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**March 16, 2018 – March 23, 2018**

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Alabama gets 'significant funding' in spending bill, Sen. Richard Shelby says

By: Paul Gattis

Provisions in the federal spending bill approved by Congress early Friday will benefit Alabama from Huntsville to Mobile, U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby said.

Shelby's office issued a press release outlining those benefits - ranging from increased funding for national defense initiatives and NASA at Redstone Arsenal to money for four new military ships built in Mobile.

The bill awaits President Trump's signature to become law and stave off another federal government shutdown, which would go into effect at midnight Friday. In a Friday morning tweet, Trump said he was considering vetoing the bill because it provided little money for the border wall and did not address the immigration DACA program that the president canceled.

"Through this appropriations measure, Alabama will receive significant funding for a number of priorities around the state," Shelby said in the statement. "For example, this legislation strongly supports missile defense, space exploration, biomedical research, law enforcement, and provides funding to improve local infrastructure, among other included priorities.

"I am proud to pass this measure which provides Alabama with the funding needed to continue economic growth and future development. I look forward to seeing our state benefit from this robust bill."

The following are a few of the provisions within the FY2018 appropriations bill of interest to Alabama, according to Shelby's statement:

Redstone Arsenal:

- This bill contains important funding for critical research and development activities that are being conducted by the Army Space and Missile Defense Command that will enable the U.S. Army to deter and prepare for conflicts of the future, including investments to advance our cybersecurity, directed energy technology and capabilities in space.

- The measure funds continued development of a new rocket propulsion system to modernize our national security space launch - Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle (EELV), which is $100 million above the President's budget request.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA): The bill includes $20.7 billion for NASA, which is $1.1 billion above the FY2017 enacted level and $1.6 billion above the budget request, to support the human and robotic exploration of space, fund science missions that enhance the understanding of the Earth, the solar system, and the universe, and support fundamental aeronautics research.

Huntsville Federal Courthouse: The measure includes $110 million to fund a new federal courthouse in Huntsville. The courthouse will be located at Lowe Avenue and Gallatin Street in downtown Huntsville.

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National Institute of Health (NIH): The legislation provides the National Institutes of Health (NIH) $37.1 billion in funding, which is a $3 billion increase over last year's levels.

Anniston Army Depot: The measure provides funding for Army ground vehicles such as:

Improved Recovery Vehicle (19 M88A2 Hercules), $86 million above the President's budget request

Abrams Upgrade Program, $375 million above the President's budget request

Stryker Lethality, $300 million above the President's budget request

Survivability Double V-hull upgrades, $348 million above the President's budget request

U.S. Coast Guard (USCG): The bill includes a total of $26 million for a new USCG HC-27J aircraft training simulator in Mobile.

Shipbuilding: This legislation provides important shipbuilding funding to grow our Navy, including funding for 3 Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) and one Expeditionary Fast Transport ship (EPF), proudly produced in Mobile. Additionally, the measure includes incremental funding for one LXR amphibious warship constructed in the nearby Huntington Ingalls Shipyards.

Red Snapper: The bill includes increased funding to protect and sustain our nation's fisheries. The funding will support more accurate and agency-independent data and language allowing NOAA to experiment with alternative management regimes. Provisions in the bill will help expand opportunities for American commercial and recreational fishermen.
INSIDE THE STATEHOUSE

The governor’s office is the brass ring

Steve Flowers

When talk turns to politics in Alabama, it usually leads to the governor’s race. In Alabama politics, the governor’s office is the brass ring. It is talked about more than anything else around coffee clubs and kitchen tables from Sand Mountain to the Wiregrass. It is comparable to college football being the king of all sports in Alabama.

This infatuation with the governor’s office is borne out in voting history. In most states the presidential race sees the largest voter turnout, but that is not the case in Alabama where we have historically voted more heavily in gubernatorial years. Gubernatorial race years also have most of the important local offices up for grabs. “All politics is local.”

Gov. Kay Ivey enters the race as the favorite. She is the quasi-incumbent, having taken over the ship of state this time last year from beleaguered and tarnished Gov. Robert Bentley. She probably would have gone to the house with her dog, Bear, with the plaudits of having served two terms as state treasurer and two terms as lieutenant governor, which is not a bad legacy. However, now she can add “Governor” to her epitaph.

Ivey has been around Alabama politics for quite a while. She has been thought of as vibrant over the years; however, if I were running her campaign, I would limit her appearances. They should keep her in the governor’s office and use photos from a few years back and take credit for the upturn in the economy. Her support is a mile wide and an inch deep. A slip and fall could derail her train.

My observation over the past 50 years is that we really do not have to have a full-time governor of Alabama. Big Jim Folsom was drunk his entire second term; George Wallace was on pain pills his last term and did not know where he was -- my first term in the Legislature was Wallace’s last term as governor and to say, he was incoherent would be an understatement. He was on heavy doses of medication to alleviate the constant pain from the bullet wounds he received from an assassination attempt while he was running for president in 1972; Fob James was totally uninterested in being governor his second term and went duck hunting the whole time. Don Siegelman and Guy Hunt were convicted on corruption charges and removed from office, as was Bentley, who fell in love at 72 like a little school boy and walked around with a glazed look in his eyes and sheepish grin, and lost all sense with reality. Ivey came on board and seems to have steadied the ship of state.

Ivey’s most daunting opponent in the Republican primary is Huntsville Mayor...
Tommy Battle, who is actually responsible for the largest economic development announcement for the state in the past several years. The landing of the Toyota-Mazda plant in Huntsville several months ago was a real coup. Battle is 61 and has been mayor of Huntsville for more than 10 years. Some would argue that if he could do for Alabama half of what he has done for Huntsville, he would be the best governor this state has had in generations. Battle has raised a lot of money and will come out of the vote-rich Tennessee Valley with a strong base of support. He may give Ivey a run for her money.

Among other Republican candidates, Birmingham evangelist Scott Dawson is hoping to garner the evangelical vote. He is running a spirited campaign and could be a factor. And state Sen. Bill Hightower from Mobile is somewhat of an aloof fellow who probably will not be a factor. Whoever wins the Republican nomination will be favored to win the race in November. The odds favor a Republican 57 to 43.

Two formidable candidates are vying for the Democratic nomination. Former Alabama Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb and Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox will fight it out for the nod in the June 5 primary. There probably will not be a runoff. Either Cobb or Maddox will win outright depending on which way Alabama's African-American voters land. Most observers predict that the 45-year-old Maddox, now in his fourth term as mayor of Tuscaloosa, will prevail. Being mayor of a major city is probably the best training ground for governor.

Steve Flowers served 16 years in the Alabama Legislature. Readers can email him at www.steveflowers.us.
Renate Alabama artist Frank Fleming died Sunday.

The 77-year-old Marion County native and creator of the Storyteller Fountain in the heart of Birmingham’s Southside, died unexpectedly at St. Vincent’s Hospital after a brief illness. He was surrounded by family and friends.

Those closest to him said Fleming “loved his family dearly and had many close friends throughout his distinguished art career.”

Fleming’s work was highly individualized — his voice authentically Southern. “Fleming was an artistic genius whose love of nature and mankind came alive with his unique talent, whimsical insight, and craftsmanship,” his family said in a Sunday night announcement of his death.

Fleming grew up on a farm in rural Bear Creek during the 1940s and was immersed in nature at a very early age. Having a speech impediment as a child, he chose not to speak until he was about 8 years old, instead building a close bond with nature, his family said. That unique connection with the natural world remained an important creative force throughout Fleming’s art and life.

Upon graduating from the University of North Alabama in Florence, Fleming worked at Boeing/NASA as a technical illustrator before attending graduate school in ceramics at the University of Alabama.

After a trip to San Francisco in 1972 — where he was exposed to the work of Robert Arneson, Peter Volkus and Marilyn Levine — Fleming set up his Birmingham studio in 1973. The following year, Fleming had his first one-man show at the Birmingham Museum of Art, where he received rave reviews and his work gained the attention of curators from around the country.

He exhibited his works in more than 40 solo exhibitions and more than 100 group exhibitions, as well as lectured and conducted numerous workshops around the country and abroad, inspiring other artists and all those who experienced his artwork.

Funeral arrangements have not yet been announced.

**STORYTELLER FOUNTAIN**

In 1983, Malcolm McRae, a Birmingham art dealer and anthropologist specializing in pre-Columbian art, was murdered. McRae was known in the Southside community for his home that he transformed into an art gallery by day. He was listed as a missing person for six weeks, until his body was found in the woods of Helena.

McRae’s mother, Jane, commissioned Fleming to make a piece of art in Southside in honor of her son. What Mrs. McRae envisioned as a tile rim around the garden in Five Points South quickly transformed, with the help of Cecil Roberts and Mayor Richard Arrington Jr.’s aide Anne Adams, into Storyteller Fountain.

There was a grassroots effort to raise money for the fountain, so the final fountain wasn’t installed until 1992.

Fleming originally planned for the Storyteller in the fountain to be a lion, representing McRae. He later changed his mind and made the sculpture into a ram.

Much to Fleming’s surprise, and disappointment, many in the Birmingham community believed the statues, cast in bronze, to be satanic or pagan.

“It really depressed me... it really did,” Fleming said in a 2016 interview with AL.com.

Fleming returned to Birmingham from Huntsville in 2015, and a show at the Birmingham Museum of Art put his work back on the map. A local art lover who collected many of Fleming’s pieces in the 1970s and 1980s let the museum feature his collection. Fleming enjoyed the show, and even stopped in at the museum’s Summer Art Camp to talk with kids who were making their own pieces while admiring his work.
Les Payne was part of a team that won the Pulitzer Prize

NEW YORK - Longtime New York journalist Les Payne, a Tuscaloosa native whose career took him from the poppy fields of Turkey to the Soweto uprising in South Africa to the streets of American cities, has died. He was 76.

Payne's family confirmed his death to Newsday, where he worked for nearly four decades, rising through the ranks from reporter to associate managing editor. The newspaper reported Tuesday that Payne died unexpectedly Monday night at his home in Harlem.

Payne oversaw foreign and national coverage for Newsday, was an editor of New York Newsday and wrote a column. He retired in 2006.

"Les Payne spent almost four decades at Newsday establishing a standard of journalistic excellence that has been a beacon for all who have come after him," Newsday Editor Deborah Henley said. "His skill, his passion and his integrity were all elements in a distinguished career that, in his own words, led to 'journalism that brought attention to problems, and sometimes helped solve those problems.'"

"He appreciated the people who appreciated him: the readers," his wife, Violet, said.

Payne was part of a Newsday reporting team that won a Pulitzer Prize in 1974 for a 33-part series titled "The Heroin Trail."

Payne, who was born in July 12, 1941 in Tuscaloosa and educated at the University of Connecticut, also was a founding member and former president of the National Association of Black Journalists and a Vietnam War veteran.
Woodfin addresses recommended changes to public safety, education, social justice at 100-day event

By: Erin Edgemon

The Birmingham Police Department must foster community involvement and embrace diversity to help stabilize the city's 99 neighborhoods, according to a report from Mayor Randall Woodfin's transition team.

Public safety is the most critical component to neighborhood revitalization. But before the city can revitalize its neighborhoods, it must stabilize its neighborhoods, said committee Co-Chair Herschell Hamilton.

He said the city has demolished 1,700 houses in the last 10 years and has only built 400. "This is not sustainable," Hamilton said.

More than 800 Birmingham residents took part in Woodfin's citizen-led transition process since he took office in November. This process involved a series of public input meetings and research on the part of the chairs of the five transition committees, which focused on: public safety and neighborhood revitalization, education and workforce development, entrepreneurship and economic development, transparent and efficient government and social justice.

The mayor's transition team presented the culmination of their 100 days of work -- recommendations for change -- to Woodfin during a Thursday night event at Alabama Theater. Most of the recommendations presented aligned with the promises Woodfin made on the campaign trail.

Hundreds of Birmingham residents attended the event to learn what recommendations the mayor would implement.

On Thursday, Woodfin said he is already being aggressive in neighborhood stabilization. He had previously announced that the city will demolish at least 125 houses in the next few months.

"We need our citizens and our developers to come together over the next four years to help revitalize this city," Woodfin said. He said residents will have to take part in the Birmingham Land Bank Authority to purchase property in their neighborhoods.

Public Safety

Briefly mentioning the active shooter situation Wednesday evening at UAB Highlands Hospital, city hall Detective Ralph Patterson, who co-chairs this committee, said police officers need annual active shooter training.

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According to the transition team's report, titled "The Woodfin Way," transparency in recruitment and hiring in the police and fire department was recommended.

"Integrity is essential in hiring good cops. Interpersonal communication skills are also vital in choosing the right candidates, and they must possess empathy and be effective in dealing with people," the report stated. "The city of Birmingham must offer a comprehensive compensation package. Pay and benefit packages are important for attracting officers. Benefits such as take-home cars, pay increases, comprehensive healthcare coverage and retirement packages influence an individual's initial decision to join a department and then stay with that department once they get some experience under their belt."

The committee recommended the mayor's office, the city council and the police department create a police advisory board made up of local residents that represent a cross-section of the community.

Education

During Thursday's event, Woodfin committed to entering into a formal agreement to work with Birmingham City Schools based on the recommendations from his transition team.

The committee stressed the importance of improving education from birth through college or career.

"It is our responsibility to start early," Birmingham City School Superintendent Lisa Herring said, of educating children. "If we do that well, we can ensure our Pre-K children are ready for kindergarten and that in the years to follow our kindergarten students are ready and reading at the third-grade level.

The school system also has a responsibility to provide Birmingham with students with the option to choose between college and career, Herring, who co-chaired the education and workforce development committee, said.

The committee recommended creating a "Promise Scholarship" program where eligible Birmingham City Schools high school graduates would receive assistance attending one of two community colleges in Jefferson County.

While he supports "Promise Scholarships," Woodfin said making vocational and technical training more accessible to city students is going to be a priority. He said it is important to give students this option.

Birmingham resident Janice Washington said she appreciated Woodfin's transparency.

"I think historically Birmingham has been a city that made great changes for good," she said. "I don't think that should stop now."
She said the best way to make sure the city is running properly is to do a thorough evaluation. She said it puts this is a positive starting point for the mayor.

Washington said she is glad to see a real plan to make sure students have an opportunity to have confidence in entering the workforce or college and not have "finances be a barrier to success."

Syrethia Fowler, who works as a substitute teacher in Birmingham City Schools, said the mayor is doing a great job in working with the school system. She is glad to see a focus on building workforce development including opportunities for students to go to a technical school to learn a trade.

Economic Development

Overwhelmingly residents surveyed said the biggest barrier to starting a business in Birmingham was obtaining a business license, said Annie Allen, who co-chaired the entrepreneurship and economic development committee.

She said the process to obtain a business license has to be streamlined and involve cooperation between city departments.

The majority of Birmingham residents are black, but Allen said the city doesn't track the number of women or minority-owned businesses.

Woodfin said he is recommending making the Mayor's Office of Economic Development a department and renaming it the Department of Innovation and Economic Opportunity.

Josh Carpenter, who co-chaired the committee, said putting people first is more than a slogan, it is an economic strategy.

He said the city is growing, but they have found that too many people are still hurting.

"There are too many people who haven't felt the opportunities in their neighborhoods and their backyards, Carpenter said.

He said too many people are still finding it difficult to find a job in Birmingham.

"We firmly believe that Birmingham can be the best place in the world to change the world because it already has been, Carpenter said to Woodfin, "but in order to do that we have to lay the groundwork for your vision."

Moving forward, Carpenter said the city has to have inclusive growth and foster innovation.
Transparent and Efficient Government

Committee Co-Chair Daniel Coleman said overall the city's finances are in good shape, but there's a lack of investment in the city's infrastructure.

He said the city's pension fund has been underfunded for nearly 10 years.

"That is the bad news," Coleman said. "The good news is that these holes aren't so big that they can't be filled up."

Woodfin said many of the recommendations made by this committee will be addressed in the performance assessment which will be completed this spring.

He said the city has largely been delivering services to residents in the same way for 30 to 40 years, and some things need to change. For example, he said 311 needs to be improved so residents know the process and receive updates on their complaint or issue.

Woodfin said the city is working to improve transparency through a partnership with OpenGov, a virtual dashboard that makes city finances, community development efforts, and many other data-intensive initiatives much more visible to the public.

Birmingham business owner Daphne Finley said she appreciates Woodfin listening to what residents have to say.

"I think they made some good steps in spending our tax dollars the right way," she said of Woodfin's first 100 days. She said she appreciates Woodfin being transparent and hosting Thursday night's event.

Social Justice

Based on recommendations from the social justice committee, Woodfin said he will form the Mayor's Office of Social Justice and Racial Equity. He said this office will be formed in the next 100 days.

He said the city needs once again to be a "beacon of hope" in social justice.

"In order to protect that legacy and build on it we are going to need to put resources into issues such as sustainability and environmental protection, health equity, LGBTQ, cultural exposure and racial justice," Woodfin said.
Taking away the health care of struggling parents not an employment strategy

Terri Sewell

The Alabama Medicaid Agency has announced plans to impose new work requirements on parents and caretaker relatives receiving Medicaid. Don’t be fooled, these requirements are not targeted at putting Alabamians back to work. Instead, they serve the sole purpose of taking away health coverage from our state’s most vulnerable parents.

A Medicaid work requirement in Alabama is a Catch-22 for parents on the program. If these work requirements are successful and a parent or caretaker who currently qualifies for Medicaid in Alabama gets a minimum wage job working more than 10 hours a week, they will no longer be eligible for Medicaid. Requiring parents to work to keep health coverage only to have it taken away when they get a job is a cruel and senseless policy.

A super majority of states have expanded their Medicaid programs to cover adults up to a higher income threshold. Alabama has not. In order to qualify for Medicaid in our state, an able-bodied Alabamian can only earn an annual income of $2,963 for a household of two or $3,740 for a household of three. That is about $3-4 a day per family member.

Kicking low-income parents off their health insurance not only strips Alabamians of resources, but these work requirements also put our hospital system at risk. Already, Alabama’s rural hospitals are struggling to stay afloat. Over the last several years, I’ve been working with public officials, stakeholders, and concerned constituents to keep rural hospitals open in Sumter, Greene and Wilcox Counties. Because of low reimbursements from Medicaid and Medicare, these hospitals are hanging on by a thread. Eliminating health insurance for more people in their community will mean higher unreimbursed costs in their emergency rooms.

The dignity of having a quality, well-paying job is the best solution for lifting people out of poverty and transforming local economies. But there are needs that must be met in order for a parent to be able to access a quality job, including affordable child care, reliable transportation, and the availability of jobs that match their skill set. Having health insurance and being able to afford primary care visits, health screenings, and prescription medicines has a positive impact on a person’s ability to do a better job at work or seek employment.

The state of Alabama needs to provide the tools necessary for those in extreme poverty to make the transition into jobs that will keep them from relying on government benefits. In my district, I lead a program called Project READY, which trains constituents in résumé writing, interview skills, and how to find workforce opportunities. If Alabama is serious about putting able-bodied adults back to work, then our state should invest in programs like this.

If our goal is to reduce the long-term cost drivers in the Medicaid program, then we

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need to focus on policies that prevent the conditions that lead to disability and illness in later years. The Alabamians who are subject to our state's new work requirements are able-bodied parents and caretakers - they are not the main driver of costs in our Medicaid program. The populations accruing the highest costs in our Medicaid program are the elderly, disabled, and blind. Pulling the rug out from under low-income struggling parents while they can still reverse factors that lead to chronic illnesses in later years is short-sighted. The reality is that we could have saved money we are spending now on the elderly, disabled, and chronically ill had we invested more in their health when they were younger.

Alabama could improve access to high-quality care in rural areas, expand coverage to include comprehensive behavioral health services for children or adults with addiction issues, or expand coverage for unpaid family caregivers. We could improve non-emergency medical transportation or invest in telehealth. There are countless solutions for reducing long-term health costs by investing in high-quality preventive care -- our state just needs to take action.

If Alabama wants to fight unemployment and poverty, I will be the first to offer ideas on the programs and legislation our state can pursue to get Alabamians back to work. But Alabama Medicaid just declared war on its impoverished families, not its unemployment rate. The work requirements proposed this month are cruel, they are harmful to our state's own residents, and they will cost resources and lives.

This month, I will be sending in comments and questions to Alabama Medicaid urging the agency to abandon its proposed work requirements. I believe that together, leaders in our state can help low-income families find the tools they need for jobs and success. Rather than growing the entitlement state, it's time to create the conditions for upward mobility.

U.S. Rep. Terri A. Sewell is in her fourth term representing Alabama's 7th congressional district.
Was a University of Alabama student expelled over racist remarks? Campus officials refuse to say.

By: Andrew Johnson

A student at the University of Alabama is no longer enrolled — and may have been expelled — after a video surfaced allegedly showing the student engaging in racial slurs.

If the student was expelled, it could be the second time this year a student was booted from the school for using racist language.

On Wednesday, University of Alabama President Stuart Bell released a statement which read, in part, that the university had “learned of an offensive video involving racist language by a student who is no longer enrolled. We hold our students to a much higher standard than this.”

The statement continued: “We are united in condemning this racist behavior and resolute in our commitment to ensure our students, faculty and staff know they are welcome, accepted and supported on our campus, and that discriminatory behavior will not be tolerated.”

It’s unclear whether the slur-slinger was a student who was expelled after the video surfaced, or simply a former student, or a recent grad. Campus officials refused to clarify. But Al.com reported the student was expelled over the video, and no correction had been issued as of late Thursday night.

The College Fix obtained a copy of the roughly ten-second video in question, which depicts a young white woman in a vehicle who appears to be very drunk. “Get me away from these niggers, seriously,” she says, adding later, “I seriously think niggers are gay.”

University officials would not tell The College Fix whether the student in question was expelled due to the content of the video.

“Because of federal privacy laws, the University has only stated that the student is no longer enrolled,” university spokeswoman Taylor Bryant told The Fix.

University spokeswoman Monica Watts directed The Fix to Bell’s public statement when asked for further details.

According to the student newspaper The Crimson White, the video clip went viral. It had reportedly circulated on Twitter, according to a statement from leaders of diverse student organizations, who condemned it and said “we stand united with other student organizations and the administration in condemning this behavior wherever it exists.”

The White’s editors stated its members could not identify the culprit, but Greek Life leaders put out a conciliatory statement condemning the video.

“The recurrence of incidents of this nature, and the problems within our community and campus culture, are things that we recognize and collectively aim to eliminate,” the statement from Greek Life leaders stated.

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This is reportedly the second time this semester that a University of Alabama student has left the school after a racially charged incident. Earlier this semester former student Harley Barber told The New York Post she was expelled after video surfaced of her stating, among other slurs, “I fucking hate niggers.”

Referring to the incident from January, Ari Cohn, a First Amendment lawyer for the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, contradicted Barber’s claim, stating that FIRE “has learned that the student was not expelled.”

“I know that she was encouraged by administrators to voluntarily withdraw,” Cohn added.

With regard to this week’s incident, Cohn told The Fix that Alabama’s expelling the student “would almost certainly be a violation of the First Amendment.”

“As hateful and bigoted as the language used in the video may be, such speech is protected by the First Amendment in accordance with longstanding judicial precedent,” Cohn told The Fix via email Thursday night.

“If hateful speech also falls under a category of unprotected speech — such as true threats or incitement to imminent lawless action — it will lose its constitutional protection. But the video in question did not constitute either of those things,” Cohn continued.

In addition to President Bell’s statement, the video was also condemned by the president of the Alabama Panhellenic Association, the leaders of several student groups, and representatives of “the four Greek Councils” at the school.
EDITORIAL: When racism surfaces, a response is required

When the University of Alabama released a statement Wednesday denouncing the racists rants of a young lady that were captured on a cellphone video and shared across social media, many people may have thought they were having a deja vu moment. They were not. It has happened again.

A young lady, possibly inebriated, spouts some vile rhetoric that makes the social media rounds at breakneck speed and almost immediately the university is on the defensive in an effort to reassure the public that those comments are not representative of the kind of culture that others should expect when visiting our community. At first blush, many in the community may wonder why this is even a topic of discussion. After all, most of us would like to believe that the vast majority of people already know that hatred spouted by a single college student doesn’t represent the entire community or the university.

Well, it became a topic of discussion after UA President Stuart Bell issued the statement. When the university president issues a statement to students, faculty and staff, anything he has to say to such a wide audience is notable. But that doesn’t mean he was wrong to do it. Actually, the opposite is true. If he had ignored it or brushed it off as unimportant, many may have interpreted the reaction as tolerance of such behavior. Considering Alabama’s history of racial strife, that should never be an option. Bell was correct to remind the community that the university condemns racist behavior.

Bell opened his statement by pointing out that the student in question is no longer enrolled at the university. But to be fair, most reasonable people understand there is little the university can do to prevent this sort of thing from happening. Students come to the University of Alabama from all over the state, country, and even the world, carrying with them issues, biases and prejudices, conscious or unconscious, that cannot be addressed until they surface. When they do, what’s important is how the institution responds.

This also happened in January, when a UA student from New Jersey drew national attention by apparently recording herself making vile racist comments and posting the video on social media.

In both instances, the university swiftly condemned the behavior and reiterated its commitment to inclusion. That was the right thing to do, of course. But the response mattered even more because these were students at Alabama, the state’s flagship university, where a governor once stood in the door to stop black students from enrolling.

In this day and age, it is a shame that this state and the university still have to answer for that legacy. The truth is that in 2018, racism, while certainly not a thing of the past, is likely no more or no less an issue at Alabama than at any other state university. It is as much a problem in other areas of the country and the world as it here. But the spotlight continues to shine brighter when racism rears its ugly head here.
Racist videos 'not my first Armageddon,' says UA diversity, equity, inclusion VP

By: Roy S. Johnson

This article is part of the Black Magic Project, which is a series of stories focusing on those who do inspiring things in the black community. This year, we created a Facebook group where if you're a Facebook user, you can join our Black Magic Project group, where we will not only share stories from our website, but we will also hold live video discussions and talk to people who are contributing to their communities in big and small ways.

Dr. G. Christine Taylor just finished shoveling snow on that January morning—sweeping snow, really. With a broom. It was, after all, Tuscaloosa, not the wintry heart of Indiana, where she lived before joining the University of Alabama last summer as its first-ever vice president and assistant provost for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Now, she was baking. Out of the oven, she pulled a homemade spaghetti squash lasagna. Cooking "gives me comfort," Taylor says, evoking memories of her childhood in rural, segregated Harriman, Tennessee, vibrant images and "wonderful aromas" as her mother and grandmother prepared meals.

"And there was always enough for neighbors passing by," she recalls.

The telephone rang. On the other end was a university colleague from the strategic communications office.

"We've got," the voice began, "a little challenge."

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Taylor was not blind to the depths of the, yes, challenges awaiting her at Alabama. In the minds of many, the institution still embodies the very antithesis of diversity, equity, and inclusion. As does our state, home of some of the most recognized, frightening and hateful chapters of America's racist past.

Chapters that played out before the eyes of the world. And continue to do so.

"We have a wonderful campus, but it's steeped in history," she says during a recent conversation at her office campus. "What happened here was happening across the nation. It just happened to get documented and continues to be replayed. In any civil rights piece, you'll see [ex-Gov. George Wallace blocking two African-American students from entering] Foster Auditorium. No place like Alabama creates the same level of (Taylor gasps), Oh, I can't believe they're putting police dogs and fire hoses on people!

"That is a part of our history that perhaps plaques us in a way it does not impact other institutions."
Yet Taylor was still drawn to Tuscaloosa, to the challenge—in part due to hurdles she herself overcame. Even at an early age. As a first grader, with bows decorating her hair, five-year-old Christine was one of five black students who integrated the hometown elementary school.

Later, she was often the first or only African-American in her workplace, which sometimes prompted uncomfortable remarks from well-meaning colleagues. "We've never had one of you," a co-worker at a South Carolina television station once said to Taylor, "and it's worked out nicely, don't you think?"

Taylor was also intrigued, mundanely enough, by the Alabama job description shared by the recruiter who reached out to her at Purdue University, where she served for six years in a similar role.

"A lot of institutions write lovely job descriptions but won't clean up their house first," she says. "They leave it up to the diversity person to come in and clean up their mess.

"[Alabama] acknowledged the state's history and current inadequacies in diversity, equity, and inclusion at the institution. Then it said, 'But we firmly believe our future of excellence is tied to our ability to be effective in these areas. We need someone experienced to help get there.'

"They were bold enough to tell the truth about themselves. I thought to myself, 'I could work with these people.'"

And there is plenty of work to do.

A decade ago, the university actually created a diversity plan, outlining five goals: 1) "communicating UA's commitment to diversity as part of its educational mission"; 2) "create and sustain a respectful and inclusive campus environment"; 3) increase faculty and "senior level" diversity; and 4) student body; and 5) "annually review and assess" actions taken towards achieving those goals.

Today, those heartfelt objectives, and the many programs and efforts they spawned, are about as relevant as a fax machine.

And last October, an independent, California-based firm, after a year-long assessment of Alabama's overall diversity efforts, told the university so: "These goals do not constitute a larger contemporary diversity strategic vision to lead UA into the future. Moreover, the Strategic Diversity Plan 2008 goals need to be revisited in terms of their utility, potency, and framing of diversity."

Translation: Your momma's and daddy's diversity goals didn't work for them and they certainly won't work for you now. So, what does "diversity, equity, and inclusion" mean in the 21st century? Especially in a nation, at this time, where we can't seem to tolerate even the most minuscule difference of opinion, culture, ethnicity, faith or sexual preference?

And what does it mean for an institution that still has so much to overcome?

Let's start with what's happened at Alabama since those original goals were crafted, oh, during diversity's Paleolithic Era.

See next page
The overall student population has exploded—rising from 25,580 in the fall of 2007 to 38,563 in fall 2017.

In that period, the percentage of non-white students grew from 14.5% in '07 to 21% in 2017 (including students who identified as "2 or more races," which, let's be real, wasn't a thing a decade ago). That puts Alabama at about the national average, according to rankings compiled by collegefactual.com.

Regarding faculty, non-whites represent about 16.5% of full-time staff and remains one of the most challenging areas of recruitment, even notwithstanding Alabama history.

"Issues related to diversity and inclusion are dynamic and ever-changing," Taylor says. "A lot of campuses are looking at what to do about childcare as a major recruiting tool for young faculty. That was not an issue a few years ago."

All that said, it's easy to oversimplify "diversity" goals as we want to attract more fill-in-the-blank students and fill-in-the-blank faculty and create a "safe space" where students, faculty, administrators, and staff are valued and accepted, despite their myriad differences.

Those are no doubt worthy, necessary components in any credible, substantive diversity strategy (and plenty of diversity plans are neither), but if viewed as sole drivers of an institution's diversity strategy today, said plan is likely to be as effective as, say, Nick Saban's Miami Dolphins playbook.

"Higher education in 2018 is very different than higher education in 1998, in terms of the things you have to be attuned to," Taylor says.

She spent months meeting with and listening to students, faculty, administrators and other stakeholders to ascertain their perspectives on what diversity means to them. But Taylor has been steeped in this field long enough to know the challenges are now broader than the numbers.

They include creating graduates capable of excelling in a workforce that is growing more and more diverse each day.

"One of the things we've heard from recruiters over the last ten to fifteen years is: 'I will hire you because of the quality of the curriculum, but your ability to move upward is directly tied to your ability to play well with others,'" Taylor says. "They say, 'I can teach you how to do things GE's way or P&G's way, but what I can't teach you is how to work with people who are different, and that's going to be an important part of your job.'"

Taylor is working with faculty and the administration to create an educational experience that, in fact, prepares students for an evolving workplace and world—in part by utilizing the events and lessons of Alabama's racial past.

"There's a real need to reclaim our history, and to reframe who we are today—that the campus has come a far way since that time," Taylor says. "Are there issues? Sure, but be proud of what we have made ourselves to be since that point."
"The reframing won't be easy," she admits. "But if we approach our history from the theoretical perspective and begin to study it more, it becomes part of our institutional knowledge about higher education with respect to the civil rights movement.

"There's a lot there that if properly studied, can add to the conversations we have around the nation about these issues."

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"This was not my first Armageddon," Taylor shares about that snowy January day when videos featuring the racist tirades by then-Alabama freshman Harley Barber went viral, creating the "little challenge" conveyed to the university's new diversity, equity, and inclusion executive on the telephone.

What happened next--after Taylor made sure the oven was turned off and the lasagna put away--was a "fire drill," she says.

Numerous departments, including the office of the president, mobilized to address videos, and their fallout, with constituencies--alumni, donors, parents and prospective students who would soon be deciding whether to attend the University of Alabama.

"Any institution with any level of exposure negative will worry about a lot of things," Taylor says. "Having been at institutions where horrible things happen my immediate attention is on meeting with students, talking about strategies. I wanted them to know they would have a seat at the table in this crisis like everyone else."

Many students called her office or sent emails seeking answers to the storm that quickly engulfed the Internet, airwaves, and headlines nationwide. Most of them, of course, were African-American.

But not exclusively.

"It was like everyone was standing on the corner in our Sunday best when someone in a truck drove through a nearby puddle," Taylor says. "We all got mud on us."

The following morning--a Wednesday--Taylor met student leaders at her office to hear their concerns and plans. She was told they planned to march from the Ferguson Student Center to the office of UA president Stuart R. Bell. Taylor encouraged them to craft action items and advised them on messaging. "I don't like the idea of marching for a parade," she says. "There has to be action."

By late that same afternoon, the university confirmed that Barber was no longer a student, which tempered some of the tension brewing. But just some.
"It's like dealing with toxic waste," Taylor says. "It's not just the event, it's the residual, the aftermath.

"If this is not who we are here--and many of the students expressed that thought--there has to be a way to articulate that. How do they say, 'That's not going to work here'?"
It is exactly two months to the day since Barber posted her rants, and Taylor says many students are still struggling with that response.

"It hasn't taken root like I would want it to," she confesses. "Issues related to race are the most under-discussed in the nation. Instead, we holler and shout. We can even respectfully disagree. But are we able to say to another student, 'That wasn't appropriate.'"

In the spring, Taylor will release a new strategic plan and goals around diversity, equity and inclusion that incorporates what she's learned in the months since arriving at Alabama and factors that not only affect the university today--such as white nationalist groups infiltrating college campuses to recruit, the growing gap wealth between and concerns about the effectiveness of K-through-12 public education, particularly in urban areas--will undoubtedly shape the campus for years.

"The question is not, 'Will our democracy change?', but 'How soon?'", she says.

"More than half the kids poised to go to college around the nation are people of color. That has serious implications for us as a country. If they're not being educated, we will have a workforce problem looming.

"The impact on higher education may not come until 2050, but how are we readying ourselves for this shift in the demography?"

"When we think about some of the world's challenges they will not be solved with homogeneous thinking."

Nor by your parents' diversity plan.
Springing into football season

University of Alabama kicks off spring practice

By Ken Roberts
City Editor

While the glow of the school's 17th national championship hasn't dimmed in the minds of Crimson Tide fans, the time has come to focus on the 2018 season. Spring football practice got underway Tuesday in Tuscaloosa and here's a look at what University of Alabama fans can expect as this season unfolds:

- **A-Day Game:** UA's 15th and final practice of the spring will be the annual intrasquad game, set for 1 p.m. April 21 at Bryant-Denny Stadium. Admission is free and the game is set to be televised by ESPN. UA will release details about other spring game activities, such as when the 2017 team captains will put their hand and footprints into cement for permanent display on the Quad, at a later date. Last year's spring game attracted 74,326 fans.

- **On the road again:** Once again, UA will kick off the season with a big-name opponent at a neutral site. The Crimson Tide will face the Louisville Cardinals on Sept. 1 in the Camping World Kick-off game in Orlando, Florida. UA also has four road games against SEC foes: Sept. 15 against Ole Miss in Oxford, Oct. 6 against the Arkansas Razorbacks and Oct. 20 in Knoxville against the Tennessee Volunteers, led by former UA defensive coordinator Jeremy Pruitt.

- **There's no place like home:** UA will play seven games in Tuscaloosa, culminating with the Iron Bowl against the Auburn Tigers on Nov. 24. The Missouri Tigers will be the opponent for homecoming on Oct. 13. Other SEC foes on the home slate begin with the Jimbo Fisher-led Texas A&M Aggies on Sept. 22, while the

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FOOTBALL

From Page A1

Kickoff times have not been set yet for any UA football games.

- Postseason possibilities:
The SEC Championship Game is Dec. 1 at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta. Fans who are confident UA can earn its fifth straight berth in the College Football Playoff had better start saving their pennies now and pick out a pair of traveling shoes. The semifinal playoff games will be played Dec. 29 at the Orange Bowl in Miami and at the Cotton Bowl in AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. The title game is set for Jan. 7, 2019, at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California.
Alabama football team to visit White House

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House announced the University of Alabama football team will visit next month.

Spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said the team will come to the White House on April 10.

Alabama won its fifth national title in nine years in January, defeating Georgia 26-23 in overtime in the College Football Playoff National Championship Game in Atlanta. It was the Crimson Tide's 17th overall national championship and fifth under Crimson Tide coach Nick Saban.

Sanders noted that President Donald Trump attended the game and looks forward to hosting Saban and the Crimson Tide players.
UA won’t release Rondini settlement agreement

The Tuscaloosa News requested a full copy of accord

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama has refused to release the full text of an agreement with the parents of former student Megan Rondini, even though UA announced some of the details after the family's lawsuit against it was dismissed.

The Tuscaloosa News requested a copy of the full settlement agreement on Feb. 28, but UA denied the request, asserting the document was a confidential agreement between the university and the Rondinis and that "the substantive terms" were provided in a joint statement they issued about the settlement on Feb. 27.

In that statement, the university and the Rondinis announced that the family would dismiss the Title II and Title IX complaints against UA that were included in a federal wrongful death lawsuit filed against several defendants last year. They announced that the university was committing about $450,000 to scholarships and programs addressing sexual assault.

The former student committed suicide in 2016. Rondini reported to police that she was raped by T.J. Bunn Jr. in 2015, but the investigation ended when a grand jury failed to indict him. Bunn has denied the allegation. The Rondini family said University of Alabama staff didn't provide Megan Rondini with adequate counseling services or accommodations after she made the report, and that law enforcement mishandled her complaint.

UA announced that under the terms of the agreement it was committing $250,000 to a center that will provide care and support to sexual assault victims, an additional $150,000 to expand

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RONDINI

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its existing programs to address sexual assault by the end of 2019, and $50,000 over the next five years for a scholarship named after Rondini, who will also be posthumously awarded a magna cum laude bachelor's degree with an accompanying certificate from the Honors College in May.

An email from UA directing the media to an online link to the joint statement said it "does not involve any admission of wrongdoing" and that the university "is not paying any money to the Rondinis ..."

The federal district judge overseeing the Rondinis' lawsuit agreed to dismiss UA from the suit on Feb. 27. Earlier, Sheriff Ron Abernathy, Investigator Josh Hastings, Investigator Adam Jones and University of Alabama President Stuart Bell were dismissed from the lawsuit, leaving Bunn as the sole defendant.

The Rondinis later filed an amended complaint against the investigators.

Alabama Press Association attorney Dennis Bailey argued the ability of a public university which uses taxpayer funds to

enter into a confidential settlement agreement is questionable.

"Generally, when you have a confidential settlement agreement, nobody announces it," he said.

The Alabama Press Association position is the settlement is a public record subject to the state's open records law unless it is specifically exempted by statute, Bailey said.

Further, Bailey noted the university has already released details of the confidential agreement.

"They shouldn't be able to pick and choose what they want to say about it (agreement)," Bailey said.
See bleed, AV

between depolarization
until the waves with calcium reach teams at the hospital
Training team, which consists of a special AR force surgical
trained team, which plays a vital role in the training of the
Training and support a half dozen other members of a VA.

When we hold direct pressure, we are committing our

wounds.

The school also provides kits that contain latex
rubber gloves, bandages, and burn dressings for every classroom in
the school. They also provide a kit that contains latex
rubber gloves, bandages, and burn dressings for the
Training team. This kit contains four pairs of gloves,
four burn dressings, and two bandages.

Going to San Antonio or the dish washer into that wound.

Stop the Bleed

Prepared to save lives after shootings.

Stop the Bleed

Surgeons, trauma nurses help teachers

Nurse Lila Evans

said she was just doing her job.

"When we hold direct pressure, we are committing our

wounds.

She said she was just doing her job.

When we hold direct pressure, we are committing our

wounds.

"When we hold direct pressure, we are committing our

wounds.

When we hold direct pressure, we are committing our

wounds.
BLEED
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The Stop the Bleed team has steadily worked its way across Jefferson County, starting with schools in Homewood and other suburbs. Interest in the program increased after the recent shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Mitchell’s unit treated about 750 bleeding injuries during its last deployment — many from gunshots, blasts and shrapnel. When those injuries happen in battle, medics often reach for tourniquets, which can stop bleeding and prevent death.

“Around the early part of 2004 in Iraq, the military realized tourniquets were saving lives,” Mitchell said. “Now it’s 2018 and we’re putting them in classrooms.”

St. Barnabas is an elementary and middle school in Birmingham’s East Lake neighborhood. The small two-story campus curls around a courtyard that connects to the handsome church next door. During the training session, the sounds of bouncing basketballs and children’s laughter cluttered down the cinder block hallways.

Evans, a trauma nurse at UAB, began with a presentation about blood loss prevention. She explained that tourniquets could be applied high on the arm or leg to stop bleeding from an injury to the limb. If a child was too small for the tourniquet in the kit, a teacher can pull together a makeshift version from pencils and wide rubber bands, she said.

Tourniquets are safe, she said, and very effective. For years, they fell out of favor due to concerns they could cause damage to arms and legs, but research has shown tourniquets applied for two hours or less rarely cause lasting injuries.

While the partnership between UAB and Jefferson County schools is unique in Alabama, there is a nationwide, surgeon-promoted effort to teach tourniquet skills. Other Alabama efforts are among those promoted online at bleedingcontrol.org.

Evans said she has been trying to get the training into schools in Shelby County, where she lives and serves as coroner. So far, none of the schools have accepted.

“I’d rather see them on this side than the other side,” she said.

Dr. Virginia Strickland, a trauma surgeon at UAB, said school districts initially resisted the tourniquet training. Most teachers and administrators don’t want to believe a school shooting could happen to them, but Strickland explained the skills could come in handy after accidents and other injuries.

“Our kids go to school here too, and we wanted to do what we could,” Strickland said. “It took a bit of persistence, from our standpoint.”

The idea began with a grant to help train police and firefighters on the proper use of tourniquets, said Maj. Cade Reedy, a trauma nurse with the U.S. Air Force. After the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012, the American College of Surgeons began a campaign to improve access to tourniquets and training called Stop the Bleed. The Birmingham team that trained first responders decided to take its expertise into schools.

Bleeding can cause death in five to eight minutes, Strickland said. It may take much longer than that to secure and clear a building in the event of a shooting, she said.

“The person that’s going to save your life is the person sitting next to you.”

After Evans finished her presentation, teachers at St. Barnabas practiced the techniques on foam logs. Nurses and doctors adjusted tourniquets and explained how to apply direct pressure.

Second-grade teacher Krystal Dennis said the school had an active shooter drill that day.

“We call it ‘Code Silver’ here,” she said.

Her students know what to do, she said. When they hear the code come over the speakers, they hide and lock the door. Now Dennis said she also knows what to do if one her students becomes gravely injured. Although she’s had first-aid training in the past, it didn’t cover tourniquet use or bleeding control, Dennis said.

Dennis said she doesn’t spend a lot of time worrying about school shootings, but did leave the training with an improved confidence in her ability to respond to an emergency.

“We know the proper protocols and procedures,” she said.

“We put our faith first, but we’re also prepared for the worst. It’s the only thing we can do.”
Longtime nursing supervisor slain

UAB Highlands shooter kills himself after killing one, injuring another

Carol Robinson  crorein@al.com

A woman fatally shot at UAB Highlands on Wednesday night was a longtime nursing supervisor who died at the hands of a disgruntled employee.

Nancy Swift, a 63-year-old Mississippi native, was described by those who knew her as a sweet, kind soul. She was a wife and mother who lived in Shelby County with her husband.

The shooting happened just before 7 p.m. in or near Swift's second-floor office near the operating room at the 11th Avenue South facility. Sources say Swift was reprimanding an employee — 31-year-old central sterile supply worker Trevis Devon Coleman — who then brandished a gun and opened fire.

Swift was shot, as was 28-year-old instrument management supervisor Tim Isley, the son of Springville Mayor Butch Isley. After shooting the two, the suspect then turned the gun on himself and died at the scene from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

See SHOOTING, AS

Central sterile supply worker Trevis Devon Coleman, 31, opened fire Wednesday, killing one and injuring another.

Nancy Swift, 63, a longtime nursing supervisor, was shot and killed Wednesday night.

Tim Isley, the son of Springville Mayor Butch Isley, was resting and recovering Thursday in the ICU.
SHOOTING
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Coleman was pronounced dead on the scene at 7:35 p.m. Coworkers said there had been prior problems with him at work.

The first officers on the scene rushed inside.

"Our training for an active shooter is we don't wait," said Birmingham police Lt. Pete Williston. "If we can go in as a team, that's how we prefer to do it, but the officers that arrived on the scene did not hesitate. They immediately responded to the active threat that was perceived."

Isley was rushed to the main UAB Hospital, where he underwent surgery and was critical but stable in the facility's Trauma and Burn Intensive Care Unit late Wednesday night. His family released a statement Thursday saying that he was "resting" and "recovering" in the ICU.

Swift was rushed to the emergency room at UAB Highlands, where police announced at 10 p.m. that she had died. Her official time of death was 9:01 p.m.

UAB canceled all surgeries scheduled for Thursday at UAB Highlands, but said all other hospital operations would continue as normal. Counselors are being provided for employees.

"We ask that you please join us in prayer for these families, those who work where the incident occurred, and those who were immediately on the scene, including first responders who acted so heroically under extremely difficult circumstances," UAB officials said in a statement to employees informing them of the deadly incident.

6:55 P.M. WEDNESDAY

The ordeal began at 6:55 p.m. Wednesday, when police received the citywide call of an active shooter at the hospital. UAB Police has officers stationed at both UAB Highlands and the main hospital, and a call for all possible assistance was dispatched.

Birmingham police officers from precincts across the city — as well as Interim Police Chief Orlando Wilson — swarmed the area and set up a blocks-wide perimeter. Unsure of how many people were wounded, doctors from the main hospital were transported by police to UAB Highlands.

The first officers entered the hospital and then transitioned out once the SWAT team arrived. A methodical room-by-room search was carried out until it was determined there was no longer a threat.

UAB issued an "All Clear" about 7:45 p.m. Crime scene technicians and homicide detectives were brought in to process the scene.

"It's terrible," said Birmingham Fire and Rescue Capt. Harold Watson. "As far as what makes people do these terrible things, I don't know."

UAB Hospital Vice President Anthony Patterson called the shooting a horrific tragedy.

"This is a sad day for Birmingham and UAB. We lost a colleague and a friend last night," he said. "First, I want to offer my sincerest condolences to the victims who have suffered and to their family and colleagues who are grieving this senseless loss of life and injury."

"Our highest priority is the health and safety of our patients and employees," Patterson said, "and while we all want to know how this happened, we will respect the dignity and the privacy of the victims."

 Authorities said there are metal detectors at UAB Highlands and they were in use Wednesday.

"We have extensive security measures in place that include police officers on site 24-7, as well as others that we do not publicly disclose in the interest of safety," Patterson said UAB officials are limited in what they can say because of the ongoing investigation and also federal laws that protect patient privacy.

"When we leave here, we will continue the important work to understand this horrific tragedy," he said, "and make sure UAB Hospital is as safe as the environment can be."

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FAMILY REACTIONS

The Isley family released this statement on Thursday afternoon: "Our son, Timothy Noah Isley, was injured in a shooting that occurred last night at his place of employment. We would like to thank the doctors and staff at UAB Hospital for the fine care Tim has received as a result of those injuries. Following emergency surgery last night, and a follow-up operation this morning, Tim is resting in the Intensive Care Unit recovering from his injuries. In addition to our continued concern for our son's recovery, we grieve along with the families of others affected by this tragedy. We ask that you continue to pray for Tim and please respect our privacy and refrain from contacting the family at this time."

Friends and family of Swift gathered at her Pelham home Thursday, but said they weren't yet ready to talk about what happened.

Coleman's family declined to comment on the shooting, but friends of Coleman, who had no criminal record, said what happened at the hospital was unexpected.

"I've known him all my life," said Mekayla Rembert, who lived across from Coleman in southwest Birmingham. "He was a little secluded, but he was sweet person. Don't let them tell you he was all bad."

Rembert was shot and paralyzed on the front porch of her home in 2011 in a similar situation. She was sitting with family when her boyfriend got upset with her and pulled a six-shot Smith & Wesson, shot and wounded Rembert and her grandmother, and then turned the gun on himself.

Wednesday night's shooting brought the memories flooding back.

"What makes a person click? No one knows what is going through somebody's mind," she said. "People do crazy things and I guess we'll leave here never knowing."
Work remains for BJCC stadium project

Yet another major hurdle in the long-running bid for a new stadium and renovation of the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex has been cleared.

The Alabama House passed a bill to activate a dormant car rental tax in Jefferson County to fund upgrades to the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex and new stadium at the BJCC. The Senate passed the bill earlier in the session. The bill now heads to Gov. Kay Ivey.

While passage of the bill represents a key victory - as there are few gives in Montgomery - more work remains to make the project a reality.

Tad Snider, executive director and CEO of the BJCC, said the next step involves continuing efforts to work with Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin and the Birmingham City Council to evolve the council’s recent resolution of intent to fund the project to an actual funding agreement to formalize the city’s commitment.

Woodfin has recommended the city commit $3 million for 30 years to the project.

Woodfin said the Alabama House vote moves the region one step closer to Birmingham having state-of-the-art facilities to better compete for tourism, sporting and entertainment business. He also said the stadium and upgrades at the BJCC will generate millions of dollars that will go toward neighborhood revitalization.

Some councilors have expressed concerns about what building a new stadium will mean for the area surrounding Legion Field and have suggested the city should invest in upgrading that stadium.

As we’ve previously noted, other funding components would include $10.7 million in annual debt service from the BJCC Authority for 30 years, $1 million per year for 30 years for Jefferson County, a projected $3.5 million per year from the car rental tax for 30 years and $4 million for 10 years from UAB and corporate partners.

“We look forward to continuing our dialog with the mayor and council on the partnership, providing information and addressing due diligence matters,” Snider said. “On a parallel track, the BJCC will continue to finalize the private sector components of the project financing, as well.”

UAB Athletics Director Mark Ingram told the Birmingham Business Journal the school, which would be a tenant in the stadium, continues to have ongoing and positive conversations with the BJCC about the project.

“We’re excited about the progress being made,” Ingram said. “This is so important not just for Birmingham and the surrounding area, but also the entire state.”

Ingram said details of corporate commitments will become more clear as the funding picture comes into focus, with some aspects depending on the actual design of the facility, such as the number of suites and similar factors.

While officials didn’t offer a clear timeline for next steps, the hope is to have the stadium ready by the 2020 football season and the 2021 World Games.
Legislature

Tax for stadium and renovations at BJCC arena is signed into law

Mike Cason mcason@al.com

A component of the funding plan needed for a new stadium and renovations at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex has cleared the Alabama Legislature.

Gov. Kay Ivey signed Thursday a bill passed by the House of Representatives to levy a 3 percent tax on auto leases and rentals in Jefferson County to help support the debt service for the project.

The tax has been on the books since 2001, when it was proposed to help build a domed stadium but has never been collected. The law would start collection of the tax when the BJCC Authority contracts to building the stadium.

The bill passed Tuesday by a vote of 14-3, with lawmakers from outside the Birmingham metro area abstaining.

The auto lease tax would help pay the debt service on the $300 million project, which would include a 45,000-55,000 seat open-air stadium, at a cost of about $175 million, and a $123 million renovation of the Legacy Arena.

Proponents of the bill by Sen. Jabo Waggoner, R-Vestavia Hills, said the tax is essential for the project. It would generate about $3 million a year to help pay the debt service.

A key piece of the funding plan awaits approval.

The Birmingham City Council has passed a resolution of intent to provide $3 million a year over 30 years to support the debt service but has not given final approval.

The stadium would be the home for UAB football, which would pay for a lease to help support the debt service.

Rep. Jack Williams, R-Vestavia Hills, who handled the bill in the Senate, said the stadium and the renovations to the Legacy Arena would attract events and conventions to Birmingham and generate business that would benefit the metropolitan area and the entire state.

"This will create a huge economic revival in the northern part of the city," Williams said. "We've seen tremendous growth in the midtown area around Regions Field and we're going to see the same thing happen around the BJCC."

Three Birmingham lawmakers voted against the bill — Reps. Juandalynn Givan, Mary Moore and John Rogers.

Moore and Rogers said the city would be shortchanged on the project because of revenues that flow to the BJCC Authority, not the city.

Rogers and Moore proposed amendments trying to steer more control or revenue to the city, but the House rejected them.

Rogers said he did not think the City Council would approve its share of the funding plan.

Givan said she did not oppose the BJCC project but said she wanted to see improvements at Legion Field and the surrounding Smithfield community, which is in her district. She suggested a 6 percent auto lease tax with the revenue divided between the two projects.

Voting in favor of the bill were Reps. Louise Alexander, D-Birmingham; Jim Carns, R-Vestavia Hills; Merika Coleman, D-Pleasant Grove; Dickie Drake, R-Leeds; Allen Farley, R-McCalla; David Faulkner, R-Mountain Brook; Danny Garrett, R-Trussville; Rolanda Hollis, D-Birmingham; Rod Scott, D-Fairfield; Kyle South, R-Fayette; Patricia Todd, D-Birmingham; Allen Treadaway, R-Morris; Tim Wadsworth, R-Arley and Williams.

Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin issued a statement supporting the project after Tuesday's vote.

"The action the Alabama House took today puts us one step closer to Birmingham having state-of-the-art facilities to better compete for tourism, sporting and entertainment business," Woodfin said.

"In addition, expanding and renovating the BJCC will generate millions of dollars over the next decade for the city that will go to neighborhood revitalization."
Bill designed to help rural hospitals

Legislation would create a center at UAB to provide resources

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

State lawmakers are considering a bill to create a resource center in the University of Alabama at Birmingham Health System that will provide expertise and support to help sustain public hospitals in rural regions of the state.

The bill would create the Alabama Rural Hospital Resource Center within the UAB Health System, which would add staff to serve as a resource to smaller rural hospitals.

“We have a lot of expertise and resources. I have an insurance office, a compliance office — if we sent somebody down there, they could really be helpful,” said health system CEO Will Ferniany.

The hope is access to the expertise of the larger system at no cost will help nonprofit public rural hospitals remain viable and improve health care in the rural areas they serve.

“We have got to do things to take knowledge we have and let it permeate out into all areas of the state,” said State Sen. Greg Reed, the sponsor of the bill.

The bill has passed the Senate and is being considered in the House. If plans for the center are enacted by the Legislature and governor, they must still go to the UA System board of trustees for approval.

“We want rural hospitals to survive. We want people to have access to the care they need of a more routine variety close to their home. Then as the state tertiary care hospital, we want to make sure we have beds open to be able to see the car wreck victim,” said Clay Ryan, vice chancellor.

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Hospitals

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for government affairs for the UA System.
The center, if approved, would be part of an array of programs and partnerships offered by UAB Health System to help smaller rural hospitals, according to Fernany.

"Imagine it as kind of like a menu of stuff," Fernany said.

UAB began exploring partnerships with rural hospitals under a 2010 law passed by the Legislature that tailored an existing state law on the creation of health care authorities to accommodate universities with medical schools such as UAB and the University of South Alabama.

While the relationships established under the authorities are more formal business relationship, the center will provide help under less formal relationships.

Eligible hospitals would come from part of the state that meet federal designations of rural areas or have a shortage of health care resources under federal guidelines.

"We have a number of rural hospitals that are struggling right now," Ryan said. "The primary reason for that struggle is due to the patient population they serve, they have a disproportionate share of either uninsured patients or patients who are uninsured under some government program, the reimbursement rates of which are obviously lower than private pay. It puts a real strain on those hospitals. Also, their patient flow is not as predictable as UAB for example."

Potentially, there are 32 hospitals in the state that would be eligible for help from the center, Reed said.

Support provided to rural hospitals would include help with compliance, coding, purchasing and supply chain, quality, strategic planning, recruiting providers, insurance and cost reporting.

The center would submit annual reports to the Legislature, state finance director and Medicaid commissioner on the effectiveness of the resource center.

"Some of these are things that would help are challenges for rural hospitals but for places like the university system, they're a regular part of daily business," Reed said.

Whatever shape this takes depends on the needs of the individual hospitals, Ryan said.

"I think it is really up to that hospitals in terms of the help they think they need and instances where we might be able to provide a benefit," Ryan said. "This is not a cram-down. We are not here to tell people what we think they need. We want them to tell us what they think they need and then we can see where we can go from there."

The bill would also establish a rural administrative residency program working with UAB's graduate program in Health Administration.

"One of the things that is a critical issue is how are we going to attract administrators (to rural hospitals)," Reed said.

Fernany and Reed said the residency program would offer two slots.

"You have students tackling real-life problems as part of graduate studies at UAB," Reed said.

While the bill provides for the creation of the center, its operation is contingent on additional funding that would have to be allocated by the state. The UAB Health System will initially fund the startup. The center would increase the obligations of UAB by about $1 million, according to the fiscal analysis accompanying the bill.

"I think probably without funding - I don't know if we can do more than two or three hospitals. We could not expand it very far. We just don't have the resources to do that," Fernany said of the system's current capacity to operate the system.

Reed and Ryan say it is too early to say how much the operation of the center will cost.

"I think we just have to see what the need is. We feel like there is a significant need and an opportunity for us to be involved with a program that would help rural hospitals," Ryan said. "We will have a better feel for that once we get it on track."

The long-term funding plan for the center has yet to be determined, Reed said, noting the state's general operating and education budgets have already been developed for the next fiscal year. The proposal for the center was introduced too late in the abbreviated regular session to be included in the budget debates, Fernany said.

Future possibilities include a potential line item, additional appropriations for UAB Health System or a support from the general fund, Reed said.

Fernany and Ryan said the center would seek grants and other outside funding opportunities.

"We are going to look for as much funding, as we can from other places," Fernany said.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.
"LET'S PRETEND HOSPITAL" KICKS OFF AT UAH

By: Alyssa Martin

More than 2,000 local first graders are making their way through a mock hospital this week.

"Let's Pretend Hospital" kicked off on Tuesday at The University of Alabama in Huntsville.

The UAH nursing building was transformed into a jungle safari for the week, it's a learning opportunity for both the nursing students and local 1st graders.

The purpose of the role playing project is to teach children what to expect during a hospital visit.

"Going to the ER having a procedure done, riding on an ambulance, those are scary events, especially when you're young. So this is kind of like a soft introduction to them to alleviate fears and let them know we're here to help," said Rebecca Stillwell-Miller, UAH student CEO.

The 1st graders rotate through rooms where they learn about different aspects of hospitals, like the operating room.

"I won't be scared next time I go to the doctor," said 1st grader Jack Plummer.

The program also benefits nursing students at UAH who help plan, prepare and organize the event.

"A lot of the kids don't even know what to expect they just hear doctor, or they hear shot or they hear medicine, or anything like that and they have no idea what to expect, so I think a really good thing with this is to be able to go into each of the rooms we have set up and teach them what it would be like if you did have to have a surgery or a shot," said UAH Nursing Student Kristen Curtis.

"A big part of that education is with our children because a lot of children then go back to educate their families and it's a huge opportunity," added UAH Nursing Student Maddi Akers.

The 1st graders at the event are from schools in Huntsville City, Madison City and Madison County.
Travel ban won't keep California rocket team from competition

By: Lee Roop

It looks like the student rocket team from Citrus College will get to Huntsville for the annual NASA Student Rocket Launch competition despite a California ban on state-funded travel to Alabama.

The school had said the team couldn't come because California has an anti-discrimination law that blocks state-funded organizations from spending that money in states that discriminate against gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people.

Pushback came from several sources including author Homer Hickam, who is famous for his novel "Rocket Boys" about his own struggle and triumph as a young rocket builder in West Virginia. The book became the movie "October Sky," and Hickam has written numerous successful books.

"That doesn't sound right," Hickam said Monday recalling his reaction. "That sounds dumb."

"I peeled the onion back and saw there were four or five other (California) teams that were coming," Hickam said. "I looked it up. They were coming using their own funds. I looked it up further. The Citrus College team had raised their own funds, but they still weren't allowed to come. That just irritated me. They were being picked on. Singled out. For no apparent reason that I could see."

Hickam wasn't the only one from Huntsville who felt that way. Mayor Tommy Battle and others were also working the issue. Among the facts pointed out was that the school had competed in 2017.

Hickam "started griping on Facebook and Twitter," he said. He posted pictures of University of Alabama in Huntsville students holding a "welcome" sign and a group of grinning Space Campers. "These are the kids that Citrus College is trying to shield their kids from," Hickam said. "I got kind of snarky about it."

The pressure apparently paid off. The Citrus College board has a meeting scheduled Tuesday, and there is a second vote on the agenda. Hickam said it now looks like the team will get to come.

The weeklong event starting April 4 pits groups from 23 states against each other. Teams design, build, test and fly a high-altitude reusable rocket.
Deborah Edwards Barnhart is a 2018 Yellowhammer Woman of Impact

By: Rachel Blackmon Bryars

The U.S. Space and Rocket Center may teach visitors about space vehicles that defy gravity, but for its CEO and Executive Director Deborah Edwards Barnhart, the center itself has proved gravitational — pulling her into its orbit several times throughout her four-decade career.

Barnhart, who will this month be honored as a Yellowhammer Woman of Impact, began working in public affairs and marketing at the Space and Rocket Center in the early 1970s when she was in her final year at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, according to a 2012 U.S. army article detailing her background.

After some time away, she returned to manage publicity when the center added the space shuttle.

“That’s when I became interested in satellites,” Barnhart told Army.mil reporter Kari Hawkins. “At that time, the Navy was in charge of all satellite programs. My father had been a Navy Seabee in World War II and my brother attended the Naval Academy. So, at the age of 27, I joined the Navy to work on satellites.”

Barnhart would serve 26 years in the military — achieving the rank of Navy captain and becoming one of the first 10 women certified to serve aboard Navy ships — before returning to the Space and Rocket Center in 1986 to serve as the director of Space Camp and Space Academy.

She went on to hold leadership roles in three major aerospace and defense companies including Honeywell International, United Technologies Aerospace and McDonnell Douglas. She also raised two children and earned graduate degrees from the University of Maryland and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a doctorate in strategy and supervision from Vanderbilt University.

Barnhart had retired from Honeywell and moved to Florida, where she did consulting and owned and managed two thoroughbred training centers, when she was recruited to take her fourth role at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center — this time as its CEO.

Since taking the position in 2010, Barnhart is credited with restoring the center’s financial health after it struggled for years with a staggering amount of debt racked up in the late 1990s.

Last year, the center saw an 11 percent increase in revenue and an 18 percent increase in camp revenue, as well as all-time record attendance, helping it maintain its spot as Alabama’s top attraction, according to a 2017 annual report.

“The Center is financially sound, engaged with our community, and focused on our mission of lighting the fires of imagination,” Barnhart wrote in the report.

Nearly 16 million people have toured the center since it opened in 1970. It is the largest spaceflight museum in the world.
Barnhart received NASA's Distinguished Public Service Medal, its highest non-government recognition, and last October she was inducted into the Alabama Academy of Honor, along with Gov. Kay Ivey and two other women (the first time a class of inductees has all been female).

Barnhart will again be honored with Gov. Ivey in an awards event March 29 in Birmingham. The Yellowhammer Women of Impact event will honor 20 women making an impact in Alabama and will benefit Big Oak Ranch.
Nursing Professor Helps Older Adults Stay Standing

By: Staff Editor

"Stay Standing" is the title of Dr. Amy Hunter’s most recent research study, and precisely what she wants geriatric patients to be able to do.

A clinical assistant professor of nursing at The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH), Dr. Hunter has been focused on improving the quality of care for older adults from the beginning of her academic career and now into her professional career. She earned both her bachelor’s degree and her doctorate of nursing practice from UAH’s College of Nursing, and now serves as a full-time faculty member and a part-time practitioner at the Center for Elder Care. In both capacities, she is working to ensure that older adults receive the best care possible and to inspire a passion for gerontology in her students.

"Our research team received a grant from Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing to study mobility, polypharmacy, and potentially inappropriate medicines," says Dr. Hunter. Older adults commonly take many medicines at once, a situation referred to as polypharmacy, and with each additional medication they take, the risk of PIMs rises. Inappropriate medications are detailed by the American Geriatric Society’s Beers Criteria, which provides medical professionals with information regarding medications that may not be necessary but that could cause serious side effects. "Research shows that a person over 65 who is on four or more medications and taking a specific class of medication deemed inappropriate can have cognitive impairment and mobility issues," she says, emphasizing that these problems are something physicians should seek to prevent.

The study, conducted with fellow nursing professors Dr. Karen Frith and Dr. Sharon Coffey, entailed comparing the outcomes of a group of older adults living within the general community to another receiving care at a gerontology practice. Both groups were given tests to determine their mobility, their awareness of medications, and their commitment to an exercise regimen. The patients were then retested at three-month intervals, allowing the researchers to make recommendations about possible PIMs. "We’d assess their medicines, and if they were on one that was inappropriate, we’d encourage them to ask their primary care physician about it," says Dr. Hunter.

As part of the study, Drs. Hunter, Frith, and Coffey also collaborated with two professors and a Ph.D. student from UAH’s Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering – Dr. Emil Jovanov, Dr. Aleksandar Milenkovic, and Ms. Priyanka Madhushri – to develop a smartphone application. The application not only measured three examinations of gait and balance with less human error in the timing and recording of gait-and-mobility tests, but it also anonymously cataloged the resulting data.

The researchers were able to conclude from the study that older patients who had participated showed improved strength and balance tests as compared to those who were seen at their primary care provider’s office; however, neither group had a significant decrease in the number of falls experienced in a year. In addition, patients in the study who were educated about PIMs scored higher on later medication tests, demonstrating that they had learned which medications to avoid.

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Because older adults are considered a vulnerable population, their care necessitates a specialized approach that allows a single physician – known as a gerontologist – to care for that patient rather than multiple potentially unconnected health-care providers. When an older adult has to cycle between different specialists "that is when you get a lot of medications," says Dr. Hunter, which increases the risk of PIMs. "The difference is we don’t just look at one thing. We use a holistic approach to develop the plan of care," she says. "Even if it’s not a geriatric specialist but a primary care provider who takes care of older adults, the benefits found in this study could be easily replicated using the procedures we implemented."

As an educator, Dr. Hunter is also working with her students to convince health-care providers and governmental agencies to take the wellbeing of older adults seriously. Last month, she and 100 of her gerontology students raised enough money to fund a trip to the Alabama State House in Montgomery – and make a donation to the National Alzheimer's Association – to ask lawmakers to support a Silver Alert bill that would work like an Amber Alert for missing individuals with cognitive impairment.

"Research shows that student perception of older adults and geriatrics is negative, but if we can bring things to life, like this trip, and do things to show them caring, giving back, that will change their perception," she says. "If my students take away one thing, I’d like to change their perception of older adults, to embrace it and have a positive mindset."

At present, Dr. Hunter is finalizing preparations for an early April guest lecture from Dr. Richard Ackermann, the director of Family Health Center’s Geriatrics and Hospice/Palliative Medicine Fellowship. His presentation, about the struggles of dementia, is being offered as part of UAH’s Distinguished Speaker Series, which seeks to enrich the academic environment at UAH while connecting the university to accomplished scholars around the world. "When I saw the opportunity to apply for the UAH grant for the series," she says, "I thought, this is how I can bring education and knowledge to the university and the community."
Storms Leave Trail of Damage

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STORMS

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lots of automobile dealerships were full of cars and trucks that no longer had windows. The sheriff shared a photo of a county jail bombarded by hail but said the prisoners were fine.

Schools were closed in several counties because of damage. Alabama Power Co. said more than 9,000 homes and businesses were without electricity.

Forecasters had warned that the storms would threaten more than 29 million people, raising the risk of powerful tornadoes, damaging winds and hail the size of tennis balls.

Cities in northern Alabama reported power outages and the National Weather Service in Huntsville reported at least three confirmed tornadoes in the area.

The National Weather Service said five teams were out in Alabama assessing storm damage.

The weather service was also sending survey crews to at least two Georgia communities to investigate whether tornadoes caused widespread damage to homes there.

In one neighborhood near Atlanta, "it looks like someone did a bomb run down the street," Georgia's insurance commissioner, Ralph Hudgens, said after touring the scene Tuesday. Multiple homes were destroyed in the subdivision southwest of Atlanta, he said.

"I talked to people who were in bed when it hit, and they huddled in the bathroom with the Bible, praying," Hudgens said.

"They put the Bible against the door and they put the children in the tub. They held hands and prayed and asked the Lord to protect them. Nothing happened to them but the house was totally destroyed."

More damage was reported in Haralson, Georgia, about 40 miles (64 kilometers) southwest of Atlanta. The Haralson County School District said schools would be closed Tuesday due to storm damage "throughout our community."

The same storm system that battered Alabama and Georgia was taking aim Tuesday at a large part of Florida and coastal communities in Georgia and the Carolinas.

Much of north Florida and the entire Georgia and South Carolina coasts would be at an "enhanced" risk for severe storms Tuesday, which could include damaging winds, large hail and a few tornadoes, the National Storm Prediction Center. A small part of the North Carolina coastline was also included in the area most likely to see severe weather.

The area most at risk for Tuesday's storms is heavily populated, with more than 10 million people and major Florida cities such as Jacksonville, Tampa and Orlando, Savannah, Georgia; and Charleston, South Carolina.

The Federal Aviation Administration placed a ground stop at Tampa International Airport for a time Tuesday afternoon because of storms sweeping the Southeast, prompting dozens of delays and cancellations. But by 3:45 p.m., flights again taking off. Meanwhile, the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, which spans Tampa Bay, had to be closed because of high winds, according to the Florida Highway Patrol.
Talladega College grad wins Harper Lee award

Poet Jeffers is Alabama's Distinguished Writer of the Year

Shelly Haskins
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Harper Lee will come up. Lee's 'To Kill a Mockingbird' is the perhaps the most famous literary work of any of the hundreds of accomplished Alabama writers.

When you mention writing and Alabama in the same sentence, it's likely that the name

So it's fitting that the state's premier writing award is called the Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer of the Year, and it is presented in Lee's hometown of Monroeville at the annual Alabama Writers Symposium, which is April 19 this year.
This year's winner is not a native of Alabama, but is a graduate of the University of Alabama's Master of Fine Arts Writing Program and a 1996 graduate of Talladega College. The award "is made to a living, nationally recognized Alabama writer who has made a significant life-long contribution to Alabama letters," according to the Alabama Writers Symposium.

Honoree Fanonne Jeffers, an internationally recognized poet, is a tenured full professor at the University of Oklahoma, where she has taught creative writing for 15 years.

"I am beyond thrilled and honored to receive this prestigious award," Jeffers said. "The people and rich culture of the state of Alabama are very beloved to me, and the work of the great Harper Lee has been so essential to my growth as a writer and human being."


Her work has also appeared in numerous journals including Ploughshares, Crab Orchard Review, Georgetown Review, Callaloo, Iowa Review, Oxford American, Prairie Schooner, and Poetry. She has had work included in anthologies edited by today's greatest poets: Kevin Smith, Cornelius Eady, Toi Derricote, and Nikki Finney.

Jeffers has published essays and short stories in Black Renaissance Noire, Callaloo, Common-Place:


Other career awards include the Emerging Fiction Fellowship from the Aspen Summer Words Conference, the Tennessee Williams Scholarship in Fiction from the Sewanee Writers Conference, and the Goodheart Prize for Fiction from Shenandoah: The Washington and Lee University Review. Jeffers has been awarded poetry fellowships from the American Antiquarian Society, the Bread Loaf Writers Conference, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rona Jaffe Foundation, the Vermont Studio Center, and the Witter Bynner Foundation through the Library of Congress.

"Honorée Jeffers is exactly the type of writer who deserves the Harper Lee Award. She is prolific, engaged in discourse on social justice, talented, and not nearly finished," said Dr. Jacqueline Allen Trimble, Chair of the Department of Languages and Literatures at Alabama State University. Noting Jeffers' strong ties to the state of Alabama through education and the context and subject matter of her poetry, as well as her breadth of talent in literary genres, Trimble said Jeffers "is interested in allowing those who have been voiceless to tell their stories as an integral part of American history."

Haskins writes about points of pride statewide. Email your suggestions to shaskins@al.com, or tweet them to @Shelly_Haskins using #AlabamaProud
Jones officially joins staff

Butch Jones is now officially a member of the Alabama staff.
The former Tennessee coach has joined the Crimson Tide in an off-field capacity, Nick Saban announced Tuesday night.
It was finalized earlier Tuesday.
"He's an intern, an analyst," Saban said.
"I guess we could have several names for it. He can't coach on the field. He can work with us off the field. And today was actually the first time he was cleared by the NCAA. We have these rules and I don't even know what they're called, like we can't hire high school coaches. We can't hire people that have recruited other players that we're recruiting and all that. You have to go through a process with the NCAA, and that finally got completed today."

It's the first job for Jones since Tennessee fired him in November. And he becomes the latest former head coach to join Alabama as an analyst, following in the footsteps of coaches like Lane Kiffin, Steve Sarkisian and Mike Locksley.
Dramatic WNIT win for Alabama

See next page
Yellow Jackets a three-point lead late in the final quarter.

But that wasn't the worst of Alabama's avoided troubles — the Crimson Tide trailed by 17 early in the second quarter.

Curry used 10 different players in the first 10 minutes, none of which provided the Crimson Tide the spark it needed on offense. The Crimson Tide shot just 20 percent in the first quarter, and suffered through a seven-minute scoring drought that overlapped into the second stanza.

"We needed Meo Knight on the floor because we knew we had a mismatch and we thought we could get her off the bounce and to the free-throw line; we were in the bonus," Curry said.

It took an old-fashioned 3-point play by Jordan Lewis to wake up UA's offense and set up an 11-0 run to get the Crimson Tide back in the game. Alabama then went on a 9-1 run to finish the half that knotted the score 29-29.

The free-throw line was Alabama's biggest help in surviving its offensive woes. UA made 11 of 13 shots from the charity stripe in the first half, while Georgia Tech made just 3 of 9.

"To convert was huge," Curry said. "That's kind of contagious. When we made those we've won these close games and when we've missed them we've lost these close games."

Curry's team had to find other ways to hang around in the second half.

The Yellow Jackets kept up their consistent scoring pace, forcing Alabama to use spurts to battle its way back from multiple possession deficits. Once Hannah Cook got her first basket of the game in the fourth quarter, Alabama's options opened up on offense.

Senior Ashley Williams finished with a team-high 15 points, Lewis scored 11, and Cook finished the final segment with 9 points on perfect shooting from the floor. The Crimson Tide finished without.

Next up for Alabama is a trip to Blacksburg, Virginia, against Virginia Tech in the WNIT quarterfinals on Sunday.
ALABAMA FOOTBALL

Lost in the hype

Mac Jones, the Tide's other quarterback, is 'going to surprise a lot of people'

A three-star recruit out of Florida, Mac Jones has gotten lost as the third man in Alabama's two-man quarterback battle. But teammates believe he has the tools to be successful. Yasha Hunt, yhunts@al.com

Michael Casagraande mcasagraande@al.com

Tua and Jalen.
Jalen and Tua.
The whole Alabama quarterback situation is a two-man race for good reason. Both Jalen Hurts and Tua Tagovailoa proved capable of leading the Crimson Tide offense at certain points last season.
The third, less-talked about scholarship quarterback suddenly has a more prominent role in Alabama's spring practice. With Tagovailoa limited for the time being with a hand injury, redshirt freshman Mac Jones will get a few extra snaps moving forward.
The Jacksonville, Florida, product hasn't performed in public since last season's A-Day game as an early enrollee. Since then, he's become a popular figure in the Alabama locker room known for his sense of humor.
Behind the walls protecting the Tide football facility, Jones is also showing progress as a passer entering his second season in Tuscaloosa.
"I think he gets lost in the Jalen and Tua hype, guys that have played this year," Alabama running back Damien Harris told AL.com before the Sugar Bowl. "But I don't know if people understand he's going to be a big-time playmaker someday. He has a strong arm. He has a great mind for the game and I think he'll really be successful one day once he gets his opportunity."

The 6-foot-2 quarterback came to Alabama as a three-star recruit from the Bolles School. Originally committed to Kentucky, Jones flipped to Alabama in the summer before his high school senior season.
Playing with the second-team offense in the 2017 spring game, Jones was 5-for-11 for 48 yards and two interceptions. Fellow rookie Kyriq McDonald picked off the second pass Jones threw, returning it nine yards inside the 20-yard line.
Hurts and Tagovailoa both put up big numbers in the public scrimmage typically known for the defense. The hype built around Tagovailoa's potential to push for playing time while Jones became the clear third option.
"Yeah, it's tough sometimes hearing a lot about them," Jones said in an interview with AL.com at the Sugar Bowl, "but like I said, we have a good room and those guys work hard and I work hard. So, we're all in it together."

Little more was said about Jones after the spring game. Nick Saban said Jones had a few opportunities in an Aug. 19 scrimmage "and didn't do a bad job."
He flew under the radar until his DUI arrest in November led to a one-game suspension. The whole experience was probably one of the best things that's happened to me," Jones said because of the connections he made doing community service with a local soup kitchen.

Harris, who jokingly claims to be Jones' "tater" on social media, said the young quarterback has a selfless mentality.

SEE ALABAMA, BS
That was clear in the December interview — unpublished until now — conducted before the playoff semifinal in New Orleans.

"I don't care who plays," Jones said. "I love being here and getting better and helping out the team in whatever role I can."

With an already thin depth chart, Alabama was in position to add another veteran quarterback over the summer. East Carolina graduate transfer Gardner Minshew was committed to the Tide until Tuesday when he flipped to a Washington State program that offered more opportunity for immediate playing time.

Having three scholarship quarterbacks on the roster is the bare minimum for Saban to feel comfortable in the situation. After not signing a passer for the first time in his Alabama tenure, Saban said they were pursuing a veteran transfer option.

A transfer or an injury away from being down to two quarterbacks is not where any program wants to be.

Still, Harris isn't worried about Jones' ability to step in if needed.

The quarterback nobody is talking about has a few qualities the top returning running back likes.

"His mind for the game," Harris said. "He understands defenses really well. He sees things on the field before they happen. I think he has a strong arm. Like I said, people don't think about him or talk about him much as a player but I think one day he's going to surprise a lot of people.

"And I think he'll have a great career once it finally takes off."

Michael Casagrande is an Alabama beat writer for the Alabama Media Group. Follow him on Twitter @ByCasagrande.
Saban offers praise for younger Crimson Tide coaching staff

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

Six new faces went through their first Alabama spring practice Tuesday afternoon and not one of them was a student-athlete. Six of the 10 Crimson Tide assistant coaches are new this year, leading one to wonder if the new coaches had to practice where to be and when to be there before the first day.

On offense, the new assistant coaches are Dan Enos, Josh Gattis and Jeff Banks. On defense, it’s Karl Scott, Pete Golding and Craig Kuligowski.

Asked about all the changes, UA coach Nick Saban said the changes were necessitated.

“I didn’t have a choice,” Saban said. “You make it sound like I did it on purpose.”

In an interview earlier this week with ESPN.com, Saban allowed that he did consciously choose younger coaches to fill out his staff. That part was on purpose. Early on, they’re fitting in and making their mark.

“I think they’re all working hard, and they’ve got a lot of

FOOTBALL

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energy, a lot of enthusiasm, a lot of new ideas,” Saban said. “You know, I’m excited about our staff. These guys have been great, they’re really aggressive recruiters, the players like them, I’m really excited about them. I really am.”

“Now there’s a lot of changes on our staff, I can’t deny that. You know we have a new defensive coordinator, we have a new offensive coordinator, we have a new special teams coordinator, we have six new faces around here, but they all seem to fit in and they’re all doing extremely well. I’m excited about them and I like every one of them and to be honest with you, we’re very, very fortunate and hit a home run with the guys we were able to hire.”

New spot or not?

One of the more noticeable things during the media viewing period of practice was the national championship game hero DeVonta Smith working with the cornerbacks. But don’t expect that move to stick.

Asked about it after practice Tuesday, Saban ridiculed the question.

“He could play corner, but that’s not our plan for him,” Saban said. “We don’t have enough guys in the secondary right now. We recruited some good players. Hopefully they’ll come along in the fall. They aren’t here in the spring; Savion (Smith) is the only guy who is here. We’ve done a lot of this kind of stuff. We taught Christian Jones to play defensive back.

“So what we do, in individual, when you are there — so I should probably change this and let him go with the receivers while (the media) are there and I’ll work with him when you’re not there and then I wouldn’t have to answer these kind of questions. But just to be totally transparent like I always am about everything that we do, he works individual with the corners. Then he plays receiver the rest of the practice.

“Now I’m sure you’re next question is is how many reps does he get, and who is he splitting time with and who is he competing with, and what team is he on, and where’s he at on the depth chart none of which we have an answer for. So I’ll just take the questions right out of your mouth.”

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
Bama puts finishing touches on 2019 schedule

It looks like Alabama’s 2019 football schedule is complete.

The addition of a Nov. 23 game with FCS school Western Carolina was first reported by FBSchedules.com on Monday. That would fill the slate of four non-SEC games for the season after next for Alabama.

The Crimson Tide already had dates set with Duke (in Atlanta on Labor Day weekend), New Mexico State (Sept. 7) and Southern Miss (Sept. 21). The SEC portion of the schedule will be filled in later in the year.

Adding Western Carolina fits the template of Alabama’s recent schedules. It’ll play a Power 5 team opening weekend, two Group of 6 teams in September and an FCS team the weekend before the Iron Bowl.

Alabama has beaten Western Carolina four times in the past two decades — 48-14 most recently in 2014.

The 2018 Alabama schedule includes The Citadel on Nov. 17 as the FCS opponent. The Tide also faces Louisville (in Orlando, Florida, on Sept. 1), Arkansas State (Sept. 8) and UL-Lafayette (Sept. 29).
Nick Saban's first news conference of the spring was heavy on the news, although most of the focus was on one digit on one player's hand.

Quarterback Tua Tagovailoa, the second-half hero of Alabama's College Football Playoff championship win against Georgia, hurt his thumb — Saban did not specify how, although quarterbacks can sometimes hit their hands on a teammate's helmet, among other possibilities.

In what the head coach termed as a “precautionary” move, Tagovailoa was sent to Birmingham, home of the Crimson Tide's orthopedic team headed by Dr. Lyle Cain. There was no immediate diagnosis other than Saban's comment that it would “probably take some time.” That might indicate a certain level of severity, or it might just mean Alabama isn’t playing LSU this Saturday, so there is no need to rush things along. On the other hand, it may mean missing all of spring training. There should be some word from doctors in the near future.

Aside from provoking a collective gasp from the Alabama fan base, there was also a palpable change in the questions about the quarterback race between Tagovailoa and Jalen Hurts, questions that have been debate fodder since last fall, not just January.

There was no need to ask who was getting more practice reps, after all, if Hurts was practicing and Tagovailoa was not. Still, Saban was ready to shoot down any sort of speculation, even if it turned out to be a preemptive strike in his part.

"I know that every time I stand up here, you all are going to try to make something out of it that it isn’t," Saban said, addressing the media from the podium but projecting his voice, perhaps, to the entire state. "It's two good players that both can contribute to our team and we are going to give them both an opportunity to do that. They've been great with each other, they've been great for each other. They've both shown leadership to our team. They're both important to our team.

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HURT

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"I know y'all want me to make something up that really isn't there so you can make a big deal out of this, but it's a competition just like it is at every other position."

Saban stopped after that, but not before giving the podium a sound drumming for a few seconds.

At some point, Tagovailoa will be back. He may return by the time Saban has his next Tuesday press conference, and if he comes back, so will the same questions. But Saban seemed to be giving a pretty clear indication that no matter how often he is asked, and how cleverly the questions are phrased, his patience will be short.

He rankled at another question later in the press conference regarding transfers, one that may have been a sort of stealth-bomber approach to the quarterback issue and the possibility that whoever isn't eventually named the starter might consider other options. If it wasn't mean that way, Saban took it that way nonetheless.

The fact is, there isn't going to be a definite answer from the top about any position battle, least of all at quarterback, even after A-Day is concluded. For the 12th consecutive spring, the press corps received an admonishment for asking about "a depth chart." (No one actually asked.)

The questions will continue, though, as will the vigil about the most talked-about thumb in Alabama since the Crimson Tide won its fifth national title under Saban — one for the thumb, you know — a couple of months ago.
Tide will be better without Sexton

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Collin Sexton's final action as a college basketball player was getting hit with a technical foul for taunting a superior opponent while trailing by 26 points.

Not exactly the last impression someone wants to make before turning pro, and probably not the type of image the University of Alabama wants to project to the rest of the country after making it back to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2012.

Classless.
Clueless.
Unacceptable.

So, Alabama's one-and-done point guard took a seat on the bench and watched the final few minutes of his brief college career from the sideline. Credit to Alabama coach Avery Johnson for at least getting that right on Saturday in Pittsburgh.

From the bench, Sexton got a good look at what it must feel like to watch Alabama pummel, say, Coastal Carolina inside Bryant-Denny Stadium on a Saturday in the fall.

Only worse.

SEE SEXTON, B5

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At least Nick Saban is nice enough not to run up the score on the sacrificial lambs of college football. Villanova isn't wiring $1.5 million into Alabama's bank account on Monday morning, either.

Back on the big stage of college basketball for the first time since 2012, Alabama started its second-round NCAA Tournament game against the best team in college basketball by missing the pregame national anthem. According to a team spokesman, the team was in the locker room changing into their uniforms, and didn't make it out to the court on time.

Huh?

There was nowhere to go but up from there, but things didn't get much better.

Alabama's defense was solid in the first half, but Villanova piled it on after the break and won 81-58. The Wildcats of Philadelphia, playing about five hours from home, made 17 3-pointers in a 40-minute game of basketball.

Fun team, that Villanova.

Guard Donte DiVincenzo, who is nicknamed the "Big Ragu" because "I'm Italian and have red hair," made five 3-pointers in the first half. Teammate Mikal Bridges then had 17 points in the first five minutes of the second half.

"Some nights we're going to have them," Villanova coach Jay Wright said of the 3-pointers, "and sometimes we're going to have to sleep in the streets."

Villanova will probably be partying in the streets in two weeks the way the Wildcats play team basketball. Wright has won at least 32 games in each of his last four seasons, which is a Division I record.

It certainly didn't help Alabama that 16-seed University of Maryland, Baltimore County defeated one-seed Virginia on Friday night before a noon game on Saturday against another top-seeded team. Villanova shot the ball like the Golden State Warriors, and Alabama was 4-for-16 from distance.

It wasn't completely useless, though, this St. Patrick's Day sobering of Alabama's young basketball team in the NCAA Tournament's Round of 32. There was a lot to be learned, and much to be remembered for
next season.
    One, Alabama should be better this time next year.
    Yes, Sexton will be gone, but that doesn’t seem like such a bad thing after watching him against a truly special team. Alabama wants to win a national championship in basketball. That doesn’t happen with a 6-foot-2 point guard who wants to play isolation basketball when things get tough.

    Sexton wouldn’t say definitively he was going pro after Alabama’s loss, but his body language screamed it at the end of regulation.
    Barring transfers, everyone else could return for Alabama, which likely would make it a Top 25 team to begin the season. Johnson has built a solid foundation in Tuscaloosa, and now it’s time to take the next step.
    “We’re not there yet,” Johnson said.
    Sexton made a name for himself in the SEC Tournament, where he helped Alabama receive an at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament, but Alabama should have won more than one NCAA Tournament game with him at point guard. Instead of peaking the end of the regular season, though, Alabama lost five games in a row.

If Alabama had won a few of those games, then it likely would have received a more favorable seed in the NCAA Tournament and avoided a team like Villanova until the second weekend.

    “By the time we got to the SEC Tournament, they were ready to trust our staff 100 percent,” Johnson said.
    That’s not good enough, and that can’t happen next season with the amount of talent Alabama is returning.
    And it won’t.
    Johnson is a good coach, who knows what he’s doing at Alabama despite all of the disorganization on Saturday. Herb Jones has the potential to be a special player if he works on his game, and John Petty should be more consistent next season with a year of experience to draw upon.

    “That’s a young team that’s going to be really good,” said Wright, Villanova’s coach. “I would not like to see them in next year’s Tournament. Avery did a great job getting a bunch of young guys here.”

Joseph Goodman is a columnist for Alabama Media Group. He’s on Twitter @JoeGoodmanJr.
CUSC, CBS reach 5-year deal

Conference USA has agreed to a new five-year contract that will make CBS Sports Network the primary television home for the league's football and men's basketball games.

C-USA announced the deal Wednesday. Financial terms were not disclosed. The contract begins next season and runs through the 2022-23 season.

"While exploring our options for future exposure, continuing our tremendous relationship with CBS Sports was a priority given our history," Conference USA Commissioner Judy MacLeod said in a statement. "We recognized this was an ideal opportunity to build on our existing partnerships with CBS and Stadium to stay on the forefront of broadcasting through both digital distribution and traditional means. We will continue pioneering fresh and innovative ways to deliver our diverse audience a multitude of viewing options on emerging platforms."

The new agreement expands the conference's partnership with Stadium, a digital sports network, and includes games produced by CBS Sports Network and Stadium to be shown exclusively on Facebook.

CBS Sports Network will broadcast nine C-USA football games and the conference championship.

Stadium will broadcast 15 football games and 17 men's basketball games next season, with seven of its football games and 10 basketball games streaming on Facebook. — Associated Press
Jalen or Tua? It's a good dilemma to be in for Tide
Saban recently said he would be agreeable to playing both quarterbacks if the situation presented itself. The quarterback competition will not be sorted out, at least not publicly, this spring. No, it will continue into fall practice before Saban makes his decision. And who knows, he may not make it public until the first game against Louisville.

**The backup**

Alabama didn't recruit a quarterback in its 2018 signing class, leaving redshirt freshman Mac Jones as the only other scholarship quarterback on the roster for the spring. Jones spent his first season on campus getting stronger in UA's strength and conditioning program. He did not play in 2017.

**Outlook**

The question will be asked — and likely more than once — and Saban will not give an answer to a question that doesn't yet need to be answered. The fans have expressed their support and appreciation for Tagovailoa. But Saban isn't the type to turn his back on Hurts. He will give the junior-to-be every opportunity to compete to keep his starting job. Spring won't reveal much to the public until the A-Day spring game and even then the offense is watered down. Given his ability to throw the football, it's going to be tough to keep Tagovailoa off the field, but Hurts isn't afraid of competition.