and the government is expected to ask for proposals from finalists by Jan. 16.

Here's more from the UCF news release:

The five university partners have formed PRISM—the Photonics Research Institute for Sustainable Manufacturing—to focus their assets and expertise on an industry-led, not-for-profit effort centered in the Southeastern U.S. but with national reach.

With confirmed interest of more than 55 companies spanning the entire value-chain of integrated photonics, PRISM is seeking additional interested partners to participate in development of an agenda of priority challenges in the evolution of integrated photonics. PRISM is gearing up to submit a full proposal by March 31.

The Department of Defense will award $110 million to the winner of the IP-IMI, which will bridge the gap between basic research and product development. Proposers are required to make an equal investment in the project. PRISM is anchored by $120 million in investments already committed by the University of Central Florida, Osceola County, the Florida High Tech Corridor Council and Enterprise Florida in a 100,000-square-foot state of the art advanced manufacturing research facility being built in Osceola County. That facility is managed by the International Consortium for Advanced Manufacturing Research (ICAMR), a non-profit industry-led consortium.

See next page
PRISM is led by Winston Schoenfeld, who currently serves as director of the crystalline silicon (c-Si) branch of the Photovoltaic Manufacturing Consortium (PVMC), and was responsible for the establishment of the first industry-led domestic manufacturing consortium for c-Si photovoltaics. He also serves as director of the Solar Technologies Research Division at UCF’s Florida Solar Energy Center, and is an associate professor of optics at CREOL, The College of Optics & Photonics. Schoenfeld has a broad background that spans both academia and industry, including high-tech startups, uniquely positioning him to lead this effort across industrial, academic, and government sectors.

The competition seeks to strengthen the U.S. manufacturing base by developing innovations utilizing photonics circuits and identifying and overcoming obstacles in fabrication, packaging, testing and validation.

Osceola County’s more than $61 million investment for design, construction and equipment costs associated with the facility in addition to the land, makes pursuit of the grant more feasible, officials said.

Additional collaborators have the opportunity to help shape PRISM’s response to the federal call to provide national leadership in establishing a robust and vital integrated photonics industry.

Securing federal funding for PRISM would add to the roughly 30,000 photonics-related jobs in the state, said Alex Fong, president of the Florida Photonics Cluster. While a 2009 report by The Corridor and Florida Photonics Cluster put the gross regional product at $3.65 billion and sales of these companies at $7.27 billion, the national impact of the industry rises to more than $3 trillion.
Stillman will cut attendance costs for students this fall

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Stillman College plans to reduce its cost of attendance by about $5,000 in fall 2015 in the hope that making college more affordable will attract more students.

"If you look at national statistics, you see a lot of schools are having declining enrollments. One of the main reasons for declining enrollment is affordability," Stillman President Peter Millet said.

In a letter to students last Monday, Millet said the annual cost of tuition, room and board would decrease from roughly $22,500 to $17,500 in the fall for full-time students. Millet sent a similar letter to faculty and staff announcing the change. Most of the reduction would come from a decrease in the tuition rate, he said.

Currently at Stillman, annual tuition is $13,548, meals are $3,350, and housing ranges from $2,300 to $3,404 depending on the residence hall, according to the college catalog. "You should be able to go to school without going into the proverbial poorhouse," Millet said. "If we lower the tuition, we are going to increase the number of students who are able to go to school. The number of students who are able to go to school will be able to offset the decrease in tuition."

The decrease is a balancing act between the revenue the small private college needs to operate and what students can afford.

"The theory is that you have lots of people who cannot afford to go to school for $20,000 to $30,000 a year," Millet said.

But if the cost of attendance was reduced to $15,000 to $18,000, many who are now priced out of college might reconsider the option of higher education.

The move would make Stillman among the cheaper four-year institutions in the state, based on 2014-15 tuition rates. The median annual tuition for historically black colleges and universities in Alabama is roughly $12,000, based on figures for the 2014-15 academic year. For public four-year institutions in the state, the median tuition in 2014-15 is $9,088 for residents and $17,435 for out-of-state students, based on figures compiled by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education for the current academic year.

"You can't keep doing things the same way and hoping for a different result," Millet said, noting national trends of

See Stillman | 4A
increasing tuition and declining enrollment. "Increasing tuition more is not likely to increase enrollment."

The announcement of the reduction follows similar efforts earlier this year to mitigate the cost of attendance and attract new students.

With a similar goal in mind, Millet announced plans earlier this year to offer partial scholarships for housing and tuition for community college graduates seeking four-year degrees.

While the decision to reduce the cost of attendance is a financial strategy aimed at growing enrollment, Millet said it is also inspired by his service-minded vision for the private school.

"One of the main things I am a proponent of is communities," Millet said. "When a student receives a college degree it influences more than just that individual. It is also going to have a positive effect on that family and the community."

Millet argued a college degree will continue to be a core factor in a student's ability to earn a living.

"If you look at projections in the business world in the coming years, the majority of jobs are going to require education beyond a high school diploma," he said.

Stillman began evaluating the viability of a tuition decrease about a year ago, Millet said.

"We didn't just come up with the idea in theory, we ran a number of scenarios," Millet said. "We have to be in a position where we can live with the worst-case scenario, and we were able to."

Millet received authorization from the board of trustees at the fall board meeting in October.

"They like the part about making the college more affordable, but their job is to look at things from all angles. So they raised some very good questions and gave us additional topics to explore," Millet said.

Stillman's enrollment in fall 2014 was 917 full-time students. Millet hopes enrollment will increase to at least 1,000 for the beginning of the 2015 academic year.

It will likely take a couple of years to evaluate whether the decrease in cost is attracting more students, Millet said.

The college plans to increase its marketing and recruitment efforts in conjunction with the tuition decrease. This fall will also see the rollout of a new retention plan by the college. More details of the retention plan will be released in the spring, Millet said.

"It's critical that we get them in but it is more important that we help them graduate," Millet said.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.
Stillman College lowers tuition by $5K

By: Ryan Phillips

While colleges around the country continue the trend of raising tuition, one college in West Alabama is dropping its rates.

Stillman College, a private college in Tuscaloosa, announced that students will pay about $5,000 less a year for tuition, according to a report from Fox 6. The report cited schools leaders, who made the decision in an effort to draw new students to the school.

The college currently has around 917 students, with tuition at $13,500 per year, along with meals and housing that adds another $7,000, the report said.

The drop is expected to take place in August 2015

"We hope that all of these students in the state of Alabama and beyond also take a look at Stillman. And now that you can get a good quality four year undergraduate education at a price that will be affordable for the families," Director of Admissions Joseph Tinsley, said
Samford closes on $58 million purchase of Southern Progress HQ

By Bryan Davis

Samford University has closed on the purchase of Time Inc.'s Southern Progress campus. The Birmingham college acquired the 28-acre campus for $58 million, according to Jefferson County public records.

Time announced in May its intentions to sell the campus.

In early November, Samford signed a letter of intent to purchase the campus, which includes three buildings totaling 398,000 square feet, along with 1,000 parking spaces.

In December, Samford's board of trustees approved the purchase.

Samford plans to use the two buildings closest to its current campus off of Lakeshore Drive. The school said it would likely relocate all programs of the College of Health Sciences, including the McWhorter School of Pharmacy, Ida V. Moffett School of Nursing, School of Health Professions and School of Public Health.

Some of the space may be available for commercial rent.

Southern Progress intends to remain on the campus. Time Inc. is expected to sign a long-term lease, and the company's various brands will relocate to the easternmost building on the campus. Samford's purchase of the campus is part of a long-term investment strategy that started in March with the purchase of 600 University Park for $19.7 million.
Former UAB coach Bill Clark may be a candidate for LSU's defensive coordinator job

By Mike Herndon

A new name has emerged in the search for a new defensive coordinator after John Chavis' departure for Texas A&M, as NOLA.com reported Tuesday that former UAB coach Bill Clark is among the potential candidates being discussed.

Clark led UAB to a 6-6 record in his first year as coach this season before the program was disbanded. Before joining the Blazers, he guided Jacksonville State to an 11-4 record and FCS quarterfinal berth and spent five years as South Alabama's defensive coordinator.

Clark could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

The Tigers have also reportedly spoken with Penn State defensive coordinator Bob Shoop and were expected to interview Oklahoma defensive coordinator Mike Stoops. Alabama linebackers coach Kevin Steele is also thought to be a potential candidate.

One candidate reportedly no longer in the running is former USC and NFL defensive coordinator Clancy Pendergast. Sources told NOLA.com that Pendergast did not have enough familiarity with the SEC for LSU coach Les Miles to consider him.
Dismissed UGA defensive lineman enrolls at UA

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

The University of Alabama issued two statements Wednesday explaining the enrollment of Jonathan Taylor, who was dismissed from the University of Georgia in the summer of 2014 after an arrest on domestic violence charges, as part of UA’s 2015 signing class.

Taylor, a 6-foot-5, 335-pound junior college transfer from Millen, Ga., who plays on the defensive line, was arrested on a charge of aggravated assault/family violence. Local police said Taylor “choked” and “struck with a closed fist” a 5-foot-11, 170-pound female victim.

Earlier in 2014, Taylor was one of four Georgia football players arrested for theft by deception for “double-cashing” meal reimbursement checks. For that incident Taylor received a pretrial diversion treatment and community service.

Domestic violence perpetrated by athletes, particularly football players, has been in the forefront of the news since former Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice knocked out his then-fiancee in an Atlantic City, N.J., elevator. In response, the National Football League indefinitely suspended Rice and made a major public relations push to raise awareness of domestic violence and sexual assault, including promotion for the website nomore.org.

Alabama head coach Nick Saban did not make a comment on Taylor’s admission to UA, but the university did release the following statement:

“Jonathan Taylor was admitted to the University of Alabama following the same procedures that the UA Admissions office uses to evaluate any student who has dealt with legal issues. The admissions process includes representatives from academic, legal, student affairs, student conduct, UAPD and counseling. Athletics is not involved in the admissions process. Taylor’s continued enrollment depends on his ability to fulfill all requirements the university has specifically mandated for him during his time as a UA student.”

UA director of athletics Bill Battle also issued a statement.

“One of our priorities is to make every effort to help develop young people into well-adjusted, well-rounded people,” Battle said. “In this particular situation, we thoroughly investigated numerous sources regarding the young man. I had extensive discussions with several people who have been very close to him, including a lengthy visit with this young man.

“Our coaches and I feel he is worthy of a second chance at completing his college football career at this level, and that he fully understands the position in which he has placed himself. All of us in the university community have a role in helping student-athletes reach their potential — in competition, in the classroom and in life. It’s important to note that the young man will become a part of our program after going through an extensive process conducted by the University. As one of our state’s most high-profile entities, we are acutely aware of our responsibility to the University, our student-athletes, our community and our state.”

Taylor is the second student-athlete in as many years to be accepted into Alabama and onto the football team after legal troubles. Junior defensive end D.J. Pettway was dismissed from Alabama in February 2013 after being arrested and charged with two counts of second-degree robbery. Pettway rejoined the team in January 2014.

Recently asked about the progress Pettway made in the past year, Saban,
with an eye towards Taylor's situation, spoke passionately about the benefits of student-athletes being given second chances.

"There's always a lot of criticism out there when somebody does something wrong, everybody wants to know, 'How are you going to punish the guy?'" Saban said. "But there's not enough -- for 19- and 20-year-old kids -- people out there saying, 'Why don't you give them another chance?' So I'm going to give a speech right now about this.

"Where do you want them to be? Guy makes a mistake. Where do you want them to be? Want them to be in the street? Or do you want them to be here, graduating?"

"When I was over there at the Nagurski (Award banquet), Muhsin Muhammad, who played 15 years for the Carolina Panthers, played for me at Michigan State. Everybody in the school, every newspaper guy, everybody was killing a guy because he got in trouble and said there's no way he should be on our team. I didn't kick him off the team, I suspended him, I made him do stuff. He graduated from Michigan State, he played 15 years in the league, he's the president of a company now and he has seven children and his oldest daughter goes to Princeton. So who was right?

"I feel strong about this now, really strong. About all the criticism out there about everybody who is 19 years old and makes a mistake and you all kill them. And then some people won't stand up for them. So my question to you is, where do you want them to be? Want to condemn them to a life sentence? Or do you want a guy to have his children going to Princeton?"

The Tuscaloosa News has learned that there were conditions placed upon Taylor's admission into the university, including some which were to be met prior to him applying to school and others that will be ongoing during his time on campus.

Chuck Conley, who was Taylor's coach at Jenkins County High School, said he's happy Taylor will get another chance at an education and a higher quality of life.

"I know he's stubbed his toe a time or two, but I don't know anybody that hasn't," Conley said.

Conley recalls Taylor as a caring individual who got caught up being a small fish in a big pond.

"The folks that are going to read the media, the stuff that you guys write, they don't know Jonathan and they're going to take what I say with a grain of salt and say, 'Yeah, you're just sticking up for him,'" Conley said. "They don't know Millen, Ga., where he's from. You're talking about a town with, what, three stop lights in it. You're talking about a naive young man. I don't even know if he has his driver's license. You're talking about a kid that's sheltered, and he gets off into a big environment and, in my opinion, gets led astray a time or two. You get up there and you have people that want to be associated with you ... it's just a lot to throw at a young man that's never been anywhere."

Taylor's charges have not yet been adjudicated, but Conley said he is confident that the whole story hasn't been told.

"The Jonathan that I know, I would trust with my grandchildren, my daughter," Conley said. "I have three daughters and six grandchildren, and I'd leave him with them for the weekend any time, any place.

"I am certain that the whole story hasn't come out and he hasn't gotten a fair shake on this. I'm 100 percent certain that everybody doesn't know what the whole story. And some will never know. And it wouldn't matter if you told some folks the whole story. They're not going to buy into it."

Conley is just glad he has another opportunity.

"My advice to him would be to work hard, do right and let tomorrow take care of itself."

Reach Aaron Sutliff at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
Experienced
Duckworth has
been there before

Dana Duckworth has been there before. She knows the emotions that come before a gymnastics meet begins, as a competitor and as a coach. She has felt the butterflies that come before a season opener, or a national championship.

"I used to get nervous before a meet, especially when I was young and I hadn’t figured out yet that it wasn’t all about me," Duckworth said on Tuesday as she put in final preparations for another season, one that will be the same — but very, very different.

This time, Duckworth will be entering the arena as the head coach of the program that she has been affiliated with in other roles for 20 years. On Friday night, no matter how she tries to deflect it, the spotlight will be on her as she steps into a new role.

So what is her reaction?
"I’m calm," she said. "I’m calm because I know we are prepared. Does that mean we are where we will need to be in March and April? Of course not. But we shouldn’t be, yet. But I feel good about our preparations, and I feel very good about our depth. I feel like on every rotation, we can go nine or 10 deep and that hasn’t always been the case."

That’s the team-oriented Dana Duckworth talking. But what about the Dana Duckworth who, on Friday night, will become only the second head coach (for the third, depending on whether you consider Sarah and David Patterson as one coaching entity) in Alabama gymnastics history? Every head coach in college athletics walks in a shadow. Nick Saban is many things, but one aspect is that he is heir to Paul "Bear" Bryant’s legacy as the representation of Alabama football. That doesn’t diminish Saban. Seven coaches in between also stood in that shadow. Some succeeded to a degree, some failed. And the next coach will stand in Saban’s very lengthy shadow as well, and Bryant’s, and Wallace Wade’s. The story is the same for Anthony Grant and Jay Seawell, Kristy Curry and Patrick Murphy. All are heirs to the work of others.

There’s a twist in Duckworth’s story. She follows her own coach, the one who actually brought the program to life from nothing. The challenge could be daunting — but Duckworth seems ready. She has succeeded in athletic competition — a two-time NCAA individual champion in 1990 and 1992 — and in life as a wife and mother. And, as head coach at Alabama, she promises to be herself.

"People ask me if it is ‘my’ program now, but that has never been the case for any coach," she said. "I tell the gymnasts the same thing. I tell them it isn’t about being an Alabama gymnast. Even if that has been your dream your whole life, it isn’t about you."

"I tell them to look around," she says, sweeping an arm around the panorama in the Alabama gymnastics practice facility, where every wall bears the images of SEC titles, NCAA All-Americans and multiple national championships. I tell them it isn’t just about getting here. Things are expected of you once you are here. And it’s the same for me."

"But what I will do is be myself. I am going to learn from experience. We all do. But three things about this program will always be the same."

"First, we are going to glorify our Lord in everything we do. Second, we are going to make decisions that are best for our student-athletes in every way. Third, we are going to win."

Her time is at hand. But Dana Duckworth seems, in every way, to be ready for the moment.
ALABAMA ATHLETICS

Lyons the new AD for W. Virginia

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

Shane Lyons, who has held the No. 2 position in the University of Alabama athletics department for more than three years, was named athletics director at West Virginia University on Monday.

The 49-year-old Lyons, who has served as deputy director of athletics and chief operating officer at UA since November of 2011, will be returning to his alma mater and to the state where he was born and grew up. A native of Parkersburg, W.Va., Lyons earned bachelor's and master's degrees in sports management from WVU.

"I can't express to you the excitement I have to come back home," Lyons said. "It became very clear and evident to me when I was looking at this job, it was more than just an athletic director position but it was an opportunity to come home, to come home to the state that I love even though I had left the last 26 years and pursued my athletics career. You never really leave the feelings that you have for the Mountaineers behind."

Lyons was in charge of day-to-day operations of the Alabama athletic department, including oversight of UA's 21 sports teams and compliance issues. He had direct oversight of men's and women's basketball, and associate athletics directors who supervised other sports reported to him.

Lyons said he has no plans to bring any UA athletic department employees with him, but didn't rule out the possibility of some of his Alabama colleagues joining him at some point.

"The first thing I want to do is kind of go there and evaluate the department and where their strengths and weaknesses are from an administrative standpoint," Lyons said. "That is a process that will probably take 90 to 120 days.

"I think we all have a tendency to hire people we know and people we trust. I just don't know at this point. I'm not making any predetermined type of assumptions before I get there. I've got to evaluate the entire program first."

Lyons said he plans to finish out the month at UA before departing for Morgantown, W.Va. He will replace Oliver Luck, who is leaving for a regulatory position in the NCAA.

"I have no doubt that Shane is ready to take on this next opportunity in his career," UA Director of Athletics Bill Battle said in a statement. "Not only is he ready as a professional person, but his ability to work with people will make him an exceptional athletics director."

See Lyons | 3C

See next page 44
LYONS
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1C
director. I wish him nothing but the best at West Virginia.”
Lyons said his time at Alabama taught him lessons that will be valuable in running the WVU athletics department.
“Without question, what you have here is the understanding of the pursuit of comprehensive excellence on the playing field and in the classroom,” he said. “Things can be accomplished if we all work together in unity. One thing I want to bring there is everyone has a role within the athletic department.
“The other thing is it’s all about relationships. That’s something that’s really special here.”
Before arriving at Alabama, Lyons served as associate commissioner at the Atlantic Coast Conference for 10 years, overseeing the compliance, governance and student-athlete programs for the ACC. He also previously served as associate athletics director at Texas Tech for three years.

“Growing up in West Virginia and coaching there, I know it is a very special place and I know how important athletics is to everyone in the state,” Alabama coach Nick Saban said. “Shane is also a West Virginia native so he understands that passion and what the Mountaineers represent.
“We wish Shane and his family the best and we know they’ll be a great fit at West Virginia University.”
Lyons and his wife Emily have two children: son Cameron (15) and daughter Brooke (11).
Tide lands state’s No. 1 recruit

By Andrew Bone
Senior Recruiting Analyst

The University of Alabama football team added two major commitments on Friday at the Under Armour All-America game in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Daron Payne, a five-star defensive tackle from Shades Valley High School, and Kendall Sheffield, Rivals100 cornerback from Fort Bend Marshall High School in Missouri City, Texas, announced their college decisions in front of a national TV audience on ESPN.

Payne chose Alabama instead of Auburn, and Sheffield picked the Crimson Tide instead of Texas A&M. Payne is rated the No. 1 player in the state. He was recruited by Alabama offensive line coach Mario Cristobal. Payne received an offer from Alabama after his sophomore year and has been Alabama’s top target at the position.

Payne said after the Under Armour All-America game he is still likely to take official visits to Auburn and Mississippi State in January. He also will take an official visit to Alabama.

Sheffield may have been a surprise to some as Alabama was the only school of his five choices he did not take an official visit. He took official visits to Florida State, Ohio State, Texas A&M and USC. He attended Alabama’s home win against Auburn in November. He will take an official visit on Jan. 16. He will also run track at Alabama.

Andrew Bone is the senior recruiting analyst for TideSports.com. Follow him on Twitter @AndrewJBone.
Harvard Ideas on Health Care Hit Home, Hard

By: Robert Pear

For years, Harvard’s experts on health economics and policy have advised presidents and Congress on how to provide health benefits to the nation at a reasonable cost. But those remedies will now be applied to the Harvard faculty, and the professors are in an uproar.

Members of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the heart of the 378-year-old university, voted overwhelmingly in November to oppose changes that would require them and thousands of other Harvard employees to pay more for health care. The university says the increases are in part a result of the Obama administration’s Affordable Care Act, which many Harvard professors championed.

The faculty vote came too late to stop the cost increases from taking effect this month, and the anger on campus remains focused on questions that are agitating many workplaces: How should the burden of health costs be shared by employers and employees? If employees have to bear more of the cost, will they skimp on medically necessary care, curtail the use of less valuable services, or both?

“Harvard is a microcosm of what’s happening in health care in the country,” said David M. Cutler, a health economist at the university who was an adviser to President Obama’s 2008 campaign. But only up to a point: Professors at Harvard have until now generally avoided the higher expenses that other employers have been passing on to employees. That makes the outrage among the faculty remarkable, Mr. Cutler said, because “Harvard was and remains a very generous employer.”

In Harvard’s health care enrollment guide for 2015, the university said it “must respond to the national trend of rising health care costs, including some driven by health care reform,” in the form of the Affordable Care Act. The guide said that Harvard faced “added costs” because of provisions in the health care law that extend coverage for children up to age 26, offer free preventive services like mammograms and colonoscopies and, starting in 2018, add a tax on high-cost insurance, known as the Cadillac tax.

Richard F. Thomas, a Harvard professor of classics and one of the world’s leading authorities on Virgil, called the changes “deplorable, deeply regressive, a sign of the corporatization of the university.”

Mary D. Lewis, a professor who specializes in the history of modern France and has led opposition to the benefit changes, said they were tantamount to a pay cut. “Moreover,” she said, “this pay cut will be timed to come at precisely the moment when you are sick, stressed or facing the challenges of being a new parent.”

The university is adopting standard features of most employer-sponsored health plans: Employees will now pay deductibles and a share of the costs, known as coinsurance, for hospitalization, surgery and certain advanced diagnostic tests. The plan has an annual deductible of $250 per individual and $750 for a family. For a doctor’s office visit, the charge is $20. For

See next page
most other services, patients will pay 10 percent of the cost until they reach the out-of-pocket
limit of $1,500 for an individual and $4,500 for a family.

Previously, Harvard employees paid a portion of insurance premiums and had low out-of-pocket
costs when they received care.

Michael E. Chernew, a health economist and the chairman of the university benefits committee,
which recommended the new approach, acknowledged that “with these changes, employees will
often pay more for care at the point of service.” In part, he said, “that is intended because patient
cost-sharing is proven to reduce overall spending.”

The president of Harvard, Drew Gilpin Faust, acknowledged in a letter to the faculty that the
changes in health benefits — though based on recommendations from some of the university’s
own health policy experts — were “causing distress” and had “generated anxiety” on campus.
But she said the changes were necessary because Harvard’s health benefit costs were growing
faster than operating revenues or staff salaries and were threatening the budget for other
priorities like teaching, research and student aid.

In response, Harvard professors, including mathematicians and microeconomists, have dissected
the university’s data and question whether its health costs have been growing as fast as the
university says. Some created spreadsheets and contended that the university’s arguments about
the growth of employee health costs were misleading. In recent years, national health spending
has been growing at an exceptionally slow rate.

In addition, some ideas that looked good to academia in theory are now causing consternation. In
2009, while Congress was considering the health care legislation, Dr. Alan M. Garber — then a
Stanford professor and now the provost of Harvard — led a group of economists who sent an
open letter to Mr. Obama endorsing cost-control features of the bill. They praised the Cadillac
tax as a way to rein in health costs and premiums.

Dr. Garber, a physician and health economist, has been at the center of the current Harvard
debate. He approved the changes in benefits, which were recommended by a committee that
included university administrators and experts on health policy.

In an interview, Dr. Garber acknowledged that Harvard employees would face greater cost-
sharing, but he defended the changes. “Cost-sharing, if done appropriately, can slow the growth
of health spending,” he said. “We need to be prepared for the very real possibility that health
expenditure growth will take off again.”

But Jerry R. Green, a professor of economics and a former provost who has been on the Harvard
faculty for more than four decades, said the new out-of-pocket costs could lead people to defer
medical care or diagnostic tests, causing more serious illnesses and costly complications in the
future.

“It’s equivalent to taxing the sick,” Professor Green said. “I don’t think there’s any government
in the world that would tax the sick.”

Meredith B. Rosenthal, a professor of health economics and policy at the Harvard School of
Public Health, said she was puzzled by the outcry. “The changes in Harvard faculty benefits are
parallel to changes that all Americans are seeing,” she said. “Indeed, they have come to our front door much later than to others.”

But in her view, there are drawbacks to the Harvard plan and others like it that require consumers to pay a share of health care costs at the time of service. “Consumer cost-sharing is a blunt instrument,” Professor Rosenthal said. “It will save money, but we have strong evidence that when faced with high out-of-pocket costs, consumers make choices that do not appear to be in their best interests in terms of health.”

Harvard’s new plan is far more generous than plans sold on public insurance exchanges under the Affordable Care Act. Harvard says its plan pays 91 percent of the cost of services for the covered population, while the most popular plans on the exchanges, known as silver plans, pay 70 percent, on average, reflecting their "actuarial value."

"None of us who protested was motivated by our own bottom line so much as by the principle,” Ms. Lewis said, expressing concern about the impact of the changes on lower-paid employees.

In many states, consumers have complained about health plans that limit their choice of doctors and hospitals. Some Harvard employees have said they will gladly accept a narrower network of health care providers if it lowers their costs. But Harvard’s ability to create such networks is complicated by the fact that some of Boston’s best-known, most expensive hospitals are affiliated with Harvard Medical School. To create a network of high-value providers, Harvard would probably need to exclude some of its own teaching hospitals, or discourage their use.

“Harvard employees want access to everything,” said Dr. Barbara J. McNeil, the head of the health care policy department at Harvard Medical School and a member of the benefits committee. “They don’t want to be restricted in what institutions they can get care from.”

Although out-of-pocket costs over all for a typical Harvard employee are to increase in 2015, administrators said premiums would decline slightly. They noted that the university, which has an endowment valued at more than $36 billion, had an unusual program to provide protection against high out-of-pocket costs for employees earning $95,000 a year or less. Still, professors said the protections did not offset the new financial burdens that would fall on junior faculty and lower-paid staff members.

“It seems that Harvard is trying to save money by shifting costs to sick people,” said Mary C. Waters, a professor of sociology. “I don’t understand why a university with Harvard’s incredible resources would do this. What is the crisis?”