NOVEMBER 17, 2017

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Infant death rate increase ‘troubling’

Why the rise? Experts say several factors at play

Amy Yurkanin ayurkanin@al.com

The infant mortality rate in Alabama increased sharply last year, jumping to more than nine deaths per 1,000 births for the first time since 2008.

Alabama’s infant mortality rate is among the worst in the nation, and much higher than the national average of 5.8 in 2014. Only Mississippi had a higher rate of infant deaths in 2014, the most recent year available for comparison.

The death rate for black infants is more than two times higher than the rate for white infants, a stubborn trend that has persisted for the past several years.

In 2015, the Alabama infant mortality rate measured 8.3 deaths per 1,000 live births, according to the Alabama Department of Public Health.

“I would describe it as very worrisome and daunting,” said assistant state health officer Dr. Grace Thomas.

The leading causes of infant death in Alabama are congenital malformation, premature birth and sudden infant death syndrome. Preterm births before 37 weeks increased in 2016 to 12 percent of pregnancies.

The reasons for the increase are complicated and difficult to identify, Thomas said. Factors include maternal health, access to prenatal care and social variables such as poverty.

Women in impoverished areas might face particular challenges, Thomas said.

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Alabama in 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Live births</th>
<th>Deaths before age 1</th>
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<td>59,090</td>
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“Our infant mortality rate is troubling and disheartening and trending in the wrong direction,” said Dr. Scott Harris, acting state health officer for Alabama. “Challenges include ensuring mothers have access to health care before, during and after pregnancy; reducing premature births; the opioid epidemic; and addressing persistent racial disparities.”

Medicaid pays for almost half the births in Alabama, but coverage typically does not begin until a woman enrolls after becoming pregnant, which might take weeks or even months. Coverage through Medicaid typically ends a few weeks after birth.

Many rural hospitals have ended labor and delivery services in recent years, which might make it difficult for women in these areas to access care.

“I don’t think there is one particular cause you can pinpoint,” Thomas said. “It’s multiple factors.”

### Recent Alabama Infant Death Rates (per 1,000 live births)

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<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
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Source: Alabama Department of Public Health
U.S. Steel seeking to partner with city on high-tech industrial park

Erin Edgemon edgemon@al.com

U.S. Steel is seeking to partner with the city of Birmingham in the development of a high-tech industrial park on 40 acres south of Barber Motorsports Park.

In the development agreement, the city would fund $4.6 million in road construction and grading of the undeveloped property, according to the city. Also, U.S. Steel would transfer a 24-acre portion of the property to the city for the future relocation of the Southern Museum of Flight.

U.S. Steel will give the city of Birmingham approximately 120 acres in a multiple-phase deal, according to officials.

The city has yet to release the proposed agreement to AL.com.

The agreement will have to be approved by the City Council. The council's economic development and budget and finance committees on Monday afternoon approved recommending the agreement to the full council.

City Council is expected to discuss the agreement at its Nov. 21 meeting.

Lisa Cooper, the city's director for economic development, said the park could create 429 jobs and, when in operation, generate $8.5 million in city revenues over 20 years.

She said the city is already working to recruit high-tech companies to the park.

Jammie Cowden, director of real estate for U.S. Steel, said the city is underserved with pad-ready industrial sites, particularly on the eastern side of the city.

Cooper said the city has lost an auto manufacturing facility and health-related operations, including Pack Health and BioGenX, because the city didn't have the infrastructure. She said the city is in discussions with some of those companies now.

City Finance Director Thomas Barnett said the city would have to borrow the money for the development.

City Councilor Lashunda Scales voted against the agreement, expressing concerns over the city borrowing money for the project.

Museum of Flight Executive Director Brian J. Barsanti said the museum is out of space at its current location.

The museum would launch a capital campaign to build a new facility, he said.

"The city would benefit from a new structure raised from private funding," Barsanti said.

He said phase one of the project would cost an estimated $8 million, which would include the building of an 85,000-square-foot museum and the relocation of museum aircraft.

Cooper said it would cost $1.2 million in city funds to develop that portion of the property.
Six inducted into Alabama Business Hall of Fame

William Thornton  wthornton@al.com

Former University of Alabama Athletic Director Bill Battle, sports medicine giant James Andrews, Huntsville aerospace leader Dorothy Davidson, and Birmingham Barons and BASS owner Don Logan are among the six newest inductees into the Alabama Business Hall of Fame.

Also to be inducted are Charles E. Adair of Montgomery and Birmingham’s John D. Johns.

Battle, who recently retired as Alabama AD, is a member of the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame and National Collegiate Licensing Association Hall of Fame.

After his coaching career at Tennessee, Battle founded Collegiate Licensing Co., effectively creating the industry of collegiate licensing. When Battle sold the company to IMG, Collegiate Licensing Co. had earned more than $800 million in royalties representing more than 200 colleges, universities, bowls and conferences.

Along with being the go-to name in sports medicine, Andrews is one of the founding members of Andrews Sports Medicine and Orthopedic Center and co-founder of the American Sports Medicine Institute, where he serves as chairman and medical director. He is also president and chairman of the board of the Andrews Research and Education Foundation. Andrews serves as medical director and orthopedic surgeon for Auburn athletics, and is senior orthopedic consultant for Alabama and the Washington Redskins.

Adair, a graduate of the University of Alabama and the Harvard Business School, is the president of Montgomery’s Kowaliga Capital, an investment management company. He is a member of the board of directors of Tech Data Corp., Torchmark Corp. and Rayonier Advanced Materials.

In 2013, after the death of her husband, Davidson became the CEO and chairman of the board for Davidson Technologies, where she grew the company in size and revenue. She pledged $5 million to the University of Alabama in Huntsville for the construction of an innovation center, funded the construction of the Davidson Center for Space Exploration at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center and pledged $5 million to Auburn University for its student engineering center.

The executive chairman of Protective Life Corp., Johns holds degrees from the University of Alabama, Harvard Law School and Harvard Business School. He also serves on the corporate boards of Regions Financial Corp., Genuine Parts Co. and Southern Company.

Logan has served as CEO of Southern Progress, Time Inc. and chairman of Time Warner Media and Communications. He and his family own the Birmingham Barons and Seek Publishing. In 2010, he and two partners acquired BASS, the world’s largest fishing organization, from ESPN.
Schools request additional $144M

Money would pay for materials, teachers

Trisha Powell Crain  tcrain@al.com

In seeking an additional $144 million for K-12 schools for fiscal year 2019, the chief financial officer for the state school board said most of the money will go straight to local districts to pay for materials and teachers.

CFO Andy Craig gave the breakdown to state board members last week at their work session in Montgomery.

Interim state Superintendent Ed Richardson said the increase is slated for classrooms, and, "That's where the money ought to go."

Of the $144 million, $135 million would go to local districts to pay for materials for classrooms and teachers, Craig said.

More than $130 million of that would pay for increases in the state's Foundation Program, the primary mechanism through which schools are allocated state tax dollars.

Craig will ask lawmakers to release $41 million currently in the Education Advancement and Technology Fund to local school districts as well, bringing the overall increase for local schools to $176 million. Craig said the law allows school officials to use that money
training for board members and other faculty about issues specifically related to special education.

Morton said the line item was added after he and Richardson met with parents and disability advocates in October. “We listened,” Morton said, and these dollars will be put toward raising awareness about special education in Alabama’s schools. No further details were available.

Officials want an additional $200,000 for arts education, over and above the $1.3 million allocation for the current school year.

Board members had questions for Craig and Richardson, asking how at-risk funding is used and whether funding should be increased for teacher scholarships to gain National Board Certification.

Board member Dr. Cynthia McCarty, R-Jacksonville, wants to see an incentive for newly-board-certified teachers to stay in the same school system rather than leave for higher-paying systems.

“I would love for us to do more if possible, especially for our high-need schools, to get these highly-effective teachers in there,” she said.

Richardson said he will bring a final proposal to the board for a vote at its Dec. 14 regular meeting.

Richardson said the department has suffered in the eyes of lawmakers because leaders in the department haven’t been championing public education “across the street,” which is a reference to the statehouse where the Legislature meets when in session.

Richardson said that because 2018 is an election year, education leaders will have to work hard to get this budget approved, acknowledging it is unlikely lawmakers will simply sign off on their request.

Richardson said salary increases are often passed during election years, and each percentage point increase costs around $37 million. There is a finite supply of money, and a raise could take money away from other priorities in the budget.

Though department officials aren’t asking for a raise for teachers, Richardson said it’s always a good idea. The last time public education employees got a raise was 2014, and increases in health insurance premiums wiped out the raise for many.

“Who could argue with teachers getting a (raise)?” Richardson asked. “The question is what percentage could we (afford) and still meet some of these priorities. That’s the issue.”

Richardson said he is going to work hard to get these priorities into the final budget allocation because, “I think these are priorities that will help the schools, and that’s what we ought to be about.”
BIRMINGHAM

But for the bomb, the four would be in their 60s, probably grandmothers. Three were 14 and one was 11 in 1963 when the blast killed them in the 16th Street Baptist Church, which is four blocks from the law office of Doug Jones, who then was 9.

He was born in May 1954, 13 days before the U.S. Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education school desegregation decision. He was 16 when he attended, at this city’s Legion Field, the Alabama Crimson Tide vs. University of Southern California Trojans football game, in which USC’s Sam Cunningham, an African-American all-American, led a 42-21 thumping of the home team, thereby (so goes the much-embellished but true-enough story) advancing the integration of the region through its cultural pulse, college football. Roll Tide.

As a second-year law student Jones cut classes to attend the 1977 trial of one of the church bombers, “Dynamite Bob” Chambliss. In 2001 and 2002, as U.S. attorney, Jones successfully prosecuted two other bombers. Was there resentment about this protracted pursuit of justice? No, he says as he nurses with tea a voice raspy from campaigning, because after 9/11 intervened, punishing domestic terrorism was not controversial.

Today, this son of a steelworker stands between Roy Moore — an Elmer Gantry mixing piety and cupidity: he and his family have done well financially running a foundation — and the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Jeff Sessions.

Moore campaigns almost entirely about social issues — NFL protests, the transgender menace — and the wild liberalism of Jones, a law-and-order prosecutor and deer and turkey hunter who says he has “a safe full of guns.” Jones’ grandparents were members of the miners’ and steelworkers’ unions: Birmingham, surrounded by coal and iron ore, was Pittsburgh — a steel city — almost before Pittsburgh was. He hopes economic and health care issues matter more.

Evangelical Christians who embrace Moore are serving the public good by making ridiculous their pose as uniquely moral Americans, and by revealing their leaders to be especially grotesque specimens of the vanity — vanity about virtue — that is curdling politics. Another public benefit from the Moore spectacle is the embarrassment of national Republicans. Their party having made the star of the “Access Hollywood” tape president, they now are horrified that Moore might become 1 percent of the Senate. Actually, this scofflaw, twice removed from Alabama’s Supreme Court, once for disobeying a U.S. Supreme Court ruling, is a suitable sidekick for the president who pardoned Joe Arpaio, Arizona’s criminal former sheriff. Even after Donald Trump conceded that Barack Obama was born in America, Moore continued rejecting such squishiness.

Absentee ballots are already being cast. Assuming that the Republican governor
African-Americans turned out for Gov.-elect Ralph Northam, a Democrat who, like Jones, invited voters to take a walk on the mild side. Approximately a quarter of Alabamians live in the metropolitan area of Birmingham, which has had an African-American mayor since 1979. National Democrats are helping Jones, but delicately. They rashly treated a Georgia special congressional election as a referendum on the president, and want to avoid that mistake in a state Donald Trump carried by 28 points.

Turnout to the August Republican primary and the September runoff was about 18 and 14 percent, respectively. Next month’s election will occur during many distractions, midway between Thanksgiving and Christmas and, more important, ten days after Armageddon — the SEC championship game. Perhaps an Alabama victory would make the state hanker for a senator worthy of its football team. If so: Roll Tide.

*George Will is a columnist for The Washington Post. Readers can email him at georgewill@washpost.com.*

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does not shred state law by preventing the election from occurring Dec. 12, Republicans’ Senate majority might soon be gone. It has been 21 years since a Democratic Senate candidate won even 40 percent of Alabama’s vote. It has, however, been even longer — not since the George Wallace era — that the state’s identity has been hostage to a politician who assumes that Alabamians are eager to live down to hostile caricatures of them.

Nothing about Moore’s political, financial or glandular history will shake his base, unless the credible accusations of serial pursuit of underage girls are suddenly overshadowed by something his voters consider serious, such as taking sides in the Alabama-Auburn game. Jones’ hopes rest with traditional white Democrats (scarce), Republicans capable of chagrin (scarcer), and African-Americans. They are 27 percent of this state in which “civil rights tourism” (the 16th Street church, Selma’s Edmund Pettus Bridge, Martin Luther King’s Montgomery church, and more) is economically important.

This month, Virginia’s
Adapted athletics director earns honor

By: Staff Report

The director and co-founder of the University of Alabama’s adapted athletics program has earned one of the most prestigious awards bestowed by the school.

Brent Hardin will receive the Frederick Moody Blackmon-Sarah McCorkle Moody Outstanding Professor Award on Friday during a ceremony at the President’s Mansion.

According to a news release, the award is based on a specific accomplishment that is innovative, creative, useful or captures the imagination.

Athletes, coaches and administrators in various adapted sports programs nominated Hardin for his contributions to adapted sport, particularly in growing UA’s infrastructure and reputation, but also for using sport as a vehicle to support all people with disabilities.

Jason Harnett, head coach of the United States Paralympic Wheelchair Tennis team, said Hardin’s contributions to the disabled community are “almost immeasurable” and that Hardin and UA are “transforming and creating the template for success” that other universities should follow.

“The vision of Dr. Hardin has been clear from the beginning: to create the strongest, most reputable and sustainable disabled sporting program in the country,” Harnett said. “In our mind, this goal has been attained, and more.”

Hardin, along with his wife, Paralympian Margaret Stran, launched UA’s adapted athletics program in 2003. Then, the program fielded a women’s wheelchair basketball team, but has since grown to include competitive teams in a variety of sports, as well as non-competitive sporting options to more than 100 UA students.

UA has earned six national championships in wheelchair basketball. Wheelchair tennis has won three national championships.

UA Adapted Athletics will move into its $10 million multi-purpose training facility — the first of its kind on a college campus — at the end of the year.

“I’m thankful for this award, and I’m honored when I consider past faculty winners and their achievements,” Hardin said. “But to me, it’s a team award. Everything I’ve done is a result of hundreds of people who’ve done things to help me.

“I feel really blessed and lucky to have landed at Alabama, a place that cares about students with disabilities and sees adapted athletics as a bright light for the university.”

The award was created by Frederick Moody Blackmon of Montgomery to honor the memory of his grandmother, Sarah McCorkle Moody of Tuscaloosa.

The other semi-finalists for the award included:

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• David Dixon, Robert Ramsay Chair in chemistry and a UA faculty member since 2004, is a leader in computational chemistry. His work has received many professional accolades, including a prestigious 2010 award from the Department of Energy for his contributions. His work relates to research on nuclear energy and the environmental fate of nuclear materials.

• Sara McDaniel, associate professor in the department of special education and multiple abilities, and a UA faculty member since 2011. She is a national leader in research on preventing and treating behavior problems and improving student outcomes and school climate. In 2015, she established the Alabama Positive Behavior Support Office, a statewide center for training and coaching Alabama schools and districts on evidence-based positive behavior support practices.
Judge hears arguments in Rondini case

Defendants seek to have wrongful death suit dismissed

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

A federal judge on Thursday heard arguments in Megan Rondini's family's civil lawsuit against T.J. Bunn Jr., the University of Alabama and UA President Stuart Bell, Tuscaloosa County Sheriff Ron Abernathy and two investigators who worked her case.

Megan Rondini was a 20-year-old UA student when she reported to law enforcement that she was raped by Bunn at his home in 2015. Investigators said there wasn't enough evidence to charge Bunn, and a grand jury that heard the case did not indict him. He has denied the accusation.

Rondini committed suicide eight months after she filed the report. Her family has filed a lawsuit saying the actions of Bunn and law enforcement contributed to her death and that UA violated her rights by not providing her with proper counseling and assistance.

All of the defendants filed motions to have the cases thrown out.

U.S. District Judge R. David Proctor heard from attorneys from each party at a hearing Thursday in Birmingham. He did not issue an immediate ruling, saying, "This is not ripe for decision today."

In a hearing on motions

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RONDINI

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to dismiss, judges aren't considering facts of a case. In this type of hearing, a judge will assume all claims made by a plaintiff are true, because the issue at hand is whether the plaintiff has legal standing to pursue the case.

“My role is to say ‘Have they sufficiently pled a claim?’ not ‘Do I believe the allegation?’” Proctor said.

Proctor will consider arguments made by the attorneys before issuing a ruling and legal analysis. The judge said he understood “the tragic circumstances on all sides” of the case and parties involved.

“We don’t enjoy hearing cases like this, but we have a job to do and will do the dead-level best to do our job,” he said.
Political consultant files defamation lawsuit

By: Stephanie Taylor

A well-known Alabama political consultant has filed a defamation lawsuit against Donald Watkins, a Birmingham attorney who has been outspoken on social media about the Megan Rondini case.

Rondini was a 20-year-old University of Alabama student in 2015 when she told police she was raped by T.J. Bunn after he offered her a ride while she was walking along University Boulevard outside Innisfree Pub. Investigators said they didn’t have evidence to prove a sexual assault occurred, and no charges were filed. Bunn, then 34, has denied the rape allegation.

Rondini moved to her home state of Texas, where a doctor diagnosed her with post-traumatic stress disorder months before she hanged herself in the bathroom of her apartment.

Watkins and many of his Facebook followers believe Bunn escaped prosecution because of his wealth and family connections. He has made several Facebook posts against Bunn, law enforcement officers, Tuscaloosa’s criminal justice system, The Tuscaloosa News and other Alabama media outlets since a national media organization published an online story about the Rondini case in June.

In October and November, Watkins made posts claiming that political consultant Joe Perkins and his Montgomery-based company, Matrix LLC, were responsible for what he called a smear campaign against Rondini and himself. He claimed Matrix worked with The Tuscaloosa News by writing a story and editorial that were published online and in the newspaper in September. He said the company was responsible for hacking his Facebook account and removing followers.

Perkins, who is from Tuscaloosa, filed a suit in Tuscaloosa County Circuit Court on Tuesday, claiming that all of Watkins’ statements are false and asking for a jury trial. He listed “fictitious defendants” in the suit, meaning other individuals could be added as the case continues.

“For weeks, Donald Watkins Sr. has fabricated a series of malicious and harmful lies aimed at me personally and at the firm that provides a livelihood for me, my family, and many others,” Joe Perkins said Wednesday in a statement sent to The News through his attorney, Andrew Campbell of Birmingham firm Campbell Guin LLC. “I intend to recover damages to the full extent allowed by law from both Mr. Watkins and all others who willfully engaged in libel and slander with no basis in fact.”

Watkins said Wednesday that he hasn’t yet been served and hasn’t seen the lawsuit.

“Whenever I am served with it, I will issue my substantive comments on my Facebook page,” he said in an email. “One good thing about being a party to a lawsuit is the fact that it confers subpoena power upon each party. Now, I can dig deeper into Matrix, its clients, its PR operations, and its clandestine role in the Megan Rondini rape case.”

In the lawsuit, Perkins lists five instances that he claims he and his company were defamed by Watkins.

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In an Oct. 29 post, Watkins wrote that Matrix used an Internet hacker to delete more than 1,000 of his Facebook followers and to edit his Wikipedia page to “undermine my credibility as a specially-trained online journalist by removing all references from my public Wikipedia profile to the litany of nationally-recognized landmark legal cases handled by me over the last four decades that exposed police cover-ups, public corruption and gross miscarriages of justice in Alabama.”

Watkins wrote that “Everything in my life has prepared me to dig for the truth and stand up to bullies like Joe Perkins who would obstruct the truth about a rape case for a fee,” a statement that Perkins’ attorney called both false and malicious.

Perkins, in the lawsuit, said that all of those claims are false and some wrongly suggest he was involved in criminal activity.

“Watkins’ statements accuse Plaintiffs of crimes and/or extreme moral delinquency, and have subjected Plaintiffs to disgrace, ridicule, odium and/or contempt,” the lawsuit states. “Demand was made on Watkins on Nov. 3, 2017 to retract the above-reference defamatory statements. Watkins has failed to respond to said retraction letter.”

On Oct. 26 and Oct. 29, Watkins wrote that Matrix “began an endless campaign to smear Megan Rondini, the Rondini family, and me.” In the Oct. 26 post, he wrote that Matrix “got The Tuscaloosa News to publish a July 27, 2017 Bunn family-sponsored attack ad against Megan Rondini and her family” and the September story, which he called pro- T.J. Bunn and “long on verbiage, but short on substance.”

Watkins accused Matrix in an Oct. 4 Facebook post of delivering a flash drive to the Birmingham attorney representing the Rondini family in a wrongful death lawsuit against Bunn, UA, Sheriff Ron Abernathy and the investigators who worked the case.

The drive, Watkins said, included a nude photo of a woman who was not Megan Rondini and a video of her talking about a night out. The Alabama Political Reporter, an online media outlet, later reported that the drive contained a video of Rondini talking about a sexual encounter.

When asked why Watkins’ claims that Perkins was responsible for sending the drive to the Rondinis’ attorney wasn’t mentioned in the lawsuit, Perkins said, through his attorney, that he doesn’t know who sent the drive.

He said it wasn’t addressed in the lawsuit because there is “too much speculation surrounding it” and who had access to it.

On several occasions, Watkins erroneously claimed that The Tuscaloosa News was one of three entities that had the video he alleges was sent to the Rondinis’ attorneys. The video was not part of the investigative file that the newspaper sued to obtain and share with the public, nor has the newspaper ever possessed that video or confirmed that it exists.
“While we cannot speak to the accusations leveled against each other by Watkins and Matrix, we know that Watkins has written total fabrications several times with regard to the newspaper’s reporting about this story,” said Publisher James Rainey. “He also made up a version of events about the placement of an advertisement. Watkins never spoke to anyone at the paper to verify any of his accusations. He claimed collusion between Matrix and the newspaper when no one at the newspaper ever had a conversation with anyone at Matrix about coverage of this story or even about an ad that Matrix placed through a third-party. Watkins’ claims involving the newspaper have been entirely make-believe.”

Rainey said that until the lawsuit was filed and referenced the newspaper with regard to Watkins’ claims, the newspaper did not believe Watkins’ Facebook posts were worthy of a response.

The News declined to print an ad that Matrix tried to place through a third party that advertised a website called deadbeatdonald.com, which details several legal actions involving finances of Watkins’ businesses and an ongoing civil case filed by the Securities and Exchange Commission that alleges he defrauded professional athletes and other investors out of millions of dollars. Watkins called the website a smear campaign and countered each item listed on that website on his Facebook page.

Perkins is asking for a jury to hear the defamation case and award compensatory and punitive damages. Tuscaloosa County Circuit Court Judge John England will preside.
Search committee formed to replace Carl Pinkert

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama’s vice president for research and economic development plans to step down at the end of the year, and the university has formed a search committee to find his successor.

Carl A. Pinkert announced he will step down effective Dec. 31. Pinkert was named vice president for research on Nov. 1, 2013. A year later, the role was expanded to include coordination of economic development efforts at UA. Pinkert said it was premature to discuss his future plans on Friday.

Pinkert came to UA from Auburn University where he had served as associate vice president for research since 2009. Pinkert’s career includes stints at the University of Rochester, the University of Missouri and the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

The University of Alabama announced late last month it was beginning a national search for Pinkert’s replacement. A 10-person committee will work with an outside firm on the search. Graduate School Dean Susan Carvalho will lead the committee’s work.

The other committee members include Shashi Nambisan, executive director of the Alabama Transportation Institute; geography professor Matthew Therrell; Carpantaro Myles, director of research compliance; Jonathan Halbesleben, associate dean for research; Culverhouse College of Commerce chemistry professor Silas Blackstock; School of Social Work Dean Vikki Vander; graduate student Keisha Cook science education professor Dennis Sunal; and nursing professor Norma Cuellar.
UA wins annual food drive contest

Food banks in Tuscaloosa, Auburn benefit

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama students coordinating the Beat Auburn Beat Hunger food drive celebrated with sparkling cider and cookies Wednesday after learning they had won the Iron Bowl-inspired drive, which collected 492,997 pounds of food to benefit regional food banks.

"This year, we really just tried to look at all the people we could bring together for this cause," said UA senior Courtney Charland, who was president of the student effort.

The annual competition collects nonperishable food and monetary donations for the Food Bank of East Alabama in Auburn and the West Alabama Food Bank.

UA collected 260,453 pounds. Auburn University collected 232,544 pounds. Last year, the drive collected around 400,000 pounds of food. UA collected 152,322 pounds in 2016 and Auburn collected 245,000. The totals include monetary donations. Every dollar is equivalent to about 2 pounds of food.

The UA team drew on support from campus groups such as fraternities and sororities, athletes and alumni. The team reached out using social media and events. Some alumni chapters participated in their own challenges with their rival Auburn chapters, Charland said.

"People naturally, with this rivalry, wanted to get behind the university," Charland said.

Each year, the UA team has aspirations for ways to increase participation next year.

"This year, we were finally able to hit a lot of those 'maybe next years,'" she said.

During the 2017 drive, Jean Rykaczewski, executive director of the West Alabama Food Bank, said the UA effort received more monetary support, especially among alumni.

"We can buy a lot of food with that," Rykaczewski said.

The money will be used to buy in-demand foods such as peanut butter and fruit, she said. The foodbank works with 93 agencies in West Alabama.

"That's thousands of people every day that are served," she said.

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FOOD

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The annual drive inspired by the football matchup is a friendly seasonal competition before Thanksgiving, but Rykaczewski said the food bank encourages people to consider the challenge of food insecurity throughout the year.

"Hunger is not just a holiday thing. Hunger is a year-round challenge for a lot of people," she said.
UA to test metal detectors at game

University is evaluating improved security measures

Staff report

Fans attending the University of Alabama's football game on Saturday will be required to pass through metal detectors before entering Bryant-Denny Stadium.

A news release from UA says the move is a proactive effort to evaluate improved security procedures.

Alabama will play Mercer University, with kickoff set for 11 a.m. Gates will open at 9 a.m. The game will be televised by the SEC Network.

The trial will include walk-through metal detectors and wands at selected gates around the stadium. The security measures will be used to enforce existing rules that exclude entry with prohibited items, such as weapons, umbrellas, artificial noisemakers, flags/banners, strollers, computers and more.

The UA news release says measures will be in place to ensure that fans will smoothly flow through the gates. Guests will be asked to remove any metal objects from pockets or clothing before going through the detectors. Those with prohibited items will have to dispose of them or return those items to their cars before entering the stadium.

Metal detectors are now mandatory at NFL and MLB stadiums, and they are in use at several other college stadiums around the country.

In August, the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater began using walk-through metal detectors, and in September, metal detectors were installed at Tuscaloosa’s City Hall.
UA joins earth sciences consortium

Nonprofit group studies extreme weather events

Staff report

The University of Alabama was recently accepted into a nonprofit consortium of more than 100 North American universities focused on research and training in the atmospheric and related Earth system sciences.

UA was one of six new member institutions added in October to the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research, or UCAR.

"Joining UCAR will provide greater opportunities for our researchers to team together with outside agencies to provide forward-thinking solutions and leading-edge education in the area of atmospheric research," said Carl Pinkert, UA vice president for research and economic development.

The consortium manages the National Center for Atmospheric Research with sponsorship by the National Science Foundation. Through its community programs, UCAR supports and extends the capabilities of its academic consortium with training, resources and tools, access to atmospheric data, support for students, and collaborative experiments, workshops, and conferences.

Participating in UCAR will expand research collaborations and educational opportunities for UA students and faculty, said Patricia Sobeyck, director of the Alabama Water Institute and associate provost for academic affairs.

"The accomplishments and interdisciplinary strengths of our science and engineering faculty in remote sensing, hydrological sciences, environmental sciences and related areas are advancing knowledge that will help prepare our state and nation to adapt to extreme weather events," Sobeyck said.
Athletic director Byrne getting job done quietly behind the scenes

The Athletic Director Byrne is quietly doing his job behind the scenes. He is working diligently to ensure the success of the athletic programs. Byrne's dedication and hard work are paying off, as the team's performance is improving.
BYRNE
FROM B1

to promote a lot of positives throughout the athletic department, the organization, the university, our fan base and constituency of people who support the program, cultivating a new generation of supporters for Alabama football and Alabama athletics. I think he’s done a great job so far. I’m very pleased. I’ve been pleased with everybody that we’ve had. I loved Mal (Moore). I loved Bill (Battle). And I love Greg.”

Aside from having to fire and hire a baseball coach, much of this first year in Tuscaloosa for Byrne has been spent learning, evaluating, building relationships and identifying ways for the Alabama athletic department to improve while at the same time being respectful and mindful of the school’s history and tradition.

Upon being hired, Byrne spent time with every Tide coach as well as with campus leaders, trustees and even fans to help him learn about Alabama and to help with figuring out how to improve this already very strong Alabama brand. Byrne’s predecessor, Bill Battle, has helped with that, too. The two speak multiple times per week and Byrne said Battle continues to be a great resource and sounding board.

With help from trusted confidants like Battle, Byrne put together a strategic plan for the next five years called “The Standard” that was recently completed after months of work. It was presented to Alabama’s student-athlete advisory committee on Tuesday and was released publicly on Thursday.

In addition, Byrne recently visited the Green Bay Packers and Dallas Cowboys in order to learn from two of the NFL’s most respected organizations and how they continue to stay ahead of the curve with facilities and fan experience while being mindful of their individual histories.

“We have a lot of strengths,” Byrne said. “I’ve tried to be very respectful of those strengths while at the same time with a new set of eyes saying, ‘What are the things that we need to do for the future?’ We’ve had great history and we’re also under historical times right now that we can’t take for granted. But also understand that college athletics is evolving I think more dramatically than maybe anytime in its history right now. So, as we’re shaping what the future looks like, we need to make sure that we keep that in mind.”

As he was at Mississippi State and Arizona, Byrne is focused on improving fan experience at games, engaging current and prospective fans through tools such as social media and on bettering the resources provided to student-athletes.

Upgrading facilities is another priority. Under Byrne, Arizona underwent more than $100 million in construction and renovation on athletic facilities. And part of that months-long evaluation with The Standard was finding ways to better facilities such as Bryant-Denny Stadium and Coleman Coliseum.

“We’ve been preparing for what we want to do from a facility standpoint,” Byrne said.

“That includes Coleman Coliseum. That includes all of our sports. But it also includes football, Bryant-Denny Stadium. That’s early in the planning stages of what could be ahead for us. ... We’re developing those (plans) right now, a lot of which we’re not ready to talk about publicly. But we’re working behind the scenes to be in a position to hopefully work within the university system and have clearly defined what our priorities will be from a facility standpoint moving forward.”

Byrne’s personality and fundraising ability will help with those projects.

Alabama received a $2 million donation toward future athletic facility enhancements in October and then an anonymous $1 million donation on Thursday.

“I think people skills and developing relationships is so important,” said Jeff Purinton, Alabama’s senior associate athletic director for external operations. “Sometimes people don’t talk about that as much. But Greg’s done an amazing job within a year of really getting to know our coaches, our staff, a lot of our fan base and our donors. And that means a lot. He speaks to everyone that he passes by. And that part of running an organization is huge. It’s sometimes overlooked.
but Greg gets it."

What’s considered one of Byrne’s greatest accomplishments at Mississippi State, though, was helping to instill a belief and confidence throughout the athletic department and the state that Mississippi State could compete at a high level athletically.

And the Bulldogs are still benefiting from Byrne’s first two hires. The first, Cohen, led Mississippi State to the College World Series finals in 2013 and is now the school’s athletic director. The second, Mullen, had Mississippi State ranked 16th nationally heading into Saturday’s matchup with Alabama.

Byrne is proud of that success and acknowledged that it would be fun to be back in Starkville on Saturday and to be able to catch up with some friends like Cohen and Mullen.

But when the game kicked off, the man still affectionately known around Starkville as “The Ninja” was 100 percent pro-Alabama.

“They’ve got a lot of great people over there, just like we do here, and I look forward to getting a chance to say hi to folks,” said Byrne, who received that Ninja nickname because of his stealthy way of conducting coaching searches. “But this is a business trip. We’ll be playing against a very good Mississippi State team. We’ve got to play well and want to go get the win.”
UA resolves chemical storage issue

No injuries or building damage reported

Staff report
A chemical storage issue was resolved without injuries or building damage Thursday at the University of Alabama, according to a UA spokesman. Emergency teams responded to Shelby Hall at UA around 4:30 p.m. Thursday when a freezer storing a potentially hazardous chemical malfunctioned, according to the spokesman. The building was evacuated and people were diverted from the area while responders evaluated the situation. UA officials sent a campus-wide alert letting people know to avoid the area, along with updates throughout the night. Two adjacent structures, the Science and Engineering Complex Building and the

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CHEMICALS
Continued from B1

McMillan Building, were also evacuated as a precautionary measure. University and city of Tuscaloosa response teams worked together to remove the chemical from the building. The freezer was taken to a nearby vacant lot on campus, where it was destroyed during a small, controlled combustion effort around 9:20 p.m. Shelby Hall is home to the department of chemistry and UA research centers and labs. It houses more than 70 research laboratories.
Renowned author to discuss her books

Margaret Atwood honed ‘Handmaid’s Tale’ at UA

By Mark Hughes Cobb
Staff Writer

World-renowned writer Margaret Atwood will read and talk about her work 7-8 p.m. Tuesday at the Bama Theatre.

Tickets for the free event were snapped up within hours of becoming available, according to John Estes, director of the University of Alabama’s undergraduate creative writing program. Atwood’s appearance is part of the 2017-2018 UA Visiting Writers Series, through the College of Arts and Sciences. She’ll sign books afterward, some of which will be available for sale at the Bama.

It’s been 32 years since Atwood held the Coal Royalty Chair of UA’s creative writing program. In the fall of 1985, she’d already become a best-selling and acclaimed writer, but hadn’t yet published the book that made her a household name.

“She was finishing writing ‘The Handmaid’s Tale,’ which then came out in ’86,” said Don Noble, UA English department professor emeritus, and host of the Alabama Public Television series “Bookmark.” He’ll interview his former colleague Tuesday afternoon in the APT studios.

“She was working on the last draft, final revisions. So one of her

See ATWOOD, B3
In interviews, [Atwood] has rejected the idea of writing science fiction, preferring the term speculative fiction, as she says, everything she writes about could happen, given current knowledge, or has historical antecedent. But “Handmaid’s Tale” stands tall among even that pantheon, never having gone out of print, and having been adapted into a 1990 Hollywood film, a 2000 opera, stage shows, a ballet, radio plays, and a Hulu 10-part series, which began in April to effusive praise. It’s recently been renewed for a second season.

Set in Cambridge, the novel’s set in a near-future (for 1986) where a Christian theonomic military dictatorship has overthrown the United States government. In Gilead, human rights have been severely curtailed, especially for women, some of whom are kept strictly for procreative purposes, the “handmaids” of the title. Other women work for the government as “Aunts,” who indoctrinate handmaids.

Atwood’s reportedly been enthusiastic about the Hulu series, assisting with the writing, and making a cameo as an Aunt in the first episode. In interviews, she’s rejected the idea of writing science fiction, preferring the term speculative fiction, as she says, everything she writes about could happen, given current knowledge, or has historical antecedent. In a February 1986 interview with Terry Gross on NPR’s “Fresh Air,” Atwood noted “The U.S. did not start as a liberal democracy; it started as monotheistic theocracy under the Puritans.”

Later in the same talk, she added “What worries me about the U.S. is the low voting rate; in a good year, 50 percent of the voters vote. That means 27 percent can actually determine the course of an election.” Estimates indicate a fraction over 27 percent of eligible voters elected Donald Trump in 2016. A photo taken at the Women’s March on Washington, the day after the inauguration, shows a protestor holding a sign reading: “Make Margaret Atwood fiction again.”

Born in Ottawa in 1939, she grew up in northern Ontario, Quebec and Toronto, and earned an undergraduate degree from Victoria College at the University of Toronto, and a master’s from Radcliffe College. Her work has been published in more than 40 languages. She’s a founder of the Writers’ Trust of Canada, and a founding trustee of the Griffin Poetry Prize. Atwood’s a technophile, with more than 1.7 million followers on Twitter. She co-invented the

LongPen, a remote signing device allowing connecting around the world via tablet and the internet.

Coming later in UA’s Visiting Writers Series are Sarah Manguso Jan. 30; and Matt Bell April 3. For more, visit www.as.ua.edu.
Business students come face to face with 'invisible' working poor

By: UAB Magazine

The first session of a new course, Taxation and the Working Poor, had just ended, and senior Suann Hunter left the classroom looking troubled. She turned to instructor Eddie Nabors and said, “I’m going to be mad all semester.”

Nabors smiled. That’s precisely the response he wanted when he created the Collat School of Business class. “The working poor are invisible in America,” he says. “You interact with them every day without knowing it. They could be your cashier at Walmart or the waitress serving your coffee.” But some businesses know exactly who the working poor are, and target them with predatory practices involving loans and tax preparation.

The students “are shocked, appalled, and angry” when they discover the obstacles that the working poor face, Nabors says. “It’s hitting their emotions. I’m trying to enlighten my students so maybe they can change some things.”

Hunter, a 2017 accounting graduate from Pinson, Alabama, took the lessons to heart. She says the class “completely broke down” her long-held stereotypes regarding lower-income individuals. She no longer thinks of them as being irresponsible and lacking motivation, for example. “I can’t judge them,” Hunter says. “It made me grow and become more humble.”

Relieving a tax burden

Part of the students’ shift in thinking came from one-on-one interaction with lower-income workers needing assistance in filing their tax returns. The service-learning portion of the class requires each student to spend at least 30 hours working at a free tax-preparation site through Impact Alabama’s SaveFirst initiative or the United Way.

Because many lower-income individuals don’t have the time or ability to adequately prepare their own tax returns in a way that results in maximum benefits, they often pay several hundred dollars to have someone else do it. Many times, they turn to temporary tax preparers—who usually are no more knowledgeable or efficient than his students, Nabors says.

“Alabama has no regulations about opening a shop to prepare taxes,” Nabors explains. “A person cutting hair or doing nails must have a license, but you can prepare tax returns without one. So a lot of these places pop up in January, and by the end of April, they disappear. Then if the IRS comes back with a problem on your return, these people are gone.

“Plus they charge fee after fee, adding up to an outrageous amount for a return that our students can do in an hour for free.”

Nabors’s students were among 44 UAB volunteers who prepared thousands of free returns through SaveFirst in 2017. Typically, such a service averages about $400 per return, which means the students saved clients around $1 million in fees.
This spring, "I did more than 50 returns, and every person I met was so grateful," says Dave Medlock, a 2017 graduate in accounting from Birmingham now working toward a master's degree. "The tax season is a big deal to people who don't make a lot of money, and some companies prey on that. They were as thankful and kind as you can imagine. It made me feel I was giving something back."

**Barriers to progress**

While the tax-prep work was satisfying, the classroom sessions often proved to be frustrating, as students learned about institutional roadblocks that prevent the working poor from improving their situation.

"We spend a lot of time talking about poverty and predatory business practices," Nabors says. "Payday lenders charging 800 percent interest. Auto loans targeting low-income people who are willing to pay $10,000 for a car worth $5,000 because nobody else will give them a loan. Rent-to-own shops where people pay more than $4,000 for a $1,500 sofa, because they're paying $50 a month for seven years. Just insane stuff."

The class also examines connections between poverty and crime. The United States prison population has ballooned from approximately 500,000 in 1986 to 2.3 million today, due in part to the inability of poorer people to afford adequate legal representation, Nabors says.

"People are charged with crimes and told that if they are convicted of everything, they'll get 20 years. But if they plead to one crime, it will be only three years," Nabors said. "They're scared to death of going to court, so they'll plead to three even though they may not be guilty. Then they're a felon for the rest of their life, and when they leave prison, they'll earn 60 percent of what they would have earned otherwise.

"I have two goals with this class," Nabors adds. "One is to provide a needed service to help people with their taxes. The other is to inform my students and shift their attitudes toward the working poor, and hopefully instill in them a desire for lifelong service."

Hunter continues to be affected by what she learned in the course, long after that disturbing first day. She currently is an account manager at a Birmingham-area hotel, but now she's thinking about working for a nonprofit organization in the future. "I want to make a difference for others," she says.
UAB physician-scientist receives Komen grant to conduct HER2-positive breast cancer research

By: Beena Thannickal

Erica Stringer-Reasor, M.D., assistant professor in the University of Alabama at Birmingham Division of Hematology and Oncology, has been awarded a $450,000 grant from Susan G. Komen to support a clinical trial investigating PARP inhibitors for the treatment for HER2-positive breast cancer.

HER2-positive breast cancer is a cancer that tests positive for a protein called human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 or HER2, which promotes the growth of cancer cells. In about one of every five breast cancers, the cancer cells have a gene alteration that makes an excess of the HER2 protein.HER2-positive breast cancers tend to be more aggressive than other breast cancers.

PARP is an enzyme in cells that helps repair DNA when it has become damaged, as in the case with cancer. PARP inhibitors work by keeping cancer cells from repairing themselves once they have been damaged by chemotherapy, while sparing healthy cells.

At UAB, Eddy Yang, M.D., Ph.D., professor and vice chair of Translational Research in the UAB Department of Radiation Oncology, discovered that PARP inhibitors may be particularly effective in HER2-positive breast cancer that has become resistant to anti-HER2 therapies.

"However, medications are still being tested in clinical trials, and are not yet FDA-approved for use outside of clinical research," said Andres Forero, M.D., professor in the UAB Division of Hematology and Oncology, and head of the breast cancer research program.

Stringer-Reasor’s grant will allow her to investigate the combination of PARP inhibitors with HER2-positive targeted therapies, which could improve patient survival.

"There is some evidence that different PARP inhibitors work differently, so not all may have similar results in clinical trials," said Forero, a senior scientist at the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center. "We are conducting the next level of research using combination therapies to get better outcomes and move the needle forward."
UAB-built Habitat House gives Birmingham woman and her son a “magical” experience

By: Tyler Greer

Birmingham resident Tiffany Wells stood on the steps in front of her new home Wednesday — a new Habitat for Humanity House built for Wells and her 4-month-old son, Morgan — and beamed.

“It is magical,” said Wells, an eighth-grade Birmingham City Schools teacher, after the dedication of her home in Wylam. “I never thought I would own anything, let alone a house. Now, to have a home — it’s more than a blessing to me and my son. It will allow me the chance to raise him in a positive and safe environment.”

Wells’ home was built with her sweat equity and that of more than 675 volunteers from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The group worked this fall to build Wells’ Habitat House as part of a project funded by the UAB Benevolent Fund, the employee charitable-giving arm of UAB. UAB employees pledged more than $2.2 million in 2016-17 to the fund, which supports more than 120 Birmingham-area nonprofit organizations and employees in need.

“It makes me proud every day to stand among our UAB employees and represent them on occasions like this when we are giving back to our community in a very tangible way,” said UAB President Ray L. Watts at Wells’ home dedication. “We know it’s a new house, but we want Tiffany to have the opportunity to make it a home for herself and Morgan. We’re so glad she has the opportunity to move in before Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving, to me, is one of our most favored holidays, because it’s a time when we stop, reflect and are thankful for all our blessings. We at UAB are so thankful to be a part of Tiffany’s having this opportunity.”

Wells was born and raised in Bessemer and has overcome many challenges in her life to earn a bachelor’s degree. She plans to pursue a master’s degree in education.

Wells says being a part of this process and experiencing the generosity of so many has forever changed her life.

“To UAB employees, thank you,” she said. “Thank you so much from me and from Morgan, too. You have blessed me. I’ve never seen people give that much time and energy to anything as they did to building this home. That was a first for me, and it has changed my life because now I want to be like them, and I want to give like them and help people just like they have done for me.”

Wells’ Habitat House is the fourth built by UAB’s Benevolent Fund since 2014. All the homes were entirely funded by employee contributions and built entirely by UAB employee and student volunteers.
Pathologist Long Zheng shares in 2017 RISE Award

By: Jeff Hansen

Long Zheng, M.D., Ph.D., the Robert B. Adams Endowed professor and director of the Division of Laboratory Medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham Department of Pathology, has been honored with the 2017 RISE Award from the AABB.

The RISE Award, or Research Innovation in Scientific Excellence Award, is given to the authors of the best original research article published each year in the journal Transfusion, as measured by impeccable study design, innovation, significance and effective communication.

Zheng and former colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania were recognized for their paper, “ADAMTS13 autoantibodies cloned from patients with acquired thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura: 2. Pathogenicity in an animal model.”

Acquired thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura, or TTP, is a rare autoimmune disease that creates sudden pain in the abdomen or head and extreme fatigue or confusion, sending a patient to the emergency room with a potentially fatal condition. These symptoms come from a multitude of blockages of tiny blood vessels in the gut and brain, formed after the patient’s own immune system somehow inhibits an enzyme that is vital to control clotting.

Treatment involves exchanging three to seven liters of plasma each day, at a cost of $10,000 a day, and this costly care may continue for several weeks or months.

In their paper, Zheng and colleagues said their results demonstrated “for the first time the ability of human recombinant monovalent anti-ADAMTS13 antibody fragments to recapitulate key pathologic features of untreated acquired TTP in vivo, validating their clinical significance and providing a useful animal model for testing novel targeted therapeutic approaches.”

Zheng was recruited to UAB from the University of Pennsylvania in February 2015. University of Pennsylvania co-authors in the Transfusion study were Khalil Bdeir, Ph.D., Douglas Cines, M.D., Michelle Cushing, MES, Gayathri Gulendran, Vincent Hayes, Stephen Kacir, David Motto, M.D., Ph.D., Eric Ostertag, M.D., Ph.D., Mortimer Poncz, M.D., Don Siegel, M.D., Ph.D., and Lenka Yunk, Ph.D.

The AABB is an international association representing individuals and institutions involved in the fields of transfusion medicine and cellular therapies. The AABB is dedicated to advancing transfusion and cellular therapies worldwide. Members include physicians, nurses, scientists, researchers, administrators, medical technologists and other health care providers in more than 80 countries.

The AABB was formerly known as the American Association of Blood Banks.
NASA Invites Media, Public to Discussion on Astronomy's Expanding 'Senses'

By: NASA

NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, invites media and the public to hear from some of the first scientists to detect light and gravitational waves -- ripples in space-time -- caused by colliding neutron stars.

The University of Alabama in Huntsville will host a free science discussion, "Multi-messenger Astronomy: A New Era in Space Science," at 3:30 p.m. CST Monday, Nov. 20, in Room 112 of the Student Services Building at 301 Sparkman Drive.

Astronomers will share the story and science behind the violent stellar smashup and how a small team of Alabama scientists helped alert the global science community that something extraordinary was happening. Speakers and panelists will be:

Julie McEnery, project scientist for the Fermi Gamma-ray Space Telescope at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center

Tyson Littenberg, astrophysicist at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center and member of the LIGO Science Collaboration


Wen-fai Fong, assistant professor of physics and astronomy at Northwestern University

Adam Goldstein, astrophysicist from the Universities Space Research Association at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center

Peter Veres, postdoctoral fellow at The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Rachel Hamburg, graduate research assistant at The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Before the discussion, media will be invited to conduct one-on-one interviews with participants beginning at 3 p.m. in Room 114 of the Student Services Building.

Media interested in attending the discussion should contact Molly Porter by noon on Monday, Nov. 20, at molly.a.porter@nasa.gov or 256-544-2771.
Sacrifices pay off for information management leader

By: Kari Hawkins

Taking the tough assignments, being open to new opportunities, making temporary sacrifices for long-term benefits – all have been part of Shirley Perkey’s 34 years working for the Army.

Today as the Aviation and Missile Command’s chief information officer and director of information management (G-6), Perkey can look back over her career to provide insight to college graduates on how they can build their own successful career with the federal government. She did just that during a presentation to high school and college career counselors at the Nov. 1 Academia Day hosted by the Army Contracting Command.

“I wouldn’t take anything for the experiences and adventures I’ve had as a government employee,” Perkey told the counselors. “To get a job with the federal government, you may have to get your foot in the door at a lower position. But that’s a sacrifice that you can advance on. In the long run, it may well be worth it.”

Perkey began her career in 1984 as a GS-2 data transcriber, also known in those days as a keypunch operator.

“I was only 21, but I had been working at a bank and we all know that entry level jobs at banks don’t pay very well. As a GS-2 employee, I actually got a raise,” Perkey recalled. “But I was more interested in the job because it allowed me to get my foot in the door. It was an opportunity to be a government employee.”

Within a few months, she was a GS-5, working in computer operations supporting legacy applications hosted by the Defense Information Systems Agency and sustained by the Army Materiel Command’s Central Design Agency. She worked the midnight shift for two years.

“I took the midnight shift because I would automatically get promoted in a year,” she said. “I persevered in my 20s and personally decided that as a young person I was willing to go out there and make sacrifices. I sacrificed my social life. Besides the midnight shift, there were a lot of cases where overtime was offered. I would accept overtime every other Friday so that I would have eight hours of overtime on each paycheck. Commitment and perseverance and making hard decisions of what I was willing to sacrifice paid off.”

In those early years, Perkey’s associate degree in data processing from Calhoun Community College opened doors of opportunity. Soon she was determined to get her bachelor’s, even though it was difficult to juggle a full-time job with schoolwork.

“But then I was able to get picked up for a paratrainee program for computer programmers. It was a local program offered by my command.” Perkey said.

The program offered both formal classroom and on-the-job training. But before she could accept the opportunity, Perkey had to make a sacrifice.

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"I was just about eligible for a GS-7, but the program started at a GS-5 with a promotion to GS-7 in a year and a second promotion to a GS-9 the year after that," she said. "I had to go back to a GS-5 before I could go on to a GS-9 in a couple of years. It was another hard decision. I had to ask myself what I would sacrifice."

Perkey took the demotion to a GS-5 to be in the program and to grow into an even better future promotion. That sacrifice was beneficial, also, because of the learning experience it offered.

“Our instructor – Fred Cash – retired from civil service. He was a former computer programmer from our own organization at Redstone Arsenal. The program worked an arrangement with him to provide his instruction at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. The benefit of the arrangement was that we were being taught by a stellar individual who really knew our business,” Perkey said.

“It is very difficult to tailor classes directly to the needs of an organization. But because of his background, he was able to directly relate our classwork to what we were doing at work. When we left the classroom at noon, we could go right to work and get assignments from our mentors that allowed us to practice what we learned in class.”

The computer programming paratrainee program opened plenty of opportunities for Perkey. She continued taking classes part time, earning a bachelor’s in 1988 in information systems from Athens State University. While continuing to compete for higher grades with other organizations and earning promotions, she took on high-visibility projects that allowed her to understand how the Army works and where her contributions fit in. Her positions provided opportunities to interface routinely with employees of sister major subordinate commands, Army Materiel Command and the Department of the Army.

“It’s important to understand the mechanics and intricacies of how things work and how you fit in. In your mid-20s, there are times, especially in the federal government, when you have trouble understanding the organization you work for,” Perkey said. “Because of my experiences, I started to understand the big picture and it started to become intuitive to me how things work.”

As she moved up in the ranks, taking on more responsibility and challenges, she also committed herself to three more years of part-time college classes to earn her master’s in 2004 in management from the Florida Institute of Technology. Today, as AMCOM’s chief information officer, she manages and oversees the command’s Information Technology, Information Management, and Cyber Security/Information Assurance programs. She oversees a substantial portfolio of information technology investments consisting of infrastructure, systems and applications.
Wallace State’s Talent Search program teams up with UAH’s SMAP during recent Parent Information Seminar

By: Russell Moore

Wallace State Community College’s Talent Search (TRIO) program recently held its annual informational seminar for parents of the program.

Talent Search participants are students in 6th-12th grades from Wallace State’s service area high schools in Blount, Cullman, Marshall and Morgan Counties.

These students, many of whom are first generation potential college attenders, voluntarily participate in Talent Search in their home schools to be mentored in a wide variety of college readiness activities.

Parent Information Seminars allow parents to be involved in the Talent Search process, making them aware of information and opportunities their students are receiving at school.

During the recent Parent Seminar, Talent Search was excited to welcome Systems Management and Production Center (SMAP), an organization at the University of Alabama at Huntsville that conducts research in support of the U.S. Army at Redstone Arsenal.

Though many full-time engineers, computer scientists, and other specialists work at SMAP, the organization also invites undergraduate students at UAH and other colleges to assist in research projects such as drone development and 3D visualization/animation. SMAP is passionate about student involvement, and it sends teams to middle schools and high schools throughout the state to demonstrate projects they are working on, making students aware of opportunities for study and work through SMAP.

Therefore, the SMAP team, made up of UAH students, set up tables and presentations at the recent Parent Seminar at Wallace State, demonstrating their projects with drones, 3D imaging machines and weather balloons.

UAH Research Scientist and SMAP mentor Norven Goddard addressed the parents in attendance, informing them of SMAP’s desire to offer students from every community in the state the opportunity to work and learn at SMAP. Goddard’s presentation, bolstered by the exciting demonstrations in the lobby, gave the parents a first-hand look at SMAP’s benefits of academic rigor and the pursuit of college training.

Wallace State’s Talent Search and SMAP will continue to collaborate in the coming months to facilitate student exploration of academic majors and careers included in SMAP projects.

For more information about Wallace State, visit www.wallacestate.edu.
Huntsville startup provides ‘sports edits’

By: Lee Roop

HUNTSVILLE — When 19-year-old Joe Tipton of Huntsville gets his photo taken with elite basketball players now, they’re as likely to be his fans as he is theirs. Tipton’s startup business — Tipton Edits — is that popular in the world of hoops.

“I make sports edits for the top high school players in the country,” Tipton explained recently during a break at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, where he is a freshman marketing major.

“Edits” are relatively new in sports. Think of a digital baseball card or a digital poster.

“Basically, it’s a customized picture,” Tipton said. “If you took a regular photograph, you can customize it and put text to it and put jerseys ‘on’ players when they commit to a certain school.”

Commitment photos are big, and Tipton is the biggest in the field of making them. His work has been posted on websites for ESPN, The Bleacher Report, FLOHOOPS and many other sports pages. Tipton estimates 25 current NBA players have used his edits to announce big career moves, including Brandon Ingram of the Los Angeles Lakers and Josh Jackson of the Phoenix Suns. A recent photograph showed Tipton standing between Shareef O’Neal (Shaq’s son) and Manute Bol’s son Bol Bol at a basketball clinic.

Tipton was one of the first to make sports edits, but others are getting in the game. He’s even had some of his ideas stolen. “There’s a good bit of competition,” he said, “but basically since I have a good reputation and trust with the guys, I’m still considered the top dog.”

The good relationship is part trust and part speed. Players have to be able to trust Tipton won’t leak their school of choice, and he sometimes has to create edits overnight.

Players also trust Tipton because he clearly loves basketball. He started playing when he was 10 or 11 and played at Madison County High School. “Most people aren’t good enough to play in college, like myself,” he said. “When I make edits for high school, NBA or college players, it lets me be able to stay with the game.”

“Basically, he’ll just tell me the school,” he says of how it works when a high school player is ready to announce his college of choice. “I’ll ask him if he had anything in mind and, if he didn’t, I’ll just freestyle it. Usually, they love it and I don’t have to make any changes at all.”

Most of the work is digital only, but it can be printed on T-shirts, posters or other surfaces. He uses apps from the Apple App Store in his creations and can combine up to seven apps in a single image. “They have a different purpose, and when you put them together, that’s how you create (an edit),” he said.

A typical edit starts with a picture where the player is facing the camera so Tipton can change his jersey to the college of choice complete with the player’s number. On commitment day, the player posts the card on social media and it gets shown on TV.
“They post it (on social media) and give me credit, and they have 100,000 followers, so everybody following them sees it, and they follow me,” Tipton said, “and then I do more and more and get more and more popular. It’s never-ending.”

Maybe not never-ending, but Tipton going to keep it going as long as he can. He has 28,000 Instagram followers, and that number is growing. He’s a presidential scholar at UAH and doesn’t need the money for school, but it’s enough extra cash that he also doesn’t need a part-time job to pay for dinner and a movie. “So, it’s nice to have a little fun,” he said.

Tipton’s parents were a little confused about his new job at first, because they’d never heard of edits. They started to catch on when one of his edits was shown on ESPN in September 2016. Then, Shaquille O’Neal posted one of his edits earlier this year.

“I told my mom and she about freaked out, because my mom and dad watched Shaquille O’Neal play when he was in college,” Tipton said. “So, that was huge. But they’ve kind of gotten used to it now.”
State’s community colleges are key to moving Alabama forward

In March of this year, the Alabama Community College System took a giant leap forward when it brought on a giant in state government and one of Alabama’s preeminent leaders, Jimmy Baker, to be chancellor.

When you have a conversation with Chancellor Baker, he uses words that you do not normally hear in the same sentence, like exciting and community college. He says it is an exciting time. For a myriad of reasons, across the state, community colleges and technical training have been viewed as second best when it comes to higher education options. Sit down with Chancellor Baker and you will leave convinced that Alabama’s community colleges can do more to move the state forward than any other entity in the state.

For an institution that in the past had a history of caring a lot about buildings, he is singularly focused on doing what is in the best interest of students. To him, that means an open-door policy at every college across the system. Anyone looking to better themselves should be able to find opportunity at their local community college.

For some, that opportunity looks like core academic coursework to transfer to a four-year or advanced degree at a fraction of the cost. For others that means stackable credentials and skills training to leave the classroom and step directly into a career. It could also mean general literacy and workforce skills or job training for a specific industry.

The paths are as varied as the student population, which ranges from high school students participating in dual enrollment classes to adult learners who are seeking to advance their careers, and everything in between.

The Alabama Community College System consists of 24 community and technical colleges in each of the state’s urban centers as well as rural locales across the state. Extensive workforce development training for Alabama business and industry through the Alabama Technology Network also is part of the system.

Baker argues that the system’s reach across the state and each college’s connection with its local community makes them adaptable and able to adjust based on the needs of their service area. Imagine if this were the case in every community: a new auto manufacturer announces 200 jobs in Anytown, Alabama, and the local Anytown Community College is already working to adapt courses and training to ensure the workforce is ready.

Anyone familiar with Alabama realizes the dramatic change in the economy over the past half-century. Entire industries have disappeared,
replaced with new technology-based careers requiring a different knowledge base.

The Alabama Community College System is committed to being part of the solution. Baker knows that means being honest with students about opportunities that are available and the education, skills, and training needed to secure them. The Alabama Department of Labor estimates that there are more than 14,000 industrial manufacturing and transportation job openings each year. The ACCS is addressing the issue head-on by partnering with the state to provide two certification programs that upon completion translate into a job in manufacturing or production. Alabama is the first state in the nation to roll out these certifications statewide.

The ACCS also made headlines when it was selected as one of only six community college systems in the entire country by Apple Inc. to launch a new app-development curriculum. Students who participate in the courses will learn coding and app development, preparing them for a wide variety of careers in our increasingly technology-driven economy.

While workforce training is a key mission of the ACCS, its focus is also to provide students with the academic coursework they need to be successful. A great number of students come to the community college to take coursework to prepare them to transition to a four-year institution. These students are receiving the same quality of coursework and instruction as they would at other institutions but with smaller class sizes and less cost.

Over the past several years, thanks to support from the Legislature, dual enrollment has continued to expand across the state. Students can take courses and receive both high school and college credit. In many instances, scholarships or grant funds are provided so students are afforded this opportunity at no cost to them. Students who participate will not only graduate high school with college credits under their belt, they will be more prepared for the rigors of college having already experienced a college classroom.

Steve Flowers served 16 years in the Alabama Legislature. Readers can email him at www.steveflowers.us.
AL.COM ANALYSIS

Schools spending less on instruction

Money spent on debt, transportation on rise

Trisha Powell Crain  tcrain@al.com

Alabama’s schools are spending less on teaching students than they spent a decade ago, according to an AL.com analysis that explores budget data and accounts for the impact of inflation.

The size of the fall-off is somewhat startling: $29 million.

During the same period — 2006 to 2016 — schools collectively grew spending by $19.6 million in transportation, and by $62.3 million in categories labeled as “other.” Those figures are also adjusted for inflation.

How these changes are playing out in classrooms is difficult to assess. There is some statistical correlation between success and spending, but the overall results are mixed.

Nonetheless, the data is worth examining, according to Eric Mackey, executive director of the School Superintendents of Alabama, a professional organization representing the state’s 137 local superintendents.

SEE SCHOOLS, A11
SCHOOLS
FROM AL

Said Mackey: "In most cases, the amount of money that is available for the classroom, for instruction, is a key indicator to the value and investment the community places on academics."

For its analysis, AL.com combined two categories of spending — instruction and instructional support — and calculated the total percentage of school systems' budgets that flow to the classroom.

Statewide, these two areas received slightly less than 70 percent of total spending in the 2016 academic year. That's down from 71.4 percent in 2006.

In fact, as a piece of the whole spending pie, instructional spending declined slightly year-over-year during the period, except for blips in 2008 and 2009.

So where has Alabama's school spending increased? To put it simply, in every category other than instruction. Interestingly, spending for debt service, when adjusted for inflation, has jumped by almost $83 million.

NO EASY EXPLANATION

State records show 1,000 more students being enrolled in public schools in 2016 than in 2006. And there were 2,000 more teachers in 2015, the latest numbers available, than in 2006. Also, as of 2016, seven more city school systems had been established.

For these reasons and more, there's no easy explanation for the change in total spending on instruction.

According to the state Department of Education accounting manual, instructional spending covers "Instructional activities dealing directly with the interaction between teachers and students."

This category includes salaries and benefits for teachers and all other classroom instructors, as well as spending on co-curricular activities like field trips, athletics, band and clubs. It also includes instructional support spending, such as the costs for local school administrators, counselors, social workers, and curriculum and staff development.

Teachers' salaries are the largest portion of instructional spending, but there are two caveats to keep in mind: First, some school systems pay salaries higher than the state-mandated minimum levels. Second, teachers' salaries increase based on degree qualifications and years of experience; thus, school systems with a veteran teaching corps will naturally spend more on instruction.

Job benefits add another 19 percent on top of salary amounts, according to the state.

A closer look

Students in Piedmont City Schools are using tablets and laptops, but most Alabama school systems are spending less on instruction than they were a decade ago. Staff file

- The proportion of their budgets spent on instruction. Several points stick out:
  - Most of them are small — fewer than 10,000 students, even fewer than 5,000.
  - All but five are city school systems, where transportation costs typically aren't as high.
  - The systems spend 3 percent, on average, on transportation, half the statewide average.
  - They aren't all well-to-do, nor are they all poor. Poverty rates range from zero to 79 percent. In 14 of the systems, more than half the students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.
  - Across the state, operations and maintenance costs range up to 17 percent. Such costs top out at 12 percent in the school systems spending the most on instruction.
  - The systems are all over the map insofar as the local tax support that they receive. The proportion of their budgets filled by local funding ranges from 11 to 55 percent.
  - The systems generally enjoy experienced teaching corps, which likely equates to higher salary costs. On average, the teachers in the 26 school systems have 12.7 years of experience, about a year more than the statewide average.
  - All boast strong scores in the "learning gains" category of the state's 2016 "report cards."
  - Finally, 10 of the systems spend comparatively less on instruction than they did in 2006. Six others have stayed the same, while the last 10 have pushed their spending higher.

— Trisha Powell Crain
Tigers head to Charleston amid continuing controversy

James Crepea  jcrepea@al.com

With Bruce Pearl’s job status in limbo, Auburn is set to leave Wednesday for the Charleston Classic.

The Tigers, who opened the season with a 102-74 win over Norfolk State on Friday, play Indiana State on Thursday in the first of three games in four days.

“When you’re in the middle, or maybe hopefully towards the end, of an ongoing investigation, we have obviously had to survive an awful lot of discovery and a lot of information, we’re still here,” Pearl said. “But because it is ongoing, it just so happens to be at the start of our season, all you can do is take it one day at a time and continue to prepare.”

“I don’t think anybody’s in a position to guarantee anybody’s either eligibility or job security or things like that because it is an ongoing process. Yeah, it’s difficult and (Monday) was a very difficult day, losing two staff members. Even though they’re on paid indefinite suspension or indefinite suspension, that hurts, those guys are part of the family. It tugs at your heart; it’s disruptive to the kids. But that’s what going through this at this time does. You have to truly take it one day at a time.”

Despite a report of his potential firing in the near future, two members of his support staff being put on leave and two of Auburn’s best players being held out indefinitely amid the school’s internal investigation, Pearl says he trusts school administrators.

Pearl said he is “literally in communication daily” with school administrators about the ongoing investigation of the program, though he would not say whether that includes Auburn president Steven Leath and outgoing general counsel Lee Armstrong.

“We are working on it for several hours a day, I can promise you,” Pearl said. “I think the lines of communication are definitely open. Obviously, there’s a lot about the investigation I don’t know, but we are communicating.”

Asked if he trusts Leath, who has refused to comment publicly about Pearl or the basketball program despite ESPN’s report that Pearl’s job was in jeopardy, Pearl said, “Of course I trust the administration. Absolutely. I have absolutely no reason not to trust them.”

Leath has declined interviews, via a spokesman, and not returned messages over the past three months seeking comment or clarification on an array of athletic department issues.

Athletic director Jay Jacobs, who announced he’d be resigning by June 1, 2018, has not commented on the basketball program. Auburn’s players have also been left in the dark by administrators as to Pearl and the ongoing investigation of the program.

“Nobody personally came to us,” center Horace Spencer said.

Already spread thin from the firing of former assistant coach Chuck Person, who pleaded not guilty to six federal charges on Tuesday, and the promotion of director of operations Chad Prewett to interim assistant coach, Auburn’s coaching staff has even more to do on a daily basis after special assistant to the head coach Jordan VerHulst and video coordinator Frankie Sullivan were placed on administrative leave “until further notice.”

“We all definitely get involved in a lot of areas, so there are several people on our staff, including our managers, who have the ability to do the video work,” Pearl said. “Our coaches are having to double up on some scouting responsibilities. So there’s definitely a greater workload, but that’s the position we find ourselves in. But we’ll be OK. We’ll be prepared.”

Though he said administrators did not share the details as to why VerHulst and Sullivan were put on leave, Pearl said he has “got an idea” why, but could not comment.

Spencer said the mood among the players is still positive despite the administrative leaves of VerHulst and Sullivan, neither of who have commented publicly, and the unknown status of Pearl.

“I try not to think about it as much because we don’t know what can happen,” Spencer said. “I don’t know what can happen. There’s a whole bunch of might-be’s and maybe’s. You just don’t know what’s going to happen next week. Whatever happens is going to have to happen. We’re just going to have to focus on what we can control.”

Pearl said there were no changes to Auburn’s roster as of Tuesday afternoon, so Austin Wiley and Danjel Purifoy remain out indefinitely due to their connection with the federal case against Person. They are not expected to travel with the team on Wednesday. Asked if he was confident that once he boards the team’s plane Wednesday morning that he’ll at least coach the next three games, Pearl said, “How can I be any more or less confident based on any other information I have? I’m the coach of our basketball program, I’m focused on the task at hand. . . . The only thing that’s changed about my status is some report or some rumor.”

“In my mind, my status is my status. I’m the coach of the basketball coach at Auburn and we’re in the middle of an ongoing investigation.”

Auburn vs. Indiana State

When: Thursday, 10:30 a.m.
Where: Charleston, S.C.
TV: ESPNU
Auburn University's Sigma Phi Epsilon chapter shut down following investigation

By: Jonece Starr Dunigan

Auburn University's chapter of Sigma Phi Epsilon was shut down Friday after the fraternity's national board of directors revoked the chapter's charter.

The board's unanimous decision comes after an investigation into allegations of hazing, drug use and alcohol violations at the fraternity, the Auburn Plainsman wrote. The board and the university started the investigation in the fall and found evidence supporting the allegations, officials said in a statement to the newspaper.

"Since 2012, members of the Auburn Chapter have consistently refused to align with the mission and purpose of our fraternity," the statement said. "After reviewing the evidence, it was determined that the chapter's violations demonstrated a continued desire to perpetuate an experience rooted in alcohol, drug use and hazing."

On Wednesday, the national fraternity announced a substance-free policy for all of its chapters across the U.S. The announcement came two days after Florida State University banned all fraternities and sororities after the death of a 20-year-old Pi Kappa Phi fraternity pledge.

"As recent tragic events have demonstrated, fraternities today have real problems," said SigEp CEO Brian Warren in the statement regarding the substance-free policy. "Sigma Phi Epsilon and our peers have unfortunately earned a reputation for being organizations that promote alcohol consumption, misogyny and violence. For SigEp, there can be no more discussion about maintaining that status quo. Fraternities must change."

Officials did not release details of what they found during the investigation at Auburn. The decision ceases all the local chapter's activity immediately. Local alumni and university administrators supported the decision.

"SigEp's National Board of Directors has made it clear that member safety is paramount, and when chapters fail to live by our values it will take immediate and appropriate action," officials said.
The Birmingham News
Friday, November 17, 2017

INNOCENT Bystander

Broderick Thomas' latest victim left an indelible mark on the UTSA community

Evan Dudley  For AL.com

Broderick Thomas’ hit was hard enough to wake the dead. Instead, it sent an unfortunate tuba to a premature grave.

With less than a minute remaining before halftime and UTSA attempting to cut into UAB’s 21-3 lead, Roadrunner quarterback Dalton Sturm kept his eyes peeled left then swung a pass right to receiver Marquez McNair, who found nothing but open field before him.

That was until he was forced to the sidelines by junior safety Jordan Petty and into Thomas’ sights. The hit was quick and devastating. McNair popped up, but the tuba he was blasted into by Thomas didn’t.

Petty saw the tragedy unfold as he chased McNair to the sideline but was unfazed by Thomas’ destructive force.

“They ran a mesh route, I saw it late and I had to run over five people, including my own teammates,” he said. “I played him to the sideline, and the next thing I knew there was Broderick. I think the tuba saw him before the receiver did.”

The play came as no surprise to Thomas, who prides himself on his big-hit ability, but was unaware of the aftermath until loading the buses and heading to the airport following the game.

“Since little league, I’ve had the hardest hits,” he said. “It’s been all of my life. That’s my specialty. I saw it after the game. Somebody sent me the video. As soon as I got on the bus, I watched it. I didn’t know I hit him that hard, but it was pretty hard. I thought it was pretty funny, actually.”

At the same time Thomas was watching the replay of his tuba assassination, the UTSA Spirit of San Antonio marching band gave an impromptu memorial for its fallen comrade — affectionately known as Tuba 6 — on the 50-yard line at the Alamodome.

“The tuba, may it rest in peace,” linebacker Shaq Jones said with a shrug following Monday’s press conference.

In fact, it did.

The impromptu memorial at the Alamodome was followed up by a full-fledged funeral service on Monday night. The loss has affected the UTSA community, especially the tuba’s player, Christopher Zuniga, an 18-year-old freshman at UTSA.

“Tuba 6 was one of the greatest instruments I have had the privilege of knowing and playing on, and now that he is gone there’s a hole in my heart that nothing can replace,” he said. “Tuba 6 was and still is an inspiration to me and many others and touched many lives with his beautiful sound.”

Although video of the hit — and the subsequent tuba funeral — has gone viral in the week since it occurred, it was a typical play for Thomas.

“I have high expectations,” he said. “I always push myself to be better every day and every game, and Coach Clark says on me a lot because he knows how much I care for the game.”

Thomas is second on the team in total tackles — trailing senior linebacker Tevin Crews by only two — but leads the Blazers with 49 unassisted. He has also forced a fumble and intercepted a pass.

It has been an exercise in mob mentality for UAB’s defense this year. The speed with which the Blazers surround the ball can be attributed to Thomas’ own mantra to his teammates.

“I always tell them that if everybody gets to the ball something good is going to happen,” he said. “So I just tell them, ‘I know I’m going to be there so come meet me there’ and that’s what happens.”

Thomas has shown no remorse for low-brass instruments and indicated he has no plans of slowing up when laying the lumber to opposing receivers or sousaphones.

“You might have to bring another one because I’m going to mess that one up, too.”
UAB AT FLORIDA

Exceeding expectations

Blazers already have 7 wins and bowl eligibility. Is an upset of Florida in the Swamp out of the question?

Evan Dudley For AL.com

Unbelievable. That’s the word that possibly best describes UAB’s football season.

After spending the past two seasons in a holding pattern, the Blazers have already tied a program-best seven regular season wins on the FBS level — matching the 2000 and 2004 teams — and could win an eighth game Saturday when they face the Florida Gators in the Swamp.

“It’s very exciting in that we get to play what we consider a great team,” senior linebacker Shaq Jones said. “It’s a quality opponent in a nationally televised game so we’re excited about that.”

The Blazers have enjoyed the best attendance in Conference USA — playing before a season-high crowd of 45,312 at Legion Field in the season opener — but travel to one of the more intimidating stadiums in the Southeastern Conference to play in front of a crowd twice the size of any they have experienced.

“We’re preparing just like any other game and we don’t make any changes based on the opponent,” Jones said. “That crowd is something we’ll just have to deal with and for us it basically comes down to communication and we always harp on that in practice. It’s something we expect and prepare for as well.”

Florida is 5-6 and in disarray following the dismissal of coach Jim McElwain, but still has the depth and speed to overwhelm the Blazers. UAB is 2-24 all-time against SEC opponents, so overlooking the struggling Gators is not an option according to head coach Bill Clark.

“We’re going on the road again to an SEC team which is one of those things our players look forward to playing this kind of quality opponent,” he said. “They are going to be excited to play and as the season winds down we want to be playing our best football at this time and I think we are.

“They (Florida) are so talented up front. They are great on both sides of the ball. We want to be consistent and understand the physicality we have to play with. I know what it is going to mean to them playing at home. They are going to want to play well in front of their home fans. We are going to get their very best and that’s what we have to be ready for.”

After winning three straight games and five of their last six, the Blazers will not be creeping up on the Gators. UAB has the nation’s 15th leading rusher in true freshman Spencer Brown, a quarterback who minimizes mistakes and can make plays on the ground or through the air, and a defense that has forced 11 turnovers in the last five games.

“They’re explosive,” Florida interim head coach Randy Shannon said in a Monday press conference. “You know, everybody may look at UAB and say, ‘Well, it’s UAB,’ but they’re 7-3, so that should wake everybody’s eyes open.”

Shannon stopped short of saying unbelievable, but has taken notice to what UAB has accomplished.

It’s something Jones says the team has known was possible all along.

“We always believed it,” he said. “The mindset is always to win and that mentality is not going to change. Coach Clark is going to prepare us and we’re going to follow his lead and guys like me and (Tevin) Crews are going to take this team under our wing and get them amped up for a big game this week.

“It’s easy to get out of bed because it’s an exciting time here at UAB. I’m always eager to get up and go because at one time we didn’t have football. Now we have it and I’m always eager to go and be a part of something great.”
Tide’s Kigen races to top finish

Junior wins NCAA South Regional cross country championship individual title; three UA runners qualify for NCAA championships

By Joey Chandler
Sports Writer

University of Alabama junior Gilbert Kigen won the NCAA South Regional cross country championship individual title with a time of 29:44.5 on the 10K course at UA’s Harry Pritchett Running Park on Friday morning.

Three of Alabama’s runners placed in the top four to lead the Crimson Tide to a third-place finish with 95 points. Alfred Chelanga was runner-up with a time of 29:47.1 and Vincent Kiprop was fourth in 30:04.9.

"From the start of the race we tried to push the pace from the first mile until the last mile," Kigen said.

The trio qualified as individuals for the NCAA championships on Nov. 18 in Louisville, Ky., and have competed with a pack-like mentality all season.

"The whole point with the three guys up front is they were really trying to press and break the field open and they did exactly that," Alabama coach Dan Waters said.

"Vincent really did most of the heavy lifting today and he kind of finished off nice and easy and Gilbert has got a little more turnover and was able to sprint by some guys at the end. Alfred had a great race too, so those guys have been trading off first place finishes all year long and they have been training side by side everyday."

Middle Tennessee State won with 71 points, followed by Ole Miss with 76 points, to advance to the national championships.

Garrett Bull finished 44th (32:11.6) and Northside graduate J.P. Brinyark placed 54th (32:26) to round out the top five scoring for Alabama.

"Technically in the men’s race, we just missed (qualifying) in the first mile, or 1,500 meters. We just didn’t have our guys in the right position, and that was a little bit disappointing," Waters said. "We made a tactical error early that we paid for at the end, but as far as our effort and our heart, it was the best they’ve ever run as far as putting everything out there."

In the women’s 6K race, Ole Miss took first with 59 points, followed by Georgia with 73 points and Samford University with 94 points. Alabama placed ninth with 248 points.

For Alabama, Nicole Gardner finished 38th with a time of 21:04.5, followed by teammates Lizzy Danis (21:05) and Rebecca Buteau (21:06.4). McKenzie Yance, 53rd (21:18.6) and Caroline Barlow, 88th (21:47.5) rounded out the top five.
MR. GOLF

Tide women land two signees

Ian Thompson

News from University of Alabama women's golf team head coach Mic Potter is he has signed two players for next season. Carolina Cambioli of Castel Gandolfo, Italy, was a member of 2014 and 2015 Italian European Girls Team and a member of the 2015 Italian World Championship Girls Team. She also finished in third place in the 2017 French International Junior. Jiwon Jeon from Daegu, South Korea, is a transfer from Daytona State Community College. She has an impressive four college wins already: 2017 Lady Falcon Invitational, 2017 Furman Lady Paladin Invitational, 2016 Lady Falcon Invitational and 2016 Jacksonville Classic. UA men's head coach Jay Seawell said his signees will be announced early this week. Auburn women's golf welcomes Chandler Rosholt of Austin, Texas and Brooke Sansom of Pike Road. Sansom will enroll at Auburn in January and redshirt during the 2018 spring semester while attending classes and practicing with the team. Rosholt will join the Tigers for the 2018 fall semester.

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GOLF

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In addition, Julie McCarthy, who signed with Auburn last fall, is set to enroll in January and compete for the Tigers beginning with the 2018 spring semester.

Other signees with local connections, according to an ever-updating list on www.juniorgolf-scoreboard.com, include Connor Newton of Auburn going to Coastal Carolina and Cam Page of Fort Walton Beach, Fla., Carson Whiten of Newnan, Ga., and Walker Whisette of Johns Creek, Ga., all going to Huntingdon College.

And, according to the Alabama Golf Association's Junior Golf website, the AGA have the following players verbally committed as follows:

**Class of 2018**
- Caroline Waldrop: Western Kentucky University
- Ethan Hagood: University of Alabama Birmingham
- Dawson Atkinson: University of South Alabama
- Connor Reid: Samford University
- Padraig Sim: University of Washington
- Anna Claire Little: Troy University
- Connor Newton: Coastal Carolina University
- Riley Thrasher: Jefferson State Community College
- Thomas Caddell: Alabama State University. Caddell is from Vance.

**Class of 2019**
- Austin Coggin: Auburn University
- Thomas Ponder: University of Alabama
- Hal Dove: Auburn University
- Ally Williams: Mississippi State University

**Class of 2020**
- Michaela Morard: University of Alabama
- Ryan Eshleman: Auburn University
- JP Cave: University of Alabama

I’ll update the signees list as I become aware of them. The above is already a most impressive list.

Ian Thompson has been writing about golf in Alabama for more than 24 years. His weekly “Mr. Golf” column concentrates on golfers, golf events and people associated with the sport of interest to the Tuscaloosa and Birmingham areas. Reach him with story ideas at thompsonesosoff@gmail.com.
Sexton will be in starting lineup

Coach says freshman guard will return to action immediately after his suspension

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

University of Alabama basketball coach Avery Johnson said Monday that freshman guard Collin Sexton would not only be available for Tuesday night’s game against Lipscomb — but that he would see action immediately.

“Collin will be in the starting lineup,” Johnson said. “We don’t want anybody to feel there’s an enormous amount of pressure to be a one-man band and lead us to victory. But Collin has handled this whole thing very well. Not many student-athletes can go through what he’s been through and still have the type of attitude. It’s all about the team.”

Sexton, a 2017 McDonald’s All-American and a consensus top 10 prospect in the nation last season, sat out Alabama’s season-opening win over Memphis last Friday due to a one-game suspension from the NCAA. The suspension was related to a former UA athletic administrator and was revealed as part of a current FBI probe into college basketball corruption.

While Sexton will return to the lineup, two veteran players will continue to sit out due to injury. Johnson was, however, more optimistic in his outlook for senior forward Riley Norris.

“Riley is making some progress,” Johnson said. “He will be available to start practicing this week. We will see what is availability is, either in Brooklyn (where Alabama will play during Thanksgiving in the Barclay’s Classic) or in the game before Brooklyn (against UT-Arlington.) He’s ahead of schedule. Ar’Mond Davis, out with a knee injury is not healing at the same rate, and we will have an update next week on his status.”

Lipscomb, the Crimson Tide’s opponent on Tuesday, is 2-0 this season with wins over Emory and Morehead State. Garrison Matthews, a 6-foot-5 junior forward, scored 25 points in the Morehead State win.

Johnson, however, said he is focused on improving some of the Crimson Tide’s sloppy play against Memphis.

“In reviewing the video, we are a long way from a finished product,” Johnson said. “At times, we looked like we had never been in a defensive drill in our lives. We

See Sexton, C5

See next page
SEXTON

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looked poorly coached, but the players were attentive in the video review so we can learn from it. We still have some areas we have to clean up. That's my job.”

Early signees

Alabama announced its 2018 early signees on Monday as Jared Butler, the last of the Crimson Tide’s three commitments to hold a signing ceremony, sent his paperwork to Tuscaloosa.

The three-player class consists of Butler (Reserve, La./Riverside Academy), shooting guard Dianté Wood (Anniston/Sacred Heart Catholic), and 6-9 center Javian Fleming (Canton, Miss./Canton HS).

Wood, a two-time AHSAA Class 1A Player of the Year, is considered the state of Alabama’s top prospect this year.

“We are so honored to have all three of these student-athletes join the Crimson Tide family,” Johnson said. “It has been a pleasure to get to know them and their families throughout the recruiting process. All three of these young men have strong character, great competitive spirit and are extremely coachable. They are going to be great assets to our Tuscaloosa community.

“Our staff has been on the same page in terms of our future needs when it comes to a specific skill set in order to compete in the SEC and on a national level. This class may not be ranked as high or get the recognition that our 2017 signing class received, but we certainly feel this group will make a similar type of impact and will be major contributors for our program.”

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Curry excited about 2018 signing class

By Drew Hill
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

How do you replace six seniors set to graduate in spring of 2018? Well, you don’t, but Alabama’s seven signees in the Class of 2018 should help women’s basketball coach Kristy Curry compensate for some of the future losses.

The Crimson Tide’s 2018 recruiting class is made up of guards Hannah Barber, Megan Abrams and Cierra Johnson, forwards Allie Craig Cruce and Gabriella Crawford, and wings Taniyah Worth and De’Sha Benjamin.

Three of the signees come from in-state, while the remaining four are from Georgia, Louisiana and Tennessee.

The highest-ranked player in the class is the 6-foot-2 forward Crawford, who is rated the No. 16 forward and No. 89 overall player in her class by ESPNW.

“I loved the coaching staff,” Crawford said in July at a Nike Girls Elite Youth Basketball League event. “Coach Curry

Utah at Alabama

When: 7 p.m.
Where: Coleman Coliseum
Records: Alabama 1-0, Utah 1-0
Radio: 100.1 FM

was my first offer. She has always shown me love from day one. They went to all my AAU games. If it wasn’t her, it was somebody else on the staff.”

Crawford is a strong interior player that is great on the offensive glass and can make plays through contact. Her ability to get to the free-throw line should be a perfect fit for Curry’s offense, which led the SEC in free-throw attempts in 2017.

“I have a relationship with most of the girls on the team,” Crawford said.

“I know Ashley Knight. When I first went on my official visit we clicked right away. Ever since then, me and Ashley talk every day. I call her my best friend. I also know Dalija (Ruffin). She transferred from UT-Martin, and I know her from when I went to their camp.”

In addition to Crawford, Cruce, Barber and Abrams were also committed by early summer.

According to Crawford, the four commitments were together in a group text and communicated daily.

The two wings of the class, Worth and Benjamin, will bring an extra dimension of length and athleticism. Worth and Benjamin are rated the No. 14 and No. 28 wings in the class, respectively.

“It’s a culmination of four years of identifying, and each one of these relationships with these seven hasn’t been a last-minute recruiting process,” Curry said.

“It’s been over many, many days and many, many moments of being in the gym and them visiting our campus. The families that we are bringing in today — I couldn’t be more thrilled. When you look at the first class we signed four years ago and this class, this is an impact class and the best class we’ve signed.”
A TIME FOR INTROSPECTION

With one game left before Iron Bowl, Tide turns focus to fixing problems

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The lip service Nick Saban paid to Mercer was expected. The Alabama coach is known for preaching about the dangers of overlooking an opponent — once using an expletive for emphasis during a rant preceding a game against Charleston Southern of the Football Championship Subdivision.

So, Saban did his duty and praised the Bears.

"They know what they want to do, they know how to do it, they do a good job of executing," Saban said.

But Saban, with surprising candor, conceded the focus this week isn’t on the Crimson Tide’s next opponent. Rather, Alabama will be dabbling in some introspection.

“We need to focus on a lot of fundamental, technical execution at every position," Saban said. "Whether it’s offensive line, defensive backs, it doesn’t really matter what position it is. I think there’s a lot of things that we can fundamentally execute with a little more consistency, and that’s certainly going to be the focus in terms of what we try to get accomplished this week.”

With a showdown against Auburn in the Iron Bowl on the horizon, Alabama needs to resolve some issues within its depleted linebacker corps and rectify the pass-protection problems that have plagued the offensive line in recent weeks. The Tide also must find a consistent punt returner and amplify its pass rush.

“We have to go back and look, work on our fundamentals,” cornerback Levi Wallace said.

Mississippi State exposed some holes during the Tide’s thrilling 31-24 victory in Starkville. Quarterback Jalen Hurts succeeded in spite of a leaky blocking front that allowed pressures on 10 of his 26 dropbacks, according to ProFootballFocus.com.

“We have to protect better,” center Bradley Bozeman said.

The Tide, meanwhile, failed to dent quarterback Nick Fitzgerald’s pocket — recording only one sack. With linebacker Shaun Dion Hamilton unavailable for the first time since fracturing his right kneecap in a victory over LSU, the run defense also looked vulnerable during the Bulldogs’ most fruitful drives. Redshirt junior Keith Holcombe and freshman Dylan Moses turned in subpar performances, unveiling a weakness in a defense that for the longest time has shown no deficiencies.

“The fact that we have a little time to not only get healthy, but (also) go back to the film room and look at all the things that we could’ve did better,” said Rashaan Evans, “because obviously there were some things that happened that shouldn’t have ever happened as far as the run game, some of the gap schemes that we should have did better on. But that’s football. You’re going to have some ups and downs, but how you overcome it is going to be the biggest thing.”

For that reason, Evans said the reprieve in the schedule that the Mercer game provides is welcomed.

“The timing was perfect,” he said.

It will allow Alabama to turn inwards and do some needed self-scouting before the Iron Bowl. As Saban knows, working out the kinks versus the Bears could create the path to victory over the Tigers.
Alabama needed to have this type of game

America has seen many years of awesome Alabama. Years of overwhelming Alabama. Years of big bad bully Alabama.

But scrappy, gritty Alabama?

Who, aside from Nick Saban, ever expected that?

That doesn’t mean Alabama has never lost an SEC game, of course. There have been a few over Saban’s tenure, and a few sort-of-close wins, too. But it’s been a long time since Alabama had to go on the road and win a game where character and composure meant more than recruiting rankings.

Eventually, it had to happen. No matter what anyone tries to tell you, playing on the road in the Southeastern Conference isn’t easy, even if Alabama has made it look easy. The environment in Starkville on Saturday night could not have

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HURT

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better, or louder. Dan Mullen is a good coach. Mississippi State had a solid plan. The Bulldogs were strong at the line of scrimmage. If you could find a negative about the Bulldogs, perhaps it was this: When winning time came in the fourth quarter, MSU seemed to look for a path to overtime instead of keeping the gas pedal pressed firmly to the floor.

Still, it was enough to scare Alabama. The question now is whether it will make Alabama ready for scarier locations still to come. No Crimson Tide fan wanted the heart palpitations as they were happening in real time, but once the clutching chest pains ended without being terminal to the hopes of an unbeaten season, was it worth it? Did all those Saturdays of being bored by beatdowns suddenly seem not so bad after all?

Even Saban seemed to think that a taste of drama wasn’t all bad.

"If we’re going to beat really good teams, we have to learn how to compete in close games," he said. "We don’t always have that when we win 49-0."

There are chances ahead,
ones that will come quickly after a manageable game against Mercer. There is Auburn. Win that one, and there is Georgia. Win that one and there will be a national semifinal opponent good enough to emerge from the smoldering wreckage that is this season around the country.

Going into that stretch, here's what Alabama knows that it has, and what it knows that it doesn't have, or at least didn't on Saturday night.

The Crimson Tide has an unflappable quarterback, one who has the ability to make plays by either passing or running and who clearly has the respect of his teammates in the huddle. Jalen Hurts directed the kind of fourth-quarter, game-winning drive that would make any quarterback a hero for any other group of fans.

That's not to say many Alabama fans don't appreciate Hurts. Most do. Some don't, and probably still don't today, which means they never will.

Certainly, it helps that he has an elite receiver in Calvin Ridley, the one riddle Mississippi State could never solve, from Alabama's first drive to its last.

What Alabama doesn't have is a dominant linebacking corps, not after injuries have knocked out its starters and afflicted its depth. Possibly people will realize that no college team can lose Reuben Foster to the pros, then Shaun Dion Hamilton to injury, and keep plugging in the same sort of talent and experience.

When you understand those things, you find yourself with a football team at a crossroads. You can, if you are that football team, shrug and say that not being dominant means there is a chance of losing, and surrender. Or you can keep on playing, see what happens and, along the way, find out what you are made of.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
A mini-Saban

For Alabama players, Minkah Fitzpatrick is an extension of their coach, and is without question the team's leader.

By Aaron Suttle
Sports Writer

If you're looking to explain what makes Minkah Fitzpatrick such a valuable, difference-making player to the nation's No. 1 team, it's important to look off the field as much as you do on it.

You could start with the example of how during the bye week, the first thing the native of New Jersey did upon returning to campus was study film. Or you could point to his attitude and aptitude in how he scored closer than any other player in the Nick Saban era to the irascible head coach on a personality test.

Or perhaps you could point to a story predating his Alabama days.

During Fitzpatrick's senior year of high school, he spent his spring break not at the Jersey Shore, or a sugar-sand locale on the Gulf Coast or even in the Florida hotbed of spring breakers. Instead, he spent the week on the sidelines of Alabama's practice fields, studying the Crimson Tide's defense as the team underwent spring practice.

"I realized that coming to Alabama is serious," he said. "I just wanted to be ahead of the game when I got here. I didn't want to be equal or I didn't want to be behind. So I came down here. I was learning the playbook. I was asking questions, following people around. So when I came in, it was a smooth transition."

The decision, rare for a teenager, was noticed by then-Alabama players.

"I was here because I'm a little older than him. He watched us his whole spring break," senior cornerback Anthony Averett said. "I just remember when I was in high school, I wasn't thinking about football on spring break, and I was committed here. After seeing that, I saw that he's different. He's all football."

It was the beginning of the newcomer turning veterans' heads. At first it was, "Look how good this freshman is. He can play." Then it turned into everyone judging their play and effort by Fitzpatrick's.

Take his 2015 recruiting classmate Damien Harris. In his own right, the junior running back is one of the best backs in the conference and nation. A five-star player out of Kentucky, Harris has judged himself against Fitzpatrick, his former roommate, for a long time.

"We came in at the same time, that summer our freshman year, watching him during workouts, conditioning in the mornings and 7-on-7. You would hear the older guys saying, 'Man, this kid is good,'" Harris said. "It was easy for us to say that because we were in the same class, but when I witnessed the older players like Reggie (Ragland), Tim (Williams), Reuben (Foster), Cyrus (Jones), Eddie (Jackson) all those guys on the defense, you guys talking about how good he was, it was kind of eye-opening.

It wasn't that good. We'd been there maybe a month or so and everybody was already talking about how good he was."

This offseason, wanting to take his game to the next level, Harris set a goal for himself each week that revolved around Fitzpatrick.

"This past summer we would do our summer workouts in the morning, conditioning, drills and stuff and Minkah's always in the front of the line," Harris said. "I wanted to get better, so told myself, 'I'm going to get in the first line. No matter who's in...

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people from whom a positive impact can be made. They don't mean that much to them, but their unexpected talent or their creativity can create a much-needed boost for their team. Even comments from his mother or father or a friend can lead to a "3rd". If support is provided right from the start, the potential player can be the next star in the sport. A sound education and a solid performance in school will help the player stay focused on the game. Parents and coaches should not only encourage the player's development on the court or field, but they should also be involved in the player's mental and emotional well-being. The coaching staff should focus on encouraging the player to persevere through setbacks and to continue to improve. A strong support system can make all the difference in a player's career.
The New York Times
Wednesday, November 8, 2017

Endowments Boom as Colleges Bury Earnings Overseas

By: Stephanie Saul

American universities are using offshore strategies to swell their coffers, skirt taxes and obscure investments that could spark campus protests.

In 2006, the endowments of Indiana University and Texas Christian University invested millions of dollars in a partnership, hoping to mint riches from oil, gas and coal.

The partnership was formed by the Houston-based Quintana Capital Group, whose principals include Donald L. Evans, an influential Texan and longtime supporter of former President George W. Bush. Little more than a year earlier, Mr. Evans had left his cabinet position as commerce secretary.

Though the group had an impressive Texas pedigree, presidential cachet and ambitions for operations in the United States, the new partnership was established in the Cayman Islands. The founders promised their university and nonprofit investors that the partnership would try to avoid federal taxes by exploiting a loophole called “blocker corporations,” which are typically established in tax havens around the world.

A trove of millions of leaked documents from a Bermuda-based law firm, Appleby, reflects some of the tax wizardry used by American colleges and universities. Schools have increasingly turned to secretive offshore investments, the files show, which let them swell their endowments with blocker corporations, and avoid scrutiny of ventures involving fossil fuels or other issues that could set off campus controversy.

Buoyed by lucrative tax breaks, college endowments have amassed more than $500 billion nationwide. The wealth is concentrated in a small group of schools, tilting toward private institutions like those in the Ivy League and other highly selective colleges. About 11 percent of higher-education institutions in the United States hold 74 percent of the money, according to an analysis in 2015 by the Congressional Research Service.

“It’s overwhelmingly weighted towards the 1 percent,” said Dean Zerbe, former tax counsel to the Senate Finance Committee. “Most of the schools are the most elites in the country.”

The House Republican tax plan includes a 1.4 percent tax on the investment income of private colleges and universities with endowment assets of $250,000 or more per student. It would not apply to public schools. If passed, the new tax would affect about 70 elite private colleges, though it would not touch the type of offshore benefits the Texan partnership pursued.

On Monday, 45 education groups declared their opposition to the bill in a letter to Kevin Brady, the Texas Republican who is the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee.

Tax ‘Blockers’

College and university endowment earnings are usually tax-exempt. But as endowments have sought greater investment returns in recent years, they have shifted more of their money out of

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traditional holdings like United States equities to alternative, potentially more lucrative investments. These include private equity and hedge funds that frequently borrow money, opening them up to tax consequences.

When schools earn income from enterprises unrelated to their core educational missions, they can be required to pay a tax that was intended to prevent nonprofits from competing unfairly with for-profit businesses.

Establishing another corporate layer between private equity funds and endowments effectively blocks any taxable income from flowing to the endowments, the reason they are called blocker corporations. The tax is instead owed by the corporations, which are established in no-tax or low-tax jurisdictions like the Cayman Islands or the British Virgin Islands.

"Congress is essentially subsidizing nonprofits by allowing them to engage in these transactions," said Norman I. Silber, a law professor at Hofstra University who co-authored a paper on blocker corporations in 2015. "They're allowing them to borrow so that they can build up their endowments."

The use of blocker corporations has raised concerns among policymakers in recent years. That's partly because they cost the United States Treasury millions of dollars, but also because they legitimize an opaque offshore network sometimes used for nefarious purposes.

"They're not cheating. They're not hiding money or disguising money," said Samuel Brunson, a law professor at Loyola University Chicago who has studied endowment taxation. "But they're adding money to a system that allows people, if they want to hide their money, to do it." Not only do the universities benefit — so does the wealthy and influential private equity industry.

Perhaps illustrating the sensitivity of the topic, officials at most of the college and university endowments that use blocker corporations, including Colgate, Dartmouth, Duke and Stanford, declined to comment specifically, citing longstanding policies against discussing their investments. Among them was Matt Kavjian, the director of strategic communications for Indiana University’s $2 billion endowment, which had invested $10 million with Quintana.

An exception was the Quintana shareholder Texas Christian University, whose chief investment officer, Jim Hille, acknowledged that the $1.5 billion endowment had used blocker corporations. Mr. Hille said the decision to use one often came down to whether the expected return would offset the cost of establishing a blocker corporation.

References to such corporations in the Appleby files, shared with The New York Times by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, which obtained them from the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung, date back at least to 2003. At that time, five elite schools — Columbia University, Dartmouth College, the University of Southern California, Stanford University and Johns Hopkins University — became partners in a Bermuda-based group called H&F Investors Blocker.

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H&F Investors Blocker was formed to invest with one of the largest private equity firms, Hellman & Friedman, in shares of Axel Springer, a German publisher of newspapers and magazines.

Minutes from meetings at Appleby’s office in Hamilton, Bermuda, never mention tax avoidance or even explain why the word “blocker” is used in the partnership’s title. But an audit by Ernst & Young, contained in the minutes, shows that H&F Investors Blocker would owe no federal income tax.

By 2008, the University of Texas system — whose endowment last year was $24.2 billion, behind Harvard’s ($34.5 billion) and Yale’s ($25.4 billion) — asked Appleby to set up a Cayman Islands company called TX Liquidity Capital so “certain tax advantages will accrue to the system,” documents show.

Colgate University, with an endowment worth $822 million last year, stood to benefit from blocker corporations in 2008 when it invested in Genstar Capital, a private equity fund specializing in leveraged buyouts, according to the records. One investor in that Cayman Islands partnership, called Genstar Capital Partners V HV, took pains to include a handwritten note near his signature: “elect to invest through the blocker.” Other investors were Dartmouth, Stanford and a Duke fund called Gothic Corporation.

**A Shift in Public Attitude**

While legal, blocker corporations are part of a system of endowment tax breaks fueling an undercurrent of populist anger. Many students across the country struggle under massive college debt. At the same time, critics say, some wealthy schools use these tax advantages to stockpile endowments that exceed the gross national product of entire countries.

Last year, three influential Republican legislators, led by Senator Orrin G. Hatch of Utah, sent a letter to 56 private universities with endowments of $1 billion or more, requesting information on “the numerous tax preferences” they enjoy. “Despite these large and growing endowments,” the letter said, “many colleges and universities have raised tuition far in excess of inflation.”

So far, universities have mobilized lobbyists to emphasize the public benefits they deliver, beating back challenges to their tax breaks. But there is evidence that the mood has shifted, said Charlie Eaton, a professor at the University of California, Merced, who has studied endowment tax breaks.

“In some ways, the anti-elite and anti-university spirit of Trumpism could create a favorable environment on Capitol Hill for some kind of action on this,” Dr. Eaton said. “That’s part of the reason universities urgently need to grapple with this. Because people genuinely feel that our elite universities have become islands of wealth.”

In a study this year, Dr. Eaton estimated that a trio of tax breaks benefiting universities costs federal taxpayers $19.6 billion a year. Taxpayers, many of them wealthy, get breaks when they donate to colleges. Tax-free municipal bonds allow schools to borrow money at low rates. And for the most part, endowment investment returns are tax-free.

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Controversial Ventures

Multiple Appleby documents offer a glimpse into the complex financial transactions and investments, some controversial, that university endowments engage in all over the world, aside from using blockers.

Universities have been under pressure from both students and activists to shift to “green” investments in response to climate change, as well as to take social policy and global governance issues into account in investments.

The Appleby records show that investment funds of Columbia and Duke, both ranked in the top 20 endowments, held shares as recently as 2015 in Ferrous Resources, registered in the Isle of Man. Its primary business is iron mining in Brazil.

The company drew criticism there with a planned 480 kilometer pipeline to transport iron slurry from a mine in Minas Gerais to a port.

“Major demonstrations took place against this project, which culminated in the creation of a campaign,” researchers wrote in a 2015 paper published in the journal Society & Nature.

A 2010 environmental study of the pipeline revealed that more than 110,000 people might be affected by noise, dust, soil degradation and water quality issues. The project was postponed in 2012 after a downturn in iron prices.

The company, Ferrous Resources, declined to comment, except to say that the project had been discontinued.

Columbia, which owned more than eight million shares in Ferrous Recourses, or 1.1 percent of the company, declined to comment. Various investment funds connected to Duke, which also declined to comment, held more than two million shares in the company.

While some schools have announced shifts away from controversial investments, others have pointed out that divesting from fossil fuels would probably lead to a significant drop in operating funds.

Underscoring endowments’ reliance on hydrocarbon holdings, 10 schools invested in a Cayman Islands partnership in 2012 known as EnCap Energy Capital Fund IX-C, part of EnCap Investments, a private equity firm known for the acquisition and development of North American oil and gas properties.

Among the investors were the University of Alabama, DePauw, Northeastern, Pittsburgh, Purdue, Reed College, Rutgers, Syracuse, Texas Tech and Washington State.