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What are state’s chances at Toyota-Mazda plant?

State auto execs weigh in

William Thornton wthornton@al.com

Alabama is reportedly one of two states being considered for a $1.6 billion Toyota-Mazda auto plant.

What do some of the state’s existing automakers think of its chances to snag another major manufacturer?

Alabamians have been making vehicles here for 20 years, since the start of production at Mercedes-Benz in 1997. Now the state is home to three auto plants and one Toyota engine plant.

Toyota and Mazda first announced their plans in August for the plant, which is projected to be operational by 2021. Toyota will build the Corolla there, while Mazda is expected to produce crossovers.

The companies reportedly want an incentive package of at least $1 billion to get the sought-after factory.

On Tuesday, Jason Hoff, president and CEO of Mercedes-Benz U.S. International, and Mike Oatridge, vice president of manufacturing for Honda Manufacturing of Alabama, shared a stage at the Birmingham Business Alliance’s annual Chairman’s Meeting at the Alys Stephens Center.

Hoff, during the event, noted that Alabama’s unemployment rate is at a historic low. Gov. Kay Ivey announced last month that the state’s preliminary, seasonally adjusted October unemployment rate is 3.6 percent, down from 3.8 in September, which tied the previous record. Of the state’s 67 counties, only two have an unemployment rate of 6.5 percent or higher.

Might that mean that Alabama would have a problem supplying the more than 4,000 workers needed for the Toyota-Mazda plant?

Not necessarily, Hoff said later. For one thing, Alabama’s existing auto plants are geographically situated in different sectors of the state. Mercedes-Benz occupies the west, Honda the east, with Hyundai in the south. In the north is the Toyota engine plant. This has allowed the plants to operate relatively free of any workforce overlaps and enjoy a good working relationship among each other, he said.

Oatridge agreed.

“There are other parts of the state that still have a large, available workforce,” he said. “When you’re talking about the decisions that go into locating a plant, there are so many factors.”

Oatridge said Alabama has several factors in its favor, such as AIDT, the state’s workforce development program.

“And it’s not just instruction,” he said. “It’s the environment that’s created here. Alabama is very strong in doing that.”

Oatridge, originally from Canada, said Alabama’s quality of life is also a big factor.

“This is just a great place to live,” he said.
Plant expansion to bring 70 jobs

By: Stephen Dethrage

A plant in Vance that builds automotive exhaust systems for Mercedes-Benz U.S. International will effectively double in size and bring 70 additional jobs to Tuscaloosa County.

Michael May, the plant manager at Boysen Alabama, USA, said Monday that the German company currently employs around 60 people. He said their strong partnership with MBUSI and their dedication to excellence made the expansion possible.

"Here at the plant and in our headquarters in Germany, we provide stable employment and an extraordinary benefits package. We stand for the best quality," May said. "Our customers see this, too, and we’re gaining worldwide business for our exhaust systems."

May said the expansion will add more people and machines to Boysen’s operation in Vance and that the hiring process would begin soon.

"Everything is in the planning phase right now and we’re ready to contact agencies and get our specific needs out there," May said. "Applications are welcome – we always need good talent."

Anyone interested in applying can call the Boysen plant at 722-5350.

The Tuscaloosa County Boysen plant began production in November 2013 and is the group’s second site in the United States. Boysen’s first U.S. facility opened in Gaffney, South Carolina, in 2004 to supply the nearby BMW plant in Spartanburg. Worldwide, the group has 3,400 employees in 17 plants producing exhaust systems for passenger cars, trucks and off-road solutions.
Alabama's overall high school graduation rate of 87.1 percent for the class of 2016 ranks sixteenth in the country, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, falling from third for the class of 2015.

But 2015's high ranking was invalidated after federal education officials found Alabama education officials had artificially inflated graduation rates by counting as graduates students whose coursework didn't fully align with Alabama's rigorous academic standards.

Alabama's graduation rates for school years 2010-2011 through 2014-2015 must now be publicly marked as unreliable wherever the state publishes them.

The graduation rate for the country as a whole for the class of 2016 hit a record high 84.1 percent, increasing from 83.2 percent for the class of 2015.

Iowa ranked first in the nation, with a graduation rate of 91.3 percent. The District of Columbia ranked last, with a 69.2 percent graduation rate.

The federal graduation rate is calculated as the percentage of students who graduate four years after entering high school as a ninth grader.

Alabama had the third-highest graduation rate for Hispanic students (87 percent) and black students (84.5 percent), but ranked 43rd for students with disabilities (54.1 percent).

The graduation rate for Alabama's white students was 88.6 percent, tying for 24th in the country.

Alabama education officials do not plan to recalculate graduation rates for prior years, and this year released two versions of graduation rates: one using the federal formula and a second using the state formula.

The state formula stands at 89.2 percent and counts 1,202 students who took the coursework that isn't fully aligned with Alabama's standards. The state-calculated rate for the class of 2015 was 89.3 percent.

Because Alabama no longer requires students to pass a graduation test, some have questioned what bar students have had to meet to earn a high school diploma.

As an alternate measure, state education officials began measuring the percentage of students who had earned any one of seven credentials indicating the student is ready for college or career. Those indicators are:

Earning a benchmark score in any section of the ACT college entrance exam,
Earning a score of "3" or greater on an Advanced Placement test,
Earning a score of "5" or greater on an International Baccalaureate test,
Earning college credit through a dual enrollment course or other postsecondary course,
Earning an industry credential in a career tech course,

Being accepted into the military, or

Achieving the silver or gold level on the ACT WorkKeys exam.

Seventy percent of 2015 high school graduates were considered college or career-ready, while 89.2 percent of students earned a high school diploma. The percentage of 2015 graduates considered college or career ready ranged from a low of 20 percent to a high of more than 95 percent.

The college and career ready rates for the class of 2016 have not yet been released.

The Alabama State Department of Education did not return a request for comment by publication time.
School report cards delayed again

Controversial grades to be released Jan. 20

Trisha Powell Crain  tcrain@al.com

Like a student reluctant to bring home his or her report card, Alabama has once again delayed the annual release of a report grading schools.

Alabama communities eager to see what grade their schools earned will have to wait until Jan. 11, according to a Nov. 20 memo sent by interim Alabama Superintendent Ed Richardson.

Madison County Superintendent Matt Massey has his doubts that the report cards will have anything other than a negative impact on Alabama's public schools and the communities they serve. "This report card is bad," Massey said. "It's not good for the state. It's not good for education."

The original release date was set for December, and no reason was given for the delay.

In the memo, Richardson said school officials have a mandate based not only in federal and state law, but also a professional mandate to report on what's happening in public schools.

Alabama typically lands at the bottom of most national measures of school quality, including Education Week's Quality Counts metrics, where Alabama earned a D in achievement and a D-plus overall.

At least 18 other states have adopted A through F grading systems, and the first release typically causes an uproar among the education community.

When Texas released provisional grades in early 2017, 152 school districts adopted resolutions condemning the use of the grading system.

Michigan's Department of Education dropped plans for their state's grading system this past March after public feedback, officials there said.

Massey, elected in 2014, said he isn't afraid of the grades, but thinks one letter grade is overly simplistic and doesn't tell the whole story of what's happening in a school.

He said he believes state lawmakers, who passed a law in 2012 requiring the use of the single letter grade, want to create distrust in public education.

Madison County has a blend of schools, some rural, some suburban. Massey said he expects the 27 schools in his community to earn good grades.

In the memo, Richardson said Alabama's 137 local superintendents will get a first look at their grades on Dec. 14, after he presents state-level information to the state Board of Education. Local school officials will have through Jan. 10 to review the data and "develop local messages" about what the report cards say.

The report cards will be released to the public on Jan. 11.

The state department of education is hosting a webinar for school officials on Dec. 18 to help craft those local messages, according to the Nov. 20 memo.

It's that local message that has Massey worried. "For some parents, a 'B' isn't good enough," he said, and a 'C' means trouble. Nobody wants to send their kid to a 'C' school," Massey said.

Grades are based mostly on results of students who took the ACT Aspire, which the state board voted to drop in June.

"So we fired the test company," Massey said, "yet determine the letter grade from a test we said isn't a good test."

Massey said the state law places labels on schools and doesn't provide any help for schools that struggle.

The state law does not dictate consequences for schools earning low grades, but does authorize a recognition and reward program for schools earning top grades and those improving their grade from one year to the next.

The recognition portion of the law begins with the second-year grades. Funding for the reward portion depends on state lawmakers appropriating money for that use.

The law mandates that a school's and system's grade be based on a combination of "student achievement scores, achievement gap, college and career readiness, learning gains, and other indicators as determined by the State Superintendent of Education to impact student learning and success."

The formula for how the grades are calculated was left for the state Department of Education to create.

ACT Aspire results, however, factor heavily into the grades. The tremendous weight of one test on a school's grade doesn't sit well with Massey. "It's irresponsible to use a test that took a kid 40 minutes to take," Massey said, "and completely make a determination about schools that is going to have incredible ramifications for property values, and could put people's jobs on the line."
State's business community wonders about possible impacts of Roy Moore controversy

Not long after the Washington Post ran its first story last month on accusations against GOP Senate candidate Roy Moore, the Retirement Systems of Alabama began getting messages.

RSA CEO David Bronner said the pension fund, which runs the state's Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, received "a huge number" of emails and some letters from past visitors threatening to never visit the trail again — if Moore is elected Dec. 12.

That impacts tourism, Bronner said, which is a $13 billion industry annually for Alabama. But it's more than just Moore's recent allegations. It's his career, which includes being removed from office twice as Alabama's chief justice.

"Whenever you have extremist views on anything, you're in competition with places that don't have those views," he said.

The golf trail, which has been called Alabama's most significant economic project in the past 40 years, is just one aspect of how Alabama's Senate campaign could affect business, both now and in years to come. Bronner, as well as others, worry allegations that the claims women have made, and Moore's reactions, could stifle growth and development.

Moore has denied the allegations, and his campaign has highlighted its Republican pro-business agenda, as has President Donald Trump, who has now formally endorsed the former judge.

"What people don't understand is that industry as a whole, everyone that I know, that I'm associated with — they don't want to be in a place that's known for extreme positions," Bronner said. "That's left or right or anywhere. Business comes because they're going to get a good workforce and more importantly, make money. They don't want to run the risk of insulting their clients."

There haven't been many public statements from the business community. On Tuesday, the Birmingham Business Alliance held its annual Chairman's Meeting. None of the speakers referenced the campaign. And several business leaders declined to comment, as did others who were contacted elsewhere.

"I don't think that the business world will change their views of Alabama strictly on the basis of one individual being elected to the U.S. Senate," he said. "'m not saying there's one company that wouldn't be affected, but there are so many factors at play in business decisions. A lot of it also depends on what's going on in competing states."
For Shelby and Moore, no love lost

'He perceives Roy Moore as being a negative'

John Sharp jsharp@al.com

Richard Shelby says he’s already cast his vote, by absentee ballot, in Alabama’s special Senate election. And it wasn’t a vote for Roy Moore.

Shelby told reporters Monday that he’d voted for a “distinguished Republican write-in,” whom he didn’t name.

For political observers who assess the significance of such things, Shelby’s remarks, while few, were certainly notable.

Look at it this way: Alabama’s senior U.S. senator didn’t back his own party’s nominee for the state’s junior Senate seat.

“Almost unheard of,” said renowned Alabama historian Wayne Flynt.

Nationally, there have been cases in which party elders disavowed their party’s nominees. Most often mentioned by political experts is the 1990 Louisiana Senate race, when the GOP united to defeat Republican state Rep. David Duke, a former Klan leader.

Duke was running as a challenger against Democratic incumbent Bennett Johnston Jr., considered a heavy favorite for re-election. In the end, Johnston crushed Duke by a 54-43 percent margin.

A year later, Duke fared even worse when he ran for governor, capturing less than 39 percent of the vote against Democrat Edwin Edwards.

In 2012, in Missouri, Republican Sen. Roy Blunt urged his party’s nominee, Todd Akin, to drop out of that year’s Senate contest against Democrat Sen. Claire McCaskill.

Blunt’s call, backed by national Republicans, came after Akin made inflammatory comments about rape and pregnancy. But Akin didn’t quit, and Blunt and other GOP stalwarts eventually said that they’d support him.

McCaskill overwhelmingly won Akin election day, by a 55-39 percent margin.

U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Tuscaloosa: He’s "embarrassed" by Roy Moore and concerned that he’ll give Alabama "a black eye," says widely circulated political commentator Steve Flowers.

Joe Songer jsonger@al.com

Shelby is one of the most powerful men in the United States. He’s chairman of the Senate Rules Committee.

More recently, Shelby said that Moore should “seriously consider” quitting the Senate contest after The Washington Post revealed the stories of women who said that Moore had sexually pursued them in the 1970s when they were teens and he was in his 30s.

In Flowers’ opinion, Shelby is “embarrassed” by Moore and concerned that he’ll give Alabama “a black eye” that could harm industrial recruitment and hinder “bringing home the bacon.”

’STEADILY GROWN’

The 83-year-old Shelby has held his Senate post since 1987, standing seventh in seniority in the 100-member chamber.

“Whatever you think of his ideology, he has steadily grown in reputation over the decades,” Flynt said in an email statement. “He was satisfied to do what few other senators of recent vintage managed: Keep his mouth shut, work hard for his home state, which (since he has been both a respected Democrat and Republican) was shrewd because no one would have believed him had he sworn fealty to one party or the other; refuse to demagogue on class, race, or religion.”

Wrote Flynt: “At this point in his career, he is old enough (this will probably be his last term), respected enough, and enough interested in the judgment of God and history that his wife has a master’s in history that he can aspire (with Senators Bob Corker and John McCain, and a few others) to be a statesman rather than a party hack.”

There are some examples in which senators from the same state and belonging to the same party have openly feud.

Texas Republicans John Cornyn and Ted Cruz have clashed from time to time, but Cornyn recently bestowed his endorsement upon Cruz’s re-election campaign in 2018.

Ross Baker, a distinguished professor of political science at Rutgers University, recalls the bitterness between U.S. Sens. Frank Lautenberg and Robert Torricelli, two New Jersey Democrats. More than a decade ago, Torricelli — whose quick temper earned him the nickname “Torch” — infamously yelled at Lautenberg and threatened to cast a ballot for an opponent.

Baker continued: “Were Judge Moore to be elected, I would not hazard a guess as what the effect would be on Alabama of having two senators who were incapable of working together.”

GET ALONG

Steve Flowers, a commentator whose articles about Alabama politics appear in more than 60 newspapers, said U.S. senators within the same state usually “strive to have a harmonious relationship.”

“Shelby has had that throughout his career,” said Flowers. “He’s worked well with Howell Hefflin and Jeff Sessions.”

But, said Flowers, “He perceives Roy Moore as being a negative in Alabama.”

It’s possible, of course, that Moore feels the same about Shelby.

Flowers spoke of Moore’s October visit to Washington, D.C., when the former state chief justice met with former White House chief strategist Steve Bannon, while reportedly snubbing Shelby and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Shelby and McConnell backed Luther Strange during the summer’s GOP runoff contest, which Moore handily won. “They raised $14 million to defeat him, but if you are a Republican, you need to get along with them,” said Flowers. “Rich

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Media Days departure will cost the metro area $600,000

Erin Edgemon  
edgemon@al.com

The SEC’s decision to move the annual Media Days out of Hoover will cost the Birmingham metro area an estimated $600,000.

According to the Greater Birmingham Convention & Visitors Bureau, the more than 1,500 journalists, fans and teams that attend the event spend that much at area Birmingham hotels, restaurants and gas stations.

SEC Media Days, which serves as the conference’s annual kickoff event to mark the new football season, has been held in Hoover at the Hyatt Regency Birmingham/The Wynfrey Hotel for the past 17 years. Next year will mark the first time since 1985 that SEC Media Days will not be held in the Birmingham area.

Next year’s Media Days will be held in Atlanta.

The greatest loss, arguably, is the national attention SEC Media Days brought to Hoover.

“The true reality of the event is that we get so much national media coverage because of it,” said John Oros, president and CEO of the Greater Birmingham Convention & Visitors Bureau. “That is something we are going to miss.

“The Wynfrey (Hotel) has always filled up for the event, and the surrounding hotels have realized the impact,” he added. “The hotel community...is going to miss it in 2018.”

Paul Dangel, director of sales and marketing at the Hyatt Regency Birmingham/The Wynfrey Hotel, said the hotel has already found an event — a religious conference — to replace SEC Media Days next year. The hotel, though, can’t replace the media attention SEC Media Days brings to Hoover.

“The publicity and the notoriety of having Media Days in our hotel...that part is immeasurable,” he said.

Hotel general manager Matt Sterley said the hotel can “anticipate being sold out” for its 329 rooms during SEC Media Days. At a rate of approximately $170 per night for four or five nights, that’s revenue of over $220,000 that could be leaving the Hoover hotel, not to mention money spent at other area hotels and businesses.

“To say that we have a good revenue chunk within this week is definitely an understatement,” Sterley said.

SEC Media Days will return to Hoover in 2019, with various other locations throughout the conference’s footprint hosting the event in subsequent years. Hoover will remain a regular host for the event due to its central location within the league.

Hoover Mayor Frank Brocato said the city has been in conversations with SEC commissioner Greg Sankey for the past several months. He said the SEC’s decision wasn’t a reflection of Hoover’s performance or amenities.

“For us to be mentioned in the same breath as Atlanta, Dallas and Nashville — I am honored that (Sankey) considers us in the same market,” Brocato said.

He said Hoover isn’t defined by SEC Media Days.

“It filled up a number of hotel rooms. People came here from all over the Southeastern Conference, spending money in Hoover and the metro area,” Brocato said.

“We will work really hard to bring something else during that time,” he said.

Bill Powell, executive director of Hoover Chamber of Commerce, said the loss of Media Days will be felt by restaurants at Riverchase Galleria and hotels along the Highway 150 corridor.

“I don’t think we will be crippled by it, but it will be noticeable,” he said.

Todd Beegle, general manager of On Tap Sports Cafe at Riverchase Galleria, said he will miss the event. He said the sports bar is where national sports reporters came in the evenings. ESPN SportsCenter also regularly filmed there during the four-day Media Days.

“I can name all of the guys from ESPN that come here,” Beegle said. “One year we were trending on the Bleacher Report.”

Beegle said On Tap receives a noticeable increase in revenue during SEC Media Days.

“We have pretty consistent numbers, but it is busier when it happens,” he said.

Beegle said he will be glad to see SEC Media Days return in 2019.
State ranks sixth in business survey

Publication surveys climate for business in every state

Staff report

Alabama ranks sixth in a national publication's survey of the states with the best climate for businesses. Site Selection, an economic development-focused publication, based the ranking on input from business site selection consultants and corporate real estate executives, in addition to the level of high-quality project activity in each state. Alabama ranked No. 9 in 2016 and No. 11 in 2015 in the same survey.

Greg Canfield, secretary of the Alabama Department of Commerce, said the high ranking is a result of the work of the state's economic development team, which he said competes daily to bring high-caliber jobs to Alabama.

"We are going to continue our strategy of pursuing game-changing projects because we are committed to

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SURVEY

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creating opportunities that position the state for future growth,” Canfield said in a news release.

Georgia ranked No. 1 in Site Selection's survey for the fifth straight year. Eight of the top 10 states in the survey are in the Southeast.

Between 2011 and 2016, economic development activity brought $28.5 billion in new capital investment to Alabama, along with 107,000 new and future jobs, according to Alabama Department of Commerce data. In 2016 alone, new capital investment in Alabama totaled $4.2 billion, with 14,700 anticipated jobs.

The department also touted major projects across several industry sectors in 2017, including continued expansion at Mercedes-Benz U.S. International in Vance and projects in Alabama involving Toyota, Blue Origin, Aerojet Rocketdyne, Leonardo, Autocar and more.

Area Development, another economic development publication, also ranked Alabama No. 6 overall its 2017 “Top States for Doing Business” analysis.

“It’s almost like a stuck record in Alabama, but it’s playing beautiful music that economic development officials will never tire of hearing,” the publication said. “Automotive and aerospace manufacturing continues to drive healthy economic activity.”
No more harassment secrets, lawmakers say

Alabama delegation says it's time for transparency

John Sharp jsharp@al.com

Members of Alabama's U.S. House delegation are speaking up for federal legislation requiring more transparency in sexual harassment settlements on Capitol Hill.

The measure comes as the Republican-controlled Congress braces for the Dec. 12 Senate special election in Alabama, in which GOP nominee Roy Moore faces allegations that he sexually pursued teenage girls when he was in his 30s. Polls show Moore locked in a tight race with Democrat Doug Jones.

At least one political observer in Washington, D.C., believes that the Alabama election could be a watershed moment in how Congress addresses a swelling national issue of concern.

"I think that if Roy Moore is elected, that Republicans, in particular, want cover to distance themselves from his actions," said Jennifer Lawless, director of the Women & Politics Institute and a professor of government at American University in Washington, D.C. "They don't want 2018 to be a referendum on what happens in Alabama. They want to be prepared, that should he win, that they fought tooth and nail to have a better policy in place and that members of Congress should not behave this way."

She said, "The clock is ticking and they want something done prior to the special election on the 12th."

"COMPLETELY TRANSPARENT"

Hearings are expected in December to determine whether the Office of Compliance -- the body that handles harassment complaints involving the U.S. House -- should reveal settlement details that are part of $17 million in taxpayer-funded payouts to victims since 1997. That amount includes all settlements, not just related to sexual harassment, but also discrimination and other matters.

But very little is known about the payouts. The Congressional Accountability Act of 1995 mandates that settlements be secretive and that taxpayers pick up the tab.

"We need to make the process transparent from the beginning to the end," said U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne, R-Hoover, who previously predicted employment law.

"Certainly, the way the funds are paid out of this special fund to settle these claims, that needs to be completely transparent."" said U.S. Rep. Mo Brooks, R-Huntsville: "Sexual harassment settlements on Capitol Hill should be public whenever the accusation is made against a congressman or senator."

Reps. Terri Sewell, D-Birmingham; Gary Palmer, R-Hoover; Robert Aderholt, R-Haleyville; and Mike Rogers, R-Saks, all favor more transparency in the process, according to their offices.

A spokesman for Rep. Martha Roby, R-Montgomery, said that she supports sexual harassment training for members of Congress and their staffs, but that she has not "signed onto any specific transparency legislation. The U.S. House unanimously passed a resolution Wednesday requiring the training."

Reps. Jacky Speier, D-California, and Barbara Comstock, R-Virginia, are spearheading an effort to rid the 1995 law of secrecy provisions, instead mandating that any lawmaker who settles a claim as a harasser repay the U.S. Treasury from their own personal finances. Sen. Kristen Gillibrand, D-N.Y., is pushing a similar proposal in the Senate.

The issue is being propelled by a host of resignations and firings of media, political and entertainment celebrities -- all men -- newly accused of sexual wrongdoing by women who've been emboldened to speak up.

"I think people are scared in Washington because it seems like every day there is someone else who is falling from a result of this," said Richard Fording, a political science professor at the University of Alabama. "I think this movement has taken off throughout the country."

Fording predicted that Congress, which has stalled on many issues through partisan divides, could have a bipartisan incentive to move ahead with changing how it polices itself when it comes to sexual harassment claims.

"Republicans are already struggling with women voters, so they cannot afford to backslide on that," Fording said. "It's an easy one, I think for them and for the Democrats, of course, to get behind."

RETROACTIVE REVELATIONS?

A debate is likely to surface on whether the reforms should apply retroactively, which means those who have paid past settlements would now be identified.

Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-California, and the House Democratic leader, said on NBC's "Meet the Press" that an unmasking of past claims should be handled with caution as it could reveal the identity of victims who wanted to remain private.

Byrne and Brooks are supportive of retroactively applying the law. Said Byrne, "To the maximum extent we can make it transparent as far back as we can make it transparent, we should do so."

But Byrne said that victims ought not to have to grapple anew with old wounds. He said that Congress shouldn't "violate any sort of confidentiality agreement" reached between parties years ago. "That is why we have to look at each agreement," he said.

William Stewart, a professor emeritus of political science at the University of Alabama and a longtime political observer, said that the opening of sealed cases will, obviously, expose the perpetrators to public censure. But it could be even harder on the victims, he explained: "For the most part, they are not public figures who possess numerous resources to put before the public 'their side of the story.'"

And then there is the Alabama factor. Moore has denied allegations of wrongdoing, and state Republican leaders have said they intend to vote for him, among them Gov. Kay Ivey. But national Republicans, including Sen. Richard Shelby of Alabama, have distanced themselves from Moore.

Derry Moton, chairman of the Department of History and Political Science at Alabama State University, said the "unanswered question" for him is whether women "will continue to show their disdain for piggish male behavior by voting sexual harassers out of office."

Stewart said Dec. 12 will be the "first opportunity" for Alabama voters to weigh in.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

The Birmingham News
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West Alabama shortage mirrors national trend

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Since October, DCH Health System has hired about 44 nurses as it seeks to replenish its ranks while competing with peers in Alabama and nationwide amid a shortage of nurses. “Like other hospitals in Alabama and the nation, we are experiencing a nursing shortage,” said Peggy Sease, vice president of human resources for the DCH Health System. “This is caused by lots of different reasons.” During the fiscal year that ended in September, the system hired 237 registered nurses. The system expects to hire another 200 this fiscal year as it tries to maintain its staff of bedside nurses.

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Sease said. The system has about 170 vacancies right now. It's a deficit the system has learned to live with by using overtime, special pay and traveling nurses to fill shifts.

The turnover follows retirement and nurses leaving for other opportunities.

"That has been typical for us for about a year and a half or two years," Sease said of the vacancies. "It is what it is, and we are hiring."

A few years ago, the rate was between 110 and 115 vacancies, she said. The system has about 4,800 employees and sees similar challenges at other positions as well, Sease said.

"It is hard to hire a lot of positions, because there are so many positions open in our area," she said.

There is no single factor responsible for the shortage in West Alabama, according to Sease and the heads of local nursing colleges. The problem is cyclical, and supply and demand are influenced by factors including pay and working conditions, the increasing needs of an aging population, national health care policy shifts, as well as the capacity of nursing programs to provide graduates as the demand increases.

Health care delivery models are also continuously changing, said Gladys Hill, associate Dean of Health Services at Shelton State Community College.

"What we needed five years ago may be something totally different than we need today," Hill said.

Hill noted the current debate about repeals or reforms to the Affordable Care Act.

"I am not sure where we are going to land," Hill said.

A cycle of shortages

The cycle of shortages occurs every 10 years or so, Hill said. Demand increases. Programs respond by producing more graduates. The demand lessens, and fewer nurses are hired or hours are cut.

Shelton State Community College is on track to graduate about 150 nurses in 2018, Hill said. The University of Alabama graduates about 500 total annually from the Capstone College of Nursing's undergraduate and graduate programs, Dean Suzanne Prevost said.

"Our graduates are mostly local folks who
The patterns of nursing shortages nationwide tend to be regional, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, which published a report earlier this year on the projected demand for nurses during the next 15 years.

According to the report on supply and demand projections for the workforce from 2014-2030, the demand for nurses differs from state to state, with an inequitable distribution of workforce. Some regions are predicted to have a surplus of nurses, while others are projected to face deficits.

The demand for nurses in Alabama is projected to grow from 68,000 to 79,800 from 2014 to 2030. The supply in the state is projected to grow to 85,100. The supply of licensed practical nurses nationwide is expected to fall short of demand in the same period, including states such as Alabama, though LPN demand can be met more quickly because of the shorter training period.

The supply figures are calculated based on factors such as the number of graduates entering the workforce and the number of nurses who leave or see work hours cut. Demand is estimated based on current health care use, staffing patterns, demographic changes, changes to insurance and Medicaid.
or Medicare.

Recruiting season

DCH and other hospitals do most of their recruiting as students graduate from nursing programs, typically during the summer, according to Sease. But DCH is in the midst of recruiting right now because there are December graduations, she said. DCH representatives have been at nine colleges and universities recruiting.

“We are able to recruit most of our new grads from community colleges,” Sease said. “It is hard to recruit from larger colleges because half come from out of state. Some want to stay and some don’t.”

DCH typically attract individuals from the region or those who are attracted to living here, Sease said.

The Health Resources and Services Administration report said nurses tend to practice in the states where they have been trained.

DCH is also doing several things to help recruit nurses to its facilities and students into the profession, Sease said.

“We are going into the high schools,” Sease said.

DCH works with the World of Work career expo at Shelton State, which introduces eighth-graders to future job possibilities.

DCH also offers a program for second-year nursing students allowing them to work as patient care assistants to experience work in different units, Sease said. The students receive tuition assistance as part of the program. Tuition assistance is also available for DCH employees who go to nursing school, she said.

DCH hires lots of new graduates, Sease said.

Citing competition among employers, Sease declined to provide a specific salary amount but said the rates were competitive.

The average salary for registered nurses in the Tuscaloosa metropolitan area is $58,160, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data. For the nonmetropolitan area of northwest Alabama the average was about $53,000. The average in the Birmingham metro area was $59,810.

While its rates are competitive, sometimes the system finds itself competing against lifestyles rather than salaries, Sease said.

“What we find is as they get experience... they can go travel and be a travel RN,” she said.

It’s a chance to see the world, according to Hill and Sease.

“They want to live in an
area where they can snow ski," Sease said. "They want to see the world and have a different style of life."

Some University of Alabama students who did their initial clinical work in West Alabama would go to Birmingham or Nashville for their final preceptorships, Prevost said. The students would return impressed by the difference in the work environment.

Prevost agreed the Tuscaloosa area currently faced a shortage, but argued there are more nurses in the region than people may think.

Some live here but travel outside the area, drawn by better salaries or work environments.

"I think the challenge is ours to really invest to produce healthy work environments to stay in," Prevost said.

DCH wants to be the employer of choice for its nurses, Sease said.

"We do a lot of things to incentivize our employees," Sease said.
UA band reaches financial goal

Million Dollar Band raises more than $40,000 for new instruments

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

With more than a week to spare, the University of Alabama’s Million Dollar Marching Band has reached its goal of raising $40,000 to help fund the purchase of new equipment. As of Thursday, the band’s campaign on UA Crowdfunding had raised $41,126. The campaign officially ends Dec. 15 at midnight. The band’s campaign was launched last month with the goal of funding an entire section of new instruments.

The band’s campaign served as the launch of UA Crowdfunding, an online fundraising platform to support projects created by members of the UA community. Supporters can use the platform to make donations and track the overall progress of campaigns, which will typically run for 30 days.

“We have been very pleased with the success of our inaugural crowdfunding campaign in support of the Million Dollar Band,” said Allison Leitner, UA executive director of fundraising initiatives. “Although we have reached our goal, there is still more money to be raised to purchase a matching set of instruments for all members of the band. The campaign ends Dec. 15 and we continue to encourage gifts for this project.”

No decisions have been made yet about the purchases, but the donations could be used for new percussion instruments, which would replace some of the oldest instruments in the band, Million Dollar Band Director Ken Ozzello said.

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BAND

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The university will continue to build out its crowdfunding site into the New Year. Early next year, UA’s director of annual giving, Mary Lawhorn, will begin accepting applications from student groups, faculty and campus organizations interested in using the platform, Leitner said.
They married on June 12, 1954 and celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary two months before her death in 2016. Jim attended Huntington College in Montgomery where he received his Bachelor of Arts. He always said that Huntington gave him a fine liberal arts education while also giving him his Bible.

He and Donjette moved to Tuscaloosa where he received his Master's and Ph.D. in Biology from The University of Alabama. He was a faculty member in the Biology Department at the University of Alabama. Jim served at Mississippi State University for 19 years as department chair and professor of Zoology and subsequently served as the head of the Division of Structural and Systems Biology in the School of Basic Life Sciences at The University of Missouri-Kansas City. From 1980 to 2000, Jim served as the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at The University of Alabama. During his tenure as Dean, he placed special emphasis on quality undergraduate education for Alabama's students culminating in the implementation of the highly innovative Blount Undergraduate Initiative, now named the Blount Scholars Program.

During his long career in academia, Jim loved and mentored many students and positively influenced their futures. He was a valued colleague to many faculty and staff members positively impacting their personal lives and careers.

A man of faith, integrity, intelligence, kindness and grace, Jim was truly a renaissance man. He was a talented musician, a gifted writer, a philosopher, a scientist, a devoted family man, a friend to many, a wise and kind mentor to many young people and above all a Christian who shared his faith.

Jim was predeceased by his wife, Donjette Stewart Yarbrough; his beloved son, David Stewart Yarbrough; his sister, Bertie Ritterhouse; and his parents, Bill and Mary Yarbrough. Survivors include his daughters, Kathy Yarbrough and Lisa Yarbrough Fowler; son-in-law, Charles Fowler; grandchildren, Tracy Hanserd (Matt), Jocelyn Fowler, Andrew Fowler, Stewart Fowler and Mary Terrell (Chris); great-grandchildren, Ellie, Leah, Parker, Adam, Jocelyn, David, Andrew, Mary, and Parker; great-great-grandchildren, Parker Terrell; his loving sister, Janice Ksara; brother-in-law, Edward Ksara; his sister and brother-in-law, Emily and Joseph Gilbert; and many nieces and nephews.

The family wishes to extend their love and appreciation to Terra-lyn Muttuki, the staff of Traditions Way at Capstone Village and Hospice of West Alabama. In honor of our father, tell a good joke, be kind, impact the future of a young person and tell your family you love them.

Memorials may be made to the James Yarbrough Blount Scholarship, the Yarbrough Biology Scholarship and the Yarbrough Caring Hearts Award at The University of Alabama, Box 870101, Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0101.

A celebration of life service will be 11 a.m. Monday, December 11, 2017, at First United Methodist Church with Dr. Ken Dunivant and Rev. Dan Kilgore officiating and Heritage Chapel Funeral Home & Cremations, a Dignity Memorial Provider, directing. A committal service will be 11 a.m. Tuesday, December 12, 2017, at Greenwood Cemetery in Montgomery, Ala. Visitations will be Sunday, December 10, 2017, from 4 to 6 p.m., at the funeral home.

Condolences may be offered at www.heritagechapeltuscaloosa.com.
AT A GLANCE

**College football helps Alabama residents earn $1.1M**

AUBURN — College football in Alabama has helped residents earn more than $1.1 million over the past two seasons through a popular online hospitality service.

Airbnb said host earnings related to the Alabama and Auburn football seasons increased more than 80 percent in 2017 over last year, Al.com reported.

The company allows property owners and lodging seekers to book short-term rentals online.

The company tracked traffic related to football games in Tuscaloosa and Auburn.

“In addition to being leading academic institutions, the University of Alabama and Auburn University sports programs are a huge tourism draw and economic boost for Tuscaloosa and Auburn residents and businesses,” said Will Burns, Airbnb’s public policy director for Alabama.

Burns said the extra money coming in through the service benefited families and property owners while providing an affordable way for fans to attend games.

A total of 7,190 Airbnb guest bookings occurred during Alabama and Auburn home games this season.

Auburn experienced the largest growth in Airbnb bookings, with traffic up 102 percent. Tuscaloosa increased 64 percent. The city approved a slate of regulations related to short-term rentals earlier this year.

The two cities earned $726,000 during the 2017 football season.

The highest guest arrivals occurred during rivalry games including Alabama’s Nov. 4 game against LSU.

Last year, more than 1,200 residents of Alabama who hosted through Airbnb made a total of $7 million.

The average host was 40, with the typical hosts earning $4,300 sharing their home 25 nights or less annually.

*Staff and wire reports*
Don’t prop up Legion Field; city needs a new stadium

Kevin Scarbinsky

It’s hard to imagine a greater return on #theReturn of UAB football. The university’s enrollment, a key component of the school’s massive economic impact, is at a record high this fall. Home attendance at football games led Conference USA. The team didn’t lose in Birmingham, finishing 8-4 overall and second in its division to earn a trip to the Bahamas Bowl.

It’s not a happy accident. It’s the result of a mutually beneficial public and private partnership, the university, the city and the local business community working together for the greater good.

Bill Clark and his Blazers might be headed to a tropical island, but everything’s not sunny in Birmingham. A potential threat to the evolution of UAB football and the city has popped up. It’s the prospect of throwing good money after bad to prop up Legion Field, which could derail all the progress that’s been made toward building a new outdoor stadium in the growing Uptown district and renovating Legacy Arena at the BJCC.

The agenda for Tuesday’s Birmingham City Council meeting included “a Resolution supporting $30 million for the 5-year (2018-2023) capital budget for Legion Field.”

The resolution was submitted and recommended by City Councilman William Parker. Last month, Parker described his idea “to provide the necessary tools to make sure Legion Field is viable for the next 10 to 20 years.”

Wait. What? Viable? For the next decade or two? Legion Field, at 90 years old, is barely serviceable now. It’s a money pit, an albatross around the neck of UAB football and the special events held there — from the Magic City Classic to the Birmingham Bowl.

If the goal is to revitalize the community around Legion Field and prepare it for life after the stadium shuts down, that’s admirable. But it sounds as if Parker wants to put more lipstick on the dying stadium and keep it as this city’s primary football facility into the foreseeable future.

“We are going to actively pursue bringing more events to Legion Field,” he said. “The goal is to have a sporting event every Saturday at Legion Field during the football season.”

Don’t tap the brakes on that idea. Slam them.

People who care about Birmingham and its future have been trying to find a way to replace Legion Field since the 1990s. They’re on the cusp of breaking through and putting together the last pieces of a public and private financial package to pay for both a new outdoor stadium and a renovated Legacy Arena, whose age and condition limits the number and type of events possible there.

That financial package has to include an annual contribution from the city in the neighborhood of $3.5 million a year. That doesn’t seem possible if the city dedicates a similar or greater amount each year to the upkeep of Legion Field.

With a new mayor in Randall Woodfin and a new city council, this is the perfect time for Birmingham to move out of the past and into the future, to help its largest employer in UAB and, in turn, help itself. That can’t happen as long as Birmingham clings to Legion Field.
UAB DISCUSSING AGREEMENT TO KEEP RURAL HOSPITAL OPEN

UAB Health System is discussing a potential agreement that could prevent a rural Alabama hospital from closing.

UAB said it has entered into a nonbinding memorandum of understanding with the board of trustees for J. Paul Jones Hospital in Camden to discuss a management agreement.

The potential agreement would involve the hospital becoming a managed associate of UAB Medicine and the potential creation of an Alabama Health Care Authority to own and operate the facility.

The hospital's board previously said the 30-bed hospital would be forced to close due to declining reimbursement rates and the financial environment facing the state's rural hospitals.

"Small hospitals, in particular those in Alabama's underserved, rural counties, are under tremendous financial pressure," said Will Ferniany, CEO of the UAB Health System. "Several have closed over the past few years, and the outlook going forward looks bleak. We welcome the opportunity to work with the dedicated health care professionals in Wilcox County to find a way to keep the doors of this hospital open."

The memorandum states that an agreement be in place by Feb. 1, 2018.
A longtime goal for Birmingham's startup scene has been luring potential investors to town. A recent Innovate Birmingham event did just that, bringing a number of potential dealmakers to town and connecting them with some of the most promising startups in the Magic City.

It's the type of event local entrepreneurs say will help get local companies on the radar for potential investors and help buoy the area's local technology scene. Some investors came from local areas in the Southeast, such as Nashville, Raleigh, Tampa and Atlanta, but also from as far as San Francisco, Chicago, New York and New Hampshire.

Overall, according to Innovate Birmingham, there was over $8 billion in assets under management represented at the Investor Gathering.

The event was organized to not only showcase the advancement and the budding tech industry of the city, but also for some local companies to pitch their companies to high-level investors.

"I think the Investor Gathering was very successful," said Innovate Birmingham Executive Director Bob Crutchfield. "Feedback from investors was that they saw a side of Birmingham that they haven't seen in the past. We set this up to show them where Birmingham was and where Birmingham is, and in the middle of that how the tech scene is beginning to flourish."

The companies that managed to pitch and present their operations were Fleetio, TheraNest, Planet Fundraiser, XpertDox, Covalence, Help Lighting and TicketBiscuit.

Investors also received a tour of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Southern Research, Innovation Depot and the UAB Commercialization Accelerator.

According to Innovate Birmingham, Investors were extremely impressed and surprised with the capacity and the scale of Southern Research and the cohesiveness and overall abilities of the commercialization accelerator.

The gathering not only managed to display what technology companies Birmingham offer, but what is necessary in a strong technological economy.

"I think that when you look at what drives a vibrant and robust technology-based development economy, you have to have high-growth companies, industry and corporate support, strong universities and you have to have cap, so what we wanted to do with the investor conference is to boost the presence of capital in our market," Crutchfield said.

"Private capital is looking for efficiencies, so they're going to markets where there are more 'shots on goal' so what we wanted to demonstrate is that if you haven't been to Birmingham, there's a lot going on here. We gave them a new view of the volume of entrepreneurial activity that's happening and the resource and the coordination of those resources."

One of the major areas that the Investor Gathering addressed was Birmingham's past and how that can have a negative effect in perception and job development.

The visit to the Civil Rights Institute was to address a perception issue, according to Innovate Birmingham, but that it connects the dots of how that era impacted business in Birmingham and how that still impacts the economy, but it also demonstrates how creative and pragmatic business is here.

"As an investor that deals with folks and worked with many of the people who came, I think there's a perception that Birmingham is still mired in the '60s and we're not. They were surprised with the level of sophistication of the companies that are here, companies like Shipt, and the size of those companies, like Hospitalink, and they were surprised at some of the growth that's happening," Crutchfield said. "I think there was some biases but they came away thinking that this is a modern vibrant city that they need to start paying attention to."

Many of the firms that presented at the event could be looking for funding in the months to come, so the hope is the event will lead to more deals in a city where the flowing of venture capital funding has been on the rise.
Huntsville makes relocation site's list of hippest cities in nation

By: Lindsey Connell

Huntsville now has bragging rights as one of the coolest cities in America. That's according to a new study by relocation experts with MoveHub.

Places like Seattle and Portland are known as being hot spots for hipsters, but more and more cities, including Huntsville, are being recognized as some of the best spots in the country for people under 30 to live.

MoveHub created a U.S. Hipster Index and Huntsville came in at number 16 on the list of the top 20 hipster cities in the nation. The findings were highlighted in a recent Business Insider article.

Cities were ranked based on a variety of factors that make them appealing to young people, like the number tattoo parlors, vegan stores, and microbreweries, as well as the cost of living.

“We were really excited to be among some fantastic cities and what we've seen in Huntsville through our quality of life offerings really speaks to being on that list,” said Erin Kosut, Cummings Research Park director with the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce.

MoveHub found that Huntsville is a bustling city with plenty to do, including farmers' markets, coffee shops, and local breweries. They also noted that the city has lots of thrift shops, making it a great place for fashionistas and creatives.

“In Huntsville, we have 10 different breweries which is the largest craft brewery growth in the state of Alabama,” Kosut said. “One of the interesting notes that they had in this particular ranking is that Huntsville has 9.3 thrift stores per 100,000 people. Then they talked about our many other qualities like our artisans and the really cool things there are to do and places like Lowe Mill.”

Eliah McCutchen, 22, is a recent college graduate working as the media coordinator at Lowe Mill. He's lived in Huntsville since he was in first grade but left for college for four years in Birmingham and then came back. He's experiencing all of the new breweries and other places that have popped up in recent years, and he thinks it’s great for bringing new people into the city and keeping current residents entertained.

“I think that the things Huntsville has brought in over the past few years are good for people who are looking for a new place to live or looking for a place to start a family or a career or people who have lived here their whole lives and are just looking for something new and fun to do on a Friday night,” he said.

McCutchen said Huntsville has a unique combination of professions and personalities, including artists and scientists, that make it interesting and a great place for people his age.

See next page
“There’s such a good arts community so if you’re a creative person, Huntsville is the place to go. On the opposite spectrum of that, there’s an awesome engineering program at UAH and we have the Space and Rocket Center so it’s definitely a melting pot of all different kinds of personalities. No matter what you like, you’re going to find a place to fit in Huntsville that you won’t find anywhere else,” he said.

The Chamber of Commerce states the new ranking will help attract more young professionals to the Rocket City. Huntsville has already seen growth in that demographic.

“This list says not only are we a great place for our low cost of living and our STEM job growth, but we’re really hip too and here’s why. This list really speaks to that and is a great tool in the toolbox for us as we recruit,” Koshut said.

The top three cities on the U.S. Hipster Index were Cincinnati, Ohio, Salt Lake City, Utah, and Vancouver, Washington.
UAH engineers to develop ‘digital twin’ to improve CubeSat mission

By: Staff

Engineers from the US-based University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) are set to create a ‘digital twin’ of a CubeSat to ensure its successful functionality during its year-long mission to study equatorial plasma bubbles.

To be developed with a $185,000 grant from Nasa, the project will support the joint Nasa-Brazil Scintillation Prediction Observations Research Task (SPORT) mission.

Data from the mission is expected to help researchers unlock the mystery of plasma bubbles and mitigate their effects on Earth.

Due to be launched by 2020, the mission is being funded by Nasa’s Science Mission Directorate in Washington, DC.

UAH assistant professor and project lead Dr Bryan Mesmer said: “With this type of space mission, we only have one shot.

“So the idea is to test the system in the simulated world to give us a high probability that it will work once it is in orbit.”

UAH engineers have already started using a system-modelling language software called Cameo Enterprise Architecture to create the digital twin of the SPORT mission.

Development of the twin will be based on the models previously created for a Nasa CubeSat called Near-Earth Asteroid (NEA) Scout by graduate research assistant Garima Bhatia.

Once created, the twin will be paired with SPORT to undergo ‘value modelling’ to identify various ways to improve the mission.
Intern program opens doors for future scientists

By: Joanna Bradley Amrdec

The Aviation and Missile Research, Development and Engineering Center uses the Scientific, Technical, Engineering or Mathematics Student Employment Program as a tool to select interns in STEM fields to fill available positions within the center.

As a Science and Technology Reinvention Laboratory, AMRDEC is eligible to participate in the program through authorization by the National Defense Authorization Act. The NDAA authorizes the secretary of defense to conduct personnel demonstration projects at DOD labs designed as STRLs.

The SSEP allows the center to compete with private industry for high-quality STEM students to fill scientific and engineering positions within the center. AMRDEC Policy 17-02 does not have a time limit, meaning that managers can use the program as needed throughout the year to fill positions as they become available.

College students, age 18 or older, are able to apply for the program through submission of their resume either through the AMRDEC website, a manager or a human resources representative at a publically announced recruiting event, according to Amanda Compton, Center Support Directorate.

"Qualified candidates attending recruiting events will provide a resume to the AMRDEC representative attending the event," Compton said. If an interested individual is unable to attend a recruiting event, they should submit their resume through the center's website. Students can also email their resumes to usarmy.redstone.rdecom-amrdec.mbx.human-resources@mail.mil.

Kelsey Tamez works in the center as an electrical engineer. She began her career through the SSEP 10 years ago.

"It allowed me to get my foot in the door, and the rest was up to me," Tamez said. She applied for the program as a junior at Sparkman High School and was chosen to participate in the spring of that year.

"That summer I participated in the design and development project to test the effects of a Soldier firing a rocket launcher from his/her shoulder," she said. "I assisted with making a human prototype using fiberglass material until required to return to school for my senior year."

Tamez completed her high school requirements in December 2007 and was able to start taking college courses in January 2008 before officially graduating from high school. She credits the program for providing an opportunity to begin her career at an early age.

"I conduct radar signature analysis and develop predictive simulation input models with a focus on unmanned aerial systems. I also provide radar signature expertise as needed within AMRDEC," Tamez said of her job. She is working toward her master’s in electrical engineering.
at the University of Alabama in Huntsville and hopes to one day receive her doctorate in the same field.

To be eligible for the program, individuals must maintain an overall GPA of 3.0. Further requirements of the program dictate that the total number of SSEP appointments “made in a calendar year may not exceed 10 percent of the total number of scientific and engineering positions within AMRDEC,” Compton said. Interns may be hired on a temporary appointment and then converted to a flexible length appointment after completion of the trial period. Upon completion of the program, management can decide to convert the intern to a permanent appointment.
Global Temperature Increases Are Lower and Slower, Says New Study

By: Ronald Bailey

"We calculated that value as 1.1 C (almost 2° Fahrenheit), while climate models estimate that value as 2.3 C (about 4.1° F)"

A new study using more than 38 years satellite and weather balloon temperature data hypothesizes that global temperatures are going up more slowly than projected by most climate models.

And right on time, these results were challenged by other researchers who defend the scientific climate consensus as embodied in Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports.

The new study done by University of Alabama in Huntsville climatologists John Christy and Richard McNider published in the Asia-Pacific Journal of Atmospheric Science argues consensus models may not have accurately captured how storms in the tropics expel excess heat back into space and/or that they have failed to account for how heat is absorbed by the world's oceans.

Christy and McNider took into account the effects of volcanic eruptions (cooling) and El Nino (heating) and La Nina (cooling) perturbations on global temperatures during the past 38 years.

What they found was warming in the lower troposphere where the bulk of our planet's atmosphere is located at a rate of about 0.096 degrees Celsius per decade. This trend implies that global temperatures will be about 1.1 ± 0.26 degrees Celsius warmer at the time carbon dioxide produced from burning fossil fuels and land use changes doubles in the atmosphere. This is about half of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) estimate of 2.31 ± 0.20 degrees Celsius warmer for a doubling of atmospheric carbon dioxide.

"From our observations we calculated that value as 1.1 C (almost 2° Fahrenheit), while climate models estimate that value as 2.3 C (about 4.1° F)," Christy said in a press release. "Again, this indicates the real atmosphere is less sensitive to CO2 than what has been forecast by climate models. This suggests the climate models need to be retooled to better reflect conditions in the actual climate, while policies based on previous climate model output and predictions might need to be reconsidered."

John Abraham, a professor of thermal and fluid sciences at the University of St. Thomas School of Engineering in Minnesota, asserted in The Daily Mail that Christy and McNider have "manipulated the raw measurements to decrease warming by about 38 percent."

If by manipulate, Abraham means that Christy and McNider have tried to take into account the effects of volcanic eruptions sending cooling sulfur dioxide into the stratosphere and the large swings in global average temperatures caused by the natural El Nino and La Nina phenomenon, then yes. They have done nothing underhanded or wrong.

It is hard not conclude that Abraham is being disingenuous when he accuses Christy and McNider of data manipulation. Abraham must know the surface temperature datasets relied upon by IPCC...
are also "manipulated," using homogenization procedures to take into account weather station moves, instrument changes, time of observation changes, and urban heat island biases.

If the amount of warming expected from a doubling of carbon dioxide is much lower than most climate models project that implies that catastrophic climate outcomes are less likely and that humanity will have extra time to adjust to whatever warming eventually results from the increase in the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.
Ecnmag.com  
Friday, December 1, 2017

UAH Engineering Student Uses 3-D Printing To Successfully Build And Test Hall-Effect Thruster

By: University of Alabama Huntsville

Ethan Hopping has always been passionate about space. “I remember visiting the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in elementary school,” he says, “and being inspired by the story of the Apollo program and Huntsville’s role in it.”

That inspiration initially led him to earn his undergraduate degree in aerospace engineering at The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) in 2015, and to return to UAH to pursue his master’s degree in aerospace systems engineering after a summer internship with NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center. Now Hopping is set to graduate after completing an ambitious Hall-effect thruster research project under the guidance of Dr. Gabe Xu, an assistant professor in the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering.

Like chemical rockets that push payloads into orbit, Hall-effect thrusters – named for American physicist Edwin Hall – are used for the same purpose but with much higher efficiency and lower force. That’s because, while the former store the energy necessary for producing thrust in the propellant’s chemical bonds, Hall-effect thrusters use plasma and electric fields to accelerate the atoms to very high speeds of multiple kilometers per second.

Depending on the mission, electric propulsion systems like Hall-effect-thrusters can reduce the mass of propellant required by a factor of 10 or more as compared with chemical rockets. Consequently, they have the ability to reach deep-space destinations that are currently inaccessible to their chemical counterparts.

“I humorously like to say that ion engines and Hall-effect thrusters are the Prius of the in-space propulsion world,” says Hopping, “because they rely on high fuel efficiency to bring about significant cost reduction and range improvements, but at the expense of high thrust.”

The project emerged from Dr. Xu’s interest in the effect of different geometric parameters on the performance of miniature Hall-effect thrusters. There was one problem, however; to test these different effects would require multiple thruster prototypes, each with varying dimensions, and that would quickly get expensive. “The high cost of manufacturing not only limits research opportunities, but also limits the use of Hall-effect thrusters in small satellites because the propulsion systems are too expensive in comparison with the rest of the satellite,” explains Hopping.

The solution turned out to be the low cost and fast turnaround of 3-D printing. Hopping, who already had experience with 3-D printing, was tasked with designing and building a fully functioning miniature Hall-effect thruster from scratch. His product, the UAH-78AM, is the first Hall-effect thruster to be built at UAH.

“We scaled our design from a larger Hall-effect thruster that had publicly available design and performance data,” explains Dr. Xu. Hopping then worked on the magnetic field design, a feat that included learning three different modeling programs. Ten months later, Hopping and Dr. Xu tested the first version of the thruster in the small vacuum chamber at UAH’s Johnson Research Center and it worked.
After some design modifications, Hopping took the thruster to NASA’s Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio, to collect performance measurements. Those ultimately proved that the UAH-78AM, though composed of 3-D printed parts, worked just as well as traditional thrusters of the same size and power level, but at a fraction of the cost and production time. “This was an amazing opportunity,” Hopping recalls, “to be surrounded by electric propulsion system experts and work in a research environment that has a long history of developing and testing Hall-effect thrusters. I learned a lot!”

Hopping and Dr. Xu presented a paper on their project this past October at the International Electric Propulsion Conference in Atlanta, Ga. And while Hopping is now looking forward to next month’s graduation, he’s already putting to use what he learned at UAH as a propulsion development engineer at Blue Origin in Kent, Wash.

“My time at UAH equipped me with the knowledge and experience I need to support Blue Origin’s mission as an aerospace engineer,” he says. “I didn’t know exactly what I wanted to do professionally when I started school, but I was sure that I wanted to support an industry that challenges us to be better, both as individuals and as a species, and spaceflight certainly does that!”
University of West Alabama moves to expand trustees’ authority

Alabama Legislature must approve proposal

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

LIVINGSTON — Plans moved forward to give the University of West Alabama trustees authority to hold meetings by phone, establish procedures for removing trustees and give the board input into senior personnel decisions.

The trustees on Friday authorized the board’s executive committee and bylaws subcommittee to continue work on a legislative proposal, which is being drafted by UWA attorney Mike Kendrick, in a step toward making those bylaw changes. Any amendments to the board’s authority in the UWA charter, which would enable the bylaw revisions, would have to be approved by the Alabama Legislature.

The executive committee will consider and approve the legislative proposal. If lawmakers approve the changes to charter, the recommended changes to the bylaws would come back to the full board for approval, said Trustee Justin Smith, who chairs the bylaw committee. Lawmakers will return for the 2018 regular session in early January.

The bylaw committee met last month to discuss the proposals.

The authority of the board to review and approve personnel decisions remains an ongoing debate focusing on the division of authority between the board and the office of the president. Smith stressed the proposal was a safeguard for the president’s office and the board. The proposed bylaw change would allow the board to review staff appointments at the vice presidential positions.

Trustee John Killian questioned whether the provision for consent from the board was stepping into the realm of presidential authority.

Board President Jerry Smith said the process would allow the president to run appointments to senior positions past the board.

“It is certainly not for the board to usurp the judgment of the president,” Justin Smith said.

UWA President Ken Tucker didn’t express any opposition to the proposed rule change. He said it was his policy now to advise the board of appointments for senior positions. He

See UWA, B7
predicted the proposal would not substantially impact the hiring of senior leadership.

"It really won't change anything as far as practice is concerned," Tucker said.

The university's charter was amended in 2006 to give the president the sole authority to hire employees, set salaries and define the duties. That amendment was part of organizational changes at UWA meant to satisfy concerns about trustee micromanagement raised during an investigation and probation imposed by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in 2003.

The discussion of telephone meetings has weighed the ability of trustees to vote by phone against concerns that the ability to participate remotely would be a disincentive to attend meetings in person at the campus in Livingston.

There is no current process for the board to remove a sitting trustee. The discussion of formalizing a board process so far has focused on an expulsion based on multiple unexcused absences or misconduct.

In other business, Tucker announced plans to name Lawson Edmonds the next permanent vice president of financial affairs at the end of the year. He has served as interim since earlier this year.

The trustees approved the firm Seay, Seay & Litchfield Architects as the architect for a potential project to construct a new dorm. The board is considering new housing after launching initiatives to increase enrollment. UWA is expecting 80 to 100 new students next fall and another 80 to 100 in 2019, Jerry Smith said.

The board president hopes to bring options for how to proceed with the dorm project to the board at its March meeting. The options include bonds, bank loans or working with a private company that would build the dorms and lease the dorms back to UWA.

The board authorized an agreement for Schneider Electric to conduct an audit for comprehensive improvements as part of a project to create savings by improving the efficiency of the energy performance of buildings on campus.

The contractor will perform an audit of facilities on campus and recommend improvements, physical plant director Bobby Truelove said. The goal for the project is to generate energy savings of 25 percent, which would fund the improvements. The company would be paid for making the improvements. If the projects fail to achieve the savings target, the contractor is responsible, Truelove said.

The estimated annual savings would be $348,000 to $435,000 based on preliminary estimates. UWA would owe the company $54,000 for the audit, if it chose not to proceed with the improvements if they were viable projects, Truelove said.
THE LOOK OF A RIVALRY

Tigers and Blazers have made the most out of their not-quite-annual meetings

David Ching  For AL.com

Aside from the physical locations of the universities' campuses and fan bases, there aren't many other compelling reasons for a rivalry to exist between the Auburn and UAB basketball programs.

The Tigers (7-1) and Blazers (6-3) — who meet Saturday at Auburn Arena (3:30 p.m., SEC Network) — don't face each other every single season. They aren't in the same conference. And most important, virtually none of the available scholarship players on either roster are actually from the state of Alabama.

But when Auburn and UAB get together on the court, it sure looks like a rivalry.

"In my couple years here at Auburn, UAB has been probably as good of an environment that we've had — both at UAB last year and the game at home two years ago," Auburn coach Bruce Pearl said on the Tigers' postgame radio show following Wednesday's 80-55 win against Gardner-Webb. "I think we've beaten them twice by a total of like four points. They've got a lot of guys back from that team. It's a bit of a rivalry."

Pearl's math was slightly off. The Tigers actually won the two games by a total of five points — 75-74 at Auburn in November 2015 and 74-70 last year at UAB — since resuming a series that had been dormant since 1999-2000. Auburn coach Bruce Pearl said on the Tigers' postgame radio show following Wednesday's 80-55 win against Gardner-Webb. "I think we've beaten them twice by a total of like four points. They've got a lot of guys back from that team. It's a bit of a rivalry."

"It's Auburn-UAB. We've had two great games," Ehsan said after Tuesday's 90-78 win at Troy. "I know our seniors, Chris (Cokley) and HaHa (William Lee), will be especially excited for that game, the last time they get to play at Auburn, and hopefully we'll come out and play more consistent, but play like we did [against Troy] and have a chance to win."

Beating Auburn would not be especially unusual for a UAB basketball team. Blazers squads won 10 of their first 15 meetings with Auburn, and UAB still holds a 10-9 advantage in the all-time series despite Auburn's current four-game winning streak.

Auburn is the power-conference team in this equation, but the Blazers fan base seems understandably unwilling to view its team against an underdog against Saturday's in-state, SEC opponent.

They relish the chance to enjoy bragging rights against the likes of Auburn, whose fans they work, worship and shop alongside on a daily basis. They tend to show up in full force when their Blazers have an opportunity to claim the upper hand against one of the in-state programs who receive more national attention.

Pearl has witnessed this tendency first-hand, which is why he implored Auburn fans to show up Saturday — or at the very least, not sell their tickets to anyone wearing green and gold.

"It's Christmas time, it's the holiday season, I can see where folks might not be able to get here, even though it's UAB," Pearl said. "I'm asking them please, please, please, come on. And if you can't, those tickets are worth something, and don't sell them to Blazer fans. Two years ago, there were 400, 500 Blazer fans down here. I hear they're buying up every ticket they can get their hands on."

If that should come to pass again Saturday, perhaps the renewed series will take one more step toward becoming a bona fide rivalry.

Even if it's only December and there are no conference implications in the balance, the vibe that flows from the stands to the court can also help determine which opponents are true rivals. With familiar fan bases and typically close outcomes, the Auburn-UAB basketball series seems to be well on its way to reaching that status again.
A chat with UA assistant Susan Rosenstiel

By: Ian Thompson

It was my joy to chat with longtime University of Alabama assistant women’s golf coach Susan Rosenstiel, who is always so upbeat and genuinely friendly, Friday morning as I’d called to congratulate her on being named as an assistant coach for the U.S. team in next year’s Arnold Palmer Cup.

The 2018 Cup will mark the first year the matches will feature men and women, with the matches dating to 1997 as all-male matches.

And the U.S. team will face its International compatriots in an exotic locale, Evian Resort in Evian-les-Bains, near Paris, France. This course hosts the Evian Championship, a major on the LPGA Tour, annually.

There will be 12 men and 12 women on each side, with combined matches on two of the days of competition. The matches will be played July 6-8.

I was intrigued as to how Rosenstiel got into coaching.

“I played college golf for the University of Tennessee and the University of Florida. At Florida my graduate degree was in Sports Administration and I’d always wanted to get into coaching.

“When my husband, Ben, and I moved to Tuscaloosa for his job, I was looking for something to do. I was introduced to Betty Palmer (the UA women’s golf coach before current coach Mic Potter) and she did not have an assistant. I knew her having played in the SEC and it was like it was meant to be. There was a lot of fate involved. She offered me the job in 2002.”

When Palmer retired in 2005, Potter re-interviewed Rosenstiel and offered her the job to stay on.

I asked her if there had been some head coaching opportunities come here way, especially considering the success of the Crimson Tide.

“There have, but I’m so honored and appreciative to have the job I have, which I consider the best job in the country. It is perfect for our lifestyle and the stage we are at in our lives.

“My husband was diagnosed with cancer in 2011. He is no longer able to practice as a physician, but we love being here. Our children, Henry, 12, and Elizabeth, 11, are settled here.

“I’m so fortunate to combine my family life with my love of coaching.”

She was highly complimentary of Potter.

“Mic and I make a great coaching team. He gives me the ability to be integrally involved in all aspects of coaching.”

For the Arnold Palmer Cup matches, Rosenstiel will be joined as a U.S. assistant coach by Baylor men’s assistant coach Ryan Blagg, and Ohio State’s Therese Hession will serve as the team’s head coach.

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“With so many great assistant coaches out there it’s extremely humbling to be named to the Palmer Cup staff,” Rosenstiel said. “For the Arnold Palmer Foundation and the GCAA to ask me to assist with the first Palmer Cup team that will include women’s players is such an honor. To be a part of an event that Arnold Palmer had a vision for, and created as a way to give back to college and amateur golf and the next generation of golfers is exciting. I’ve known Therese for a long time and I know it will be fun to coach with her. I love the idea of being a part of a team that will represent our country in a Ryder Cup format.”

Rosenstiel was named the 2010 National Golf Coaches Association Assistant Coach of the Year, and has mentored players who have combined for 20 All-America honors and 28 All-SEC accolades. Her career at Alabama includes winning the 2012 NCAA Championship, 12 NCAA Championship appearances and three SEC Championship titles.

“It’s a tremendous honor for Susan and well deserved,” Potter said.

“Without her our program wouldn’t be where it is today. She’s the top assistant in the country and the ideal choice for something of this magnitude. With this being the first time women will be participating in the Palmer Cup, I’m sure the GCAA and the Palmer Foundation wanted someone who would help get the team off the ground in the right way. Susan representing the United States and the University of Alabama is also a huge honor and a huge benefit for our program.”

There are six men and six women for each side who will qualify via a points list, with UA players Lauren Stephenson, Kristen Gillman and Davis Riley currently in qualifying positions. The points list becomes final in mid-March, with UA’s Cheyenne Knight expected to challenge for a spot too.

Also Auburn’s Jovan Rebula, a South African native, is currently third on the International’s men’s team list.

The other six men and six women for the U.S. team will be selected as follows: Five committee picks, which must include one non-Division 1 player each, and one captain’s pick.

Rosenstiel noted that Potter will make the trip too, assuming a UA player(s) make the team and they would then both head to Sweden after the matches conclude for the European Team Championships to recruit.
Pruitt staying with Tide through playoffs

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

It was a story of two acts, one playing out in Atlanta, the other in Knoxville, Tenn.

For the purpose of Alabama and its College Football Playoff semifinal matchup against Clemson, the key part was the same: defensive coordinator Jeremy Pruitt will remain in Tuscaloosa to coach the Crimson Tide through the playoffs.

Approximately 30 minutes before Pruitt’s press conference began in Knoxville to formally announce him as the new coach at Tennessee, UA coach Nick Saban sat on stage at the College Football Hall of Fame in Atlanta alongside Dabo Swinney of Clemson, Oklahoma’s Lincoln Riley and Georgia’s Kirby Smart at the CFP coaches press conference. The first question of the night cut straight to the heart of what was relevant for Alabama football at this moment.

Would Pruitt, UA’s second-year Alabama defensive coordinator, remain with the team or leave immediately to start his new job as head coach at Tennessee?

Saban said Pruitt would do what Smart, Lane Kiffin and Jim McElwain did before him.

“Yes, Jeremy is going to finish the season with us,” Saban said. “He’s going to do some things to get his program started at Tennessee. When we’re ready to practice, he’ll be back with us, be a part of the playoff.

“I really appreciate the fact that Kirby did a great job of doing that a couple years ago when he had an opportunity. I think it shows a lot of respect for the players on our team who worked hard to help us

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TIDE

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all have success this season.” Pruitt was named Tennessee’s 26th head coach earlier in the day with the formal press conference in Knoxville essentially beginning as Saban and his fellow CFP coaches were exiting the stage in Atlanta.

It is the third consecutive season Saban’s had a coordinator accept a job during the weeks between the regular season and the playoff. All three (Smart, Kiffin and now Pruitt) opted to remain with the team through the end of the season. McElwain, UA’s former offensive coordinator, did the same after accepting the Colorado State, helping lead Alabama to the 2012 BCS National Championship at the end of the 2011 season.

“Each individual handles the circumstance like this relative to how they can stay focused on two things,” Saban said. “Most of the really good coaches who have really good competitive character are always going to do what’s best for the players. I think Kirby certainly did a good job of that and I’m sure Jeremy will do a good job of that this year.”

What Pruitt will encounter that the ones before him did not is the early signing period in recruiting. The first signing period is Dec. 20. Alabama begins practice Dec. 15, meaning Pruitt will have to balance signing his first class at Tennessee while preparing his UA defense for Clemson.

“The things that Jeremy is going to have to go through is probably going to be even more challenging in regards to that,” Smart said. “I’m glad, now looking back, that I did what I did, because it was the right thing to do. Certainly helped that we won the game. But it was a very challenging 30-day period, for sure.

“I was always concerned am I doing the right thing? Am I doing the right thing for Georgia? Am I doing the right thing for Alabama? It’s very concerning for me because I wanted to do what was best for both. And what was best for both was to finish up what you were doing but move on with the things you had to do in recruiting.”

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
10 Stats to Know for Alabama-Clemson III

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conversion 32.9 percent of the time. But Clemson’s offense has been trending higher toward the end of the season, converting 50.1 percent in the last four games. Alabama’s defense struggled on third downs late in the year, allowing 31 of 61 conversions in its last four games and 26 of 52 in its last three SEC games.

3. 184 plays

Clemson’s offense ran 184 plays against Alabama in the last two meetings, including 69 in last year’s national championship. The Crimson Tide offense ran 137 plays in the two games and was outgained in yardage, but the offensive efficiency of both teams was almost identical. Clemson averaged 6.1 yards per play on offense and Alabama averaged 6.2 yards per play.

4. Nos. 1 & 2

Alabama owns the nation’s No. 1 scoring defense, allowing 11.5 points per game. Clemson owns the nation’s No. 2 scoring defense, giving up just 12.8 points per game. The most points Alabama has allowed all year was 26 points in a loss to Auburn. Clemson gave up 31 points in a win at North Carolina State.

5. Seven returning starters

There are seven total players in this game who started both of the previous meetings between the two teams. Alabama wide receiver Calvin Ridley, defensive back Minkah Fitzpatrick, punter JK Scott and left guard Ross Fierro-bacher started both national championship games. Clemson offensive linemen Tyron Crowder and Mitch Hyatt and kicker Greg Huegel also started both games. Several other returning players, such as Clemson wide receiver Hunter Renfrow and Alabama safety Ronnie Harrison, were major factors in both games but not listed as starters on the official box score.

6. 50 yards

Alabama wide receiver Calvin Ridley has been held in check in the two national championship games against Clemson. He had six catches for 14 yards in the first meeting, then five catches for 36 yards last season. Ridley didn’t score a touchdown in either game. He hasn’t had a catch longer than 15 yards in their two meetings. In his 40 other career games, he has averaged 5.1 catches for 60.5 yards with 17 touchdowns.

7. 5 yards

Alabama has allowed five yards on punt returns on the entire season. There have been only four punt returns against the Crimson Tide this year, including a blocked punt against Texas A&M that was returned for a touchdown for three yards. Punter JK Scott’s 43.4-yard punt average isn’t gaudy, but he has dropped 22 of his 42 punts inside the 20 and booted 14 kicks longer than 50 yards. He’s done a good job of pinning opponents back and punting with hang time so his coverage unit can get downfield to prevent returns.

8. 0 turnovers

Alabama committed zero turnovers against Clemson in the two national championship games. Alabama has done an outstanding job of taking care of the ball all season in 2017. Alabama has given up just eight turnovers all season, tied for the fewest in the country. One of Alabama’s two interceptions thrown came from backup quarterback Tua Tagovailoa, one of its fumbles was by backup running back Ronnie Clark, and two of its fumbles came on special teams. That means the starting offense only threw one interception and lost three fumbles all season.

9. 40 wins

Clemson is the winningest program in the nation over the last three seasons, going 40-3. Alabama’s just one game behind at 39-3 and could tie it up with a win. The next closest program is Ohio State and Oklahoma, tied at 34-5.

10. 50-50 split

Both teams have split the carries between their top running backs almost exactly down the middle. Clemson’s top two backs, Travis Etienne and Tavien Feaster, have 103 carries each. Alabama’s Damien Harris and Bo Scarbrough have 110 carries and 108 carries, respectively. Harris and Scarbrough have combined for 1,450 yards and 19 touchdowns on 6.71 yards per carry, while Etienne and Feaster combine for 1,403 yards, 10 touchdowns and 6.81 yards per carry.

Reach Ben Jones at ben@derports.com or 205-722-0196.
Tide lands eight on first-team AP All-SEC

The Associated Press

ATLANTA — After meeting in the Southeastern Conference championship game, Georgia and Auburn split the top awards on The Associated Press All-Southeastern Conference team released Monday.

Auburn running back Kerryon Johnson was named the offensive player of the year, while Georgia linebacker Roquan Smith was selected as the top defensive player. Smith was MVP of the title game, coming up with two fumble recoveries in the Bulldogs’ 28-7 victory.

Georgia’s Kirby Smart got the nod as SEC coach of the year after leading his team to the College Football Playoff in just his second season between the hedges. Auburn quarterback Jarrett Stidham, a transfer from Baylor, and Georgia freshman quarterback Jake Fromm shared the award for newcomer of the year.

Alabama, which also claimed a spot in the four-team national playoff despite failing to win the SEC West, led the way with eight players voted to the first team: receiver Calvin Ridley, offensive tackle Jonah Williams, tackle Ross Pierschbach, running back Bo Nix, defensive end Marlon Davidson, defensive back Xavier McKinney, and placekicker Joseph Bulovas.

There were no unanimous selections to the team. Fitzpatrick and Auburn offensive guard Braden Smith came the closest to a sweep, each picked on all but one ballot.
Tide's Fitzpatrick takes Thorpe, Bednarik awards

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

ATLANTA — It was trophy season for Minkah Fitzpatrick on Thursday night at the College Football Awards at the College Football Hall of Fame. The standout Alabama junior defensive back took home the night's two biggest defensive honors, winning the Thorpe and Bednarik awards and becoming just the third player in history to claim both.

The Thorpe Award is given annually to the nation's top defensive back and the Bednarik is awarded to the country's top defensive player.

The list of defensive backs to play under Nick Saban during his time at Alabama is ximpressive. From Kareem Jackson, Mark Barron, Dre Kirkpatrick, Dee Milliner, Ha Ha Clinton-Dix and Landon Collins among many others, all played at a high level. But none of them captured the Thorpe Award.

Fitzpatrick became just the second Alabama player to win the award joining Antonio Langham, who won the honor in 1993.

"It's kind of crazy, all those names (who came before me) are doing great in the NFL right now, and they're having great careers, and to be mentioned in a sentence with them is truly an honor," Fitzpatrick said. "So just being able to win this award means a lot to me and my family. This definitely was way higher than my expectations."

As the presenter paused after announcing the three finalists, it was the second time since Sunday that Fitzpatrick experienced a dramatic pause. On Sunday, he was in the locker room when the College Football Playoff committee announced Alabama's inclusion into the playoff. This pause made him anxious, too.

"I was a little bit more nervous for the playoff (announcement), for real," he said.

The award meant a little bit more to Fitzpatrick, who suffered a hamstring injury against LSU that limited his play at the end of the season. He capped the night off with the Bednarik Award, beating out Georgia's Roquan Smith and N.C. State's Bradley Chubb.

Fitzpatrick said it was a dream come true to join Woodson and Peterson as the only players to ever win both awards.

"That's pretty cool," he said. "I don't think it's hitting me right now. My mind is elsewhere right now, thinking about Clemson and the future and getting back to my team. I appreciate all the honors and all the accolades but I'm focusing on the future.

"Me and my team faced a whole lot of adversity this year," Fitzpatrick said. "We had a lot of people get hurt in the first game. I was injured. My teammates pushed me and got me better. It wasn't (anything) too serious. We all worked together and pushed through it. So winning this award after all that is a nice way to cap it off. But we want that ring to finish it off for sure."

JK Scott was a finalist for the Ray Guy Award for the nation's top punter. Texas A&M punter Michael Dickson won the award.

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0226.
Air of familiarity with Alabama vs. Clemson

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

It isn't lost on anyone that this is third consecutive College Football Playoff to feature Alabama versus Clemson. There were things learned in the first two matchups, but personnel on both sides are gone. Both teams are different with Clemson without Deshaun Watson and Alabama without the defensive personnel that was so dominant a year ago and with a new offensive coordinator. Still, philosophically, things remain that define both programs.

"I think you can always take things from someone that you've played in previous seasons, try to develop a little history on things that they do, you get to know them a little bit better and even though they have different players now systematically, they have a lot of the same coaches," UA coach Nick Saban said. "So, I think you can take some things technically from those games and See ALABAMA, C7
maybe even a little strategically. You always do sort of a what we did well and what we did poorly when you play a game, and you get those things out and kind of look at them and see how you can try to improve this time around."

Under Dabo Swinney, Clemson is beginning to sustain the success Alabama has enjoyed for the better part of a decade under Saban. He's also learning that it's difficult to hold onto key staff when that success is recognized. Clemson defensive coordinator Brent Venables has reportedly been associated to multiple head coach openings.

Watson is gone but in his place is another dual-threat quarterback Kelly Bryant. Bryant is more of a runner than Watson, at least in terms of designed runs.

"Dabo does a great job with his team," Saban said. "I think Kelly Bryant is a different kind of player, in some ways, than Deshaun Watson, who I thought was the best player in college football and certainly proved that this year when he got an opportunity in the NFL — and we're sorry that he got injured. But we have a lot of respect for the team that they have now, the players that they have now. They've got a lot of explosive skill players, they're very good on defense, great front seven, very athletic, good pass rushers. This will be, by far, the best team that we've played all year, and we'll certainly need to play our best to have any kind of chance to be successful in the game."

"I think we have a lot of respect for them and the kind of football players that they have. And I think we just want our players to focus on what they need to do to try to play their best football, and I think that's what it'll take from our standpoint. That's certainly what we'll try to get them to focus on."
Tide players make the list

Alabama leads conference with 8 first-team All-SEC picks

By Aaron Suttle
Sports Writer

A league-best total of 11 Alabama players were named to AP All-SEC teams, including eight first-team selections, the news organization released Monday afternoon. With four selections on offense and four on defense, the Crimson Tide’s eight first-team members were more than any other conference team. No team had more than six players on the teams.

Junior wide receiver Calvin Ridley, sophomore offensive tackle Jonah Williams, junior right guard Ross Pierschbacher and senior center Bradley Bozeman represented the offense on the first-team list.

Junior defensive tackle Da’Ron Payne, senior linebacker Rashaan Evans, junior defensive back Minkah Fitzpatrick and junior safety Ronnie Harrison were selected for the defense.

On the second team, defensive end Raekwon Davis, cornerback Levi Wallace and punter JK Scott were chosen.

Former Alabama defensive coordinator was named the SEC Coach of the Year. Auburn running back Kerryon Johnson was named the SEC Offensive Player of the Year and Georgia linebacker Roquan Smith was named the Defensive Player of the Year.

Former Alabama assistant Kirby Smart was named the conference coach of the year.

**The author voted on this year’s selections.**
Tide was unequivocally better.

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process of the committee to properly weigh Alabama's resume and whether or not it deserved inclusion.

"I certainly believed and trusted in the integrity of the committee that they’d do their best to put the best teams in," Saban said. "I really do believe based on the total body of work that our team deserved the opportunity."

Alabama will face No. 1 Clemson for the third time in as many years in the playoff, this time in the Sugar Bowl semifinal on Jan. 1 in New Orleans. The previous two meetings came in the national championship game.

The game is set for 7:45 p.m., with No. 2 Oklahoma playing No. 3 Georgia earlier in the day in the Rose Bowl.

Committee integrity

Alabama Director of Athletics Greg Byrne also trusted the committee.

"Obviously thrilled for the team, coaches, our fans and our university," Byrne said. "It’s a testimony to the incredible job that Coach Saban has done leading the program. We had a bit of a restless night (Saturday) night, but the committee deserves a lot of credit because they said they were going to look at the four best; obviously I’m biased, but I certainly feel like we got the four best teams."

"I truly believe that when they say they if there's conflict with somebody on the committee, they do have to leave the room. They’re very serious about that. They have very serious discussions about doing everything they can to get it right. Now, not everybody is going to agree with it. That’s part of it. But I do believe in the process."

Ohio State Athletic Director Gene Smith served on the committee. Hocutt said Smith recused himself when the Buckeyes were discussed.

Per a school release, Tide Pride season tickets holders have until Monday, Dec. 4 to submit their requests for semifinal/final tickets.
Hoover out for 2018 SEC Media Days

Atlanta nets event; Hoover to be included in host rotation

Tom Green tgreen@al.com

SEC Media Days will be held in Atlanta in 2018, but no worries, Hoover; the move isn’t permanent.

SEC commissioner Greg Sankey announced this year’s annual media days event will be held in Atlanta at the College Football Hall of Fame from July 16-19.

Sankey added the event will return to Hoover in 2019, with various other locations throughout the conference’s footprint hosting Media Days in subsequent years. Hoover will remain a regular host for the event due to its central location within the league.

“SEC Football Media Days is a signature event for our conference and we are pleased the city of Atlanta will host this kickoff to the 2018 college football season,” Sankey said.

SEC Football Media Days is now added to Atlanta’s inventory of great events, which includes the annual SEC Football Championship Game and this season’s College Football Playoff Championship Game. We are looking forward to building an exciting week next July to feature our student-athletes and coaches.”

SEC Media Days, which serves as the conference’s annual kickoff event to mark the new season, has been held in Hoover at the Wynfrey Hotel for the past 17 years, with both sides operating on year-to-year contracts. Next year will mark the first time since 1985 that SEC Media Days will not be held in the Birmingham area.

While the College Football Hall of Fame will be the main location in 2018, with all coach press conferences held there, the Omni Atlanta Hotel at CNN Center — which is connected to the Hall of Fame — will serve as the host hotel and house Radio Row, as well as other media interviews and activities during the four-day event.

“The Hall of Fame was relocated to Atlanta, the capital of college football, for events just like this and we are perfectly situated in the center of all the activity,” College Football Hall of Fame CEO Dennis Adamovich said in a release. “We are grateful to the SEC for allowing us the opportunity to host such an important event.”
Jeremy Pruitt to Tennessee? Great save by the Vols

By: Kevin Scarbinsky

The unsolicited text arrived Thursday morning at 6:25. It came from an SEC football coach who's working with and against Jeremy Pruitt. It went straight to the point.

"Great hire by Tennessee."

Some UT fans might not see it that way. Some UT fans wouldn't be happy unless Jon Gruden walked through that door or General Neyland climbed out of his grave, but it's hard to imagine a messier coaching search with a more promising ending.

Phillip Fulmer may not know how to run an athletics department. He does know football coaches. Hiring Pruitt proves it.

Going into Knoxville, Pruitt has more potential to become a quality SEC head coach than any of Tennessee's last three hires, and yes that includes Lane Kiffin. Pruitt's been a head coach in waiting for years. He simply didn't have that title.

Alabama's defensive coordinator has worked alongside and earned the respect of some terribly demanding coaches, starting with SEC godfather Nick Saban. Saban hired him straight out of Hoover High School and gave him more and more responsibility.

After Pruitt left to prove himself as a defensive coordinator at FSU and Georgia, Saban hired him back to take Kirby Smart's place. Saban makes an occasional mistake in hiring offensive coordinators. He's close to perfect in choosing head defensive coaches.

Smart understood Pruitt's present and future value during their time together at Alabama.

"Jeremy's got great potential as a head coach," Smart said. "He's a great leader. He's a great recruiter. He's very personable. Kids like Jeremy. They enjoy playing for Jeremy. He's done a great job everywhere he's been, and he's produced on the field."

Smart said that two years ago in December of 2015 as he was finishing his run as Alabama's defensive coordinator while preparing to become Georgia's head coach. Smart's proven his worth as a boss in his second season in Athens, winning the SEC title and earning a playoff berth.

Pruitt has the same promise although his new job has more obstacles, starting with a much less fruitful in-state recruiting base. He's cut from the same cloth as Smart as the son of a high school coach and a son of Saban, but Pruitt is nobody's clone.

Alabama defensive players have run through brick walls for both Pruitt and Smart through the years, but they embraced Pruitt in a different way.

"Kirby is The General," Tim Williams said last year before Alabama beat Washington in a playoff semifinal. "He's about his business. Kirby is just like Saban. He's like a little Saban." And Pruitt?
"You talk to Pruitt, he's a great guy," Williams said. "He's like a magnet. You want to be around him."

Ryan Anderson, one of the unsung heroes of the 2016 Alabama defense, is a big Pruitt fan.

"Coach Pruitt is somebody you can go to his office and talk to, watch film with," Anderson said. "I never felt like I had that connection with Coach Smart."

Anderson also praised Pruitt for the way he recruited him to Alabama because "he was just honest. A lot of people that recruit you talk a lot about other places, other programs, other players. He never did that. He said this is what we expect, it ain't going to be easy, we're not going to promise you nothing, but we want you to be part of what we're doing."

"I'm willing to lay it all down for Coach Pruitt any day of the week," Anderson said. "I feel like he cares about me."

As Smart did two years ago and Kiffin tried last year, it would be a surprise if Pruitt didn't do double duty for the next month, juggling his old and new jobs. It created some tension in both instances, but it wouldn't be the first time Pruitt's been able to manage conflicting responsibilities.

After being named Florida State's defensive coordinator in December of 2012, Pruitt stayed with Alabama through the BCS Championship Game victory over Notre Dame.

"I've always been taught, 'You finish what you start,' " Pruitt said at the time."For me, I didn't want to abandon these coaches or these players."

Of course, it's harder to serve two masters when you're the coordinator for one and head coach for the other, but Pruitt's never shrunk from a challenge. With him taking over at Tennessee, Smart's job just got a little harder. So did Saban's. The Third Saturday in October now has a real chance to matter again.
Auburn betting big on Malzahn

By: Kevin Scarbinsky

Despite losing the SEC Championship Game and the playoff spot that went with it, Gus Malzahn's job got far more secure over the weekend.

It did NOT get any easier.

The playoff selection demonstrated two hard, cold facts of life for Auburn moving forward. Georgia's back, and Alabama's not going away. It appears Malzahn will have to deal with both rivals at the height of their considerable powers for years to come.

For better or worse - this being Auburn, you know there will be extremes - the coach and the school renewed their wedding vows when they agreed to a seven-year deal worth $49 million, an average of $7 million a year.

On the plus side, if Malzahn continues to grow as a head coach as he did this season, Auburn could move from frequent November contender to regular December champion. On the other hand, if the next three years look anything like the finishes to 2014 through 2016, both sides will have to grin and bear it.

We don't yet know all the critical buyout details, but it appears it'll be even more expensive to make a change in the coming years.

The Arkansas insiders who were convinced that Malzahn was coming home were misinformed or misled. Malzahn's camp and Auburn, led by President Steven Leath and trustee Raymond Harbert, had been working on a new deal for about two weeks and had generally agreed on the parameters before Saturday's game.

That contract, like many events in the Malzahn era, produced a mixed reaction in the Auburn fan base. Some supporters recognized this isn't an optimal time to be searching for a new coach and it would be challenging to land someone as accomplished as Malzahn.

He's been far from perfect, but he's led the Tigers to two SEC Championship Games and won one of them, the same as Tommy Tuberville but in half the time. As head coach, Malzahn has come up just short of a national title and just shy of a playoff berth, and he's had Auburn ranked in the top 10 at some point during each of his five seasons.

When his teams are good, they're very good, good enough this year to take down No. 1 Georgia and No. 1 Alabama and earn the No. 2 playoff ranking in the next-to-last poll. But when they're bad...

Those mood swings have been maddening. They concern other Auburn supporters who expect more consistency from a coach making the kind of money Malzahn has made and will make. His new deal puts him at No. 4 on the list of college football's highest-paid coaches.

Reaching higher ground on the field on a regular basis has become even more challenging. This year provides all the evidence you need.
Beating No. 1 Georgia and No. 1 Alabama wasn't enough to put the Tigers in the playoff. Unseating Alabama as SEC West champion and denying the Crimson Tide a shot at a fourth straight SEC title wasn't enough to get Auburn where it wanted to go.

Finishing seventh in the final playoff rankings but still trailing Georgia and Alabama in the only poll that mattered wasn't enough to satisfy some of the more demanding Auburn supporters.

I know because I heard from some of them Sunday night after the news of Malzahn's new contract broke. They were not thrilled.

For the foreseeable future, negative emotions will serve no purpose. Barring a bizarre set of circumstances, Malzahn is going to be the Auburn coach for years to come.

He's already shown he can stand up to Nick Saban and Kirby Smart on occasion. His new contract won't satisfy him or Auburn unless he does it again and again and again.