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ONE VIEW ON ETHICS

If this comes to pass, Ala. retreats from war on corruption

John Archibald
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I'm hard on Alabama's public officials. But not hard enough.

I mean, Luther Strange was more of a stand-up guy than this. And he became a punchline.

Robert Bentley was more honest about his intentions. And he turned out to be a two-timing fraud.

What's going on in Montgometry now is worse. Because it's not just about a couple of saps. It's an orchestrated disaster, a not-so-subtle push by business tycoons who want to keep buying politicians and buy politicians who want to stay bought — to implode Alabama's so-called "toughest in the nation" ethics law.

In the holy name of "economic development."

While trying to tell you how tough and ethical they are.

Believe it, like you believed Strange when he said Donald Trump was his best friend. Believe it, like you believed Bentley when he said he had no physical relationship with Rebekah Mason.

Believe. Suckers.

But it's a scam. A sham. You could see it last week when Senate President Pro Tem (and Mike Hubbard crony) Del Marsh stood with Attorney General (and Robert Bentley appointee) Steve Marshall and imploded the threat of a tough ethics bill this year. They agreed, in sober tones, that ethical behavior by public officials is an imperative and a priority and blah, blah, blah. It's so important that it has to wait until 2019, they said.

Until after the election.
Until the damage is done.
The ethics law is not supposed to be tough. Not this year. Not ever.

Marsh and Marshall, and others, backed a resolution to create an "ethics reform and clarification commission" to ponder changes.

They stocked it with enough lawmakers to form a basketball team, but no one from the AG's special prosecutions division, which has done Alabama's only corruption work in years.

Matt Hart's not on it. Nor Mike Duffy or any of the men and women who actually make a career of holding public officials accountable.

They want us to take this seriously? Seriously?

Then on Tuesday — less than a week after Marsh and Marshall (it's time to drain the Montgomery marshes) vowed there'd be no talk of ethics laws until 2019 — the Alabama House passed HB317, a bill backed by Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield that would redefine the whole definition of lobbying to exclude economic developers. Sponsor Rep. Ken Johnson uttered the magic words — jobs, jobs, jobs — and the legislators fell in line.

Companies are scared to come to Alabama because they don't want to have to register as lobbyists, he lied. He could point to no examples.

It passed overwhelmingly. Even though Van Davis, the man who oversaw the prosecution of Hubbard, said it would roll back the ethics law and make that kind of prosecution difficult.

It doesn't take a genius to see what's going on. You just have to look.

Look at the Hubbard trial, at the emails showing how the convicted speaker of the house begged former Gov. Bob Riley for a job.
When he learned it would be illegal for him to work for a lobbyist, he urged Riley to de-register as a lobbyist to get around the law.
Which is the same thing that's happening here.

You don't have to be brilliant to see the links. One of the charges against Hubbard was lobbying the executive branch — Canfield himself.

Another charge involved an adviser at Harbert Management. But then, Harbert's CEO last month contributed $50,000 to Marshall's campaign.
This is not about jobs. It's about ending corruption by simply refusing to look for it.

Paul Beckman, a Republican and momentary voice of reason from Prattville, called it right Tuesday. He said Republicans took power in 2010 to clean up corruption, and now they are changing the law that brought them. "This is the ethics law," he said: "We're going to call an apple an orange."

That's right.

Archibald writes a regular opinion column for AL.com.
Duplicity and deception knit together to make a loophole

Kyle Whitmire
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State Rep. Chris England doesn't belong in the Alabama Legislature, and when you hear him speak at the Alabama House podium, you quickly understand why.

He's smart. He's honest. He's plainspoken. In short, he doesn't fit in there.

Consider the debate Tuesday over a bill traveling under the banner of economic development — House Bill 317. Ostensibly the bill would make Alabama more competitive with other states when recruiting business, but threaded though it is something more sinister — it creates a huge new loophole in state ethics laws. Specifically, it frees people who call themselves "economic developers" from the reporting requirements imposed on lobbyists.

"What does an economic developer do?" he asked. The bill's sponsor, Ken Johnson, R-Moulton, couldn't reply with a good answer, so England gave one for him.

"Don't they lobby?"

And it's really that simple. While "economic development" can mean whatever the business interests behind want it to, the economic developers you see walking the halls of the Alabama State House, or holding meetings with the governor or other state agency leaders — they come with their hands out. They come to Montgomery to ask for tax incentives and property, or maybe even cash.

That's money that comes out of your pocket as a taxpayer. And they don't ask for those things out of some sort of civic duty or calling. They have their hands out because someone is paying them to do so.


More than once, Johnson said on the House floor that his bill does not affect the ethics law, but that just isn't true.

"Notwithstanding any provision of law, including, but not limited to, Chapter 25 of Title 36, a person acting as an economic development professional is not a lobbyist," it says. That Chapter 25 of Title 36 — that's Alabama's ethics law.

And by changing the definition of lobbyist, it means that people calling themselves "economic development professionals" won't have to register with the Alabama Ethics Commission before they go beg your elected officials for favors.

And it means that if they ply your elected officials with free food and drinks and trips and whatever else their employers' expense accounts will cover, they won't have to report any of that spending to the ethics panel, as lobbyists must. Most importantly, it means that, under Alabama's ethics laws, those things won't be crimes.

"I think it's a bad bill that weakens the ethics laws considerably," Tom Albritton, director of the state ethics panel, said Wednesday. "Simply saying that anyone involved in economic development isn't a lobbyist approaches the issue from the wrong direction. The better solution, in my view, is to recognize that they are lobbying, but then protect project-sensitive information from public disclosure. We offered that solution, but it was rejected."

Van Davis, who as acting attorney general successfully prosecuted former Alabama House Speaker Mike Hubbard has said, the bill would weaken the very ethics laws his team used to convict Hubbard.

"These people elected to office — not just legislators — should take office for the right reasons, to represent their community and constituency," Davis told John Archibald recently when talking about HB317. "They want to parlay it into a way to make money."

However, I have one quibble with Davis's argument. These public officials don't want to make money. They want to take money.

They want to take money from special interests. Special interests who take money from your government. Your government that takes money from you.

Which is why HB317 passed on Tuesday and now heads to the Alabama Senate, from where it will likely go to Gov. Kay Ivey, whose office has been pressuring reluctant lawmakers to support it. In the end, those few exceptions — the Chris Englands — they get crowded out by the guys with their hands out.

But on second thought, I was wrong about one thing I said. England isn't the one who doesn't belong in the Alabama Legislature. It's all the others who need to go.

Whitmire writes an opinion column on state politics for AL.com.
STATEWIDE

Huntsville, Birmingham named tech hubs

Alabama is home to two cities that made Livability's list of five up-and-coming tech hubs.

Livability maintains an online presence for researching communities, and monthly and annual lists of cities, defining the best places to live in America. Among tech hubs, it went looking for communities that are affordable and inclusive enough for entrepreneurs to find a good starting place.

Checking in at No. 2 on the list are Huntsville and Birmingham.

It notes that Huntsville has been investing in a tech economy since the 1950s due to its association with NASA.

"The city has built on its legacy as it moved into the 21st century with concerted efforts to help start-ups flourish with helpful resources like The Foundry, an incubator in downtown Huntsville," Livability wrote. "In 2017, Huntsville was named the number one fastest-growing tech city by ZipRecruiter and currently has the third most technical workforce in the country, according to Bloomberg."

Moving on to the Magic City, Livability says Birmingham has gained a lot of attention through the work of Velocity Accelerator and the Innovation Depot, and the growth of grocery delivery service Shipt and Daxko, software for health and wellness organizations.

Placing ahead of Alabama on the list were Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska. Also making it were Ames and Des Moines, Iowa, Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, N.C., and Kansas City and St. Louis, Missouri.

—William Thornton
Mazda, Toyota establish joint venture company for Huntsville plant

By: William Thornton

In the next step toward their Huntsville venture, Mazda Motor Corp. and Toyota Motor Corp. have announced the establishment of a joint-venture company.

Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA, Inc., or (MTMUS), says the full-scale construction of its $1.6 billion Huntsville plant will begin in 2019. When fully operational in 2021, the plant is expected to employ 4,000 people.

Both Mazda and Toyota will have a 50 percent stake in the company, with Mazda Executive Officer Masashi Aihara serving as president and Hironori Kagohashi, executive general manager of Toyota, serving as executive vice president.

"We hope to make MTMUS a plant that will hold a special place in the heart of the local community for many, many years," Aihara said in a statement. "By combining the best of our technologies and corporate cultures, Mazda and Toyota will not only produce high-quality cars but also create a plant employees will be proud to work at and contribute to the further development of the local economy and the automotive industry."

"We hope that cars made at the new plant will enrich the lives of their owners and become much more than just a means of transportation," he said.

Kagohashi said the new plant will be Toyota's 11th U.S. factory.

"We are committed to realizing a highly competitive plant and producing vehicles with the best quality for customers by combining Toyota and Mazda's manufacturing expertise and leveraging the joint venture's synergies. Based on this competitiveness, we will make every effort to becoming a best-in-town plant that will be loved by our hometown," he said.

Both Mazda and Toyota plan to produce up to 150,000 vehicles each at the plant annually. Toyota plans to make Corollas, while Mazda still has yet to unveil a crossover for the North American market.

In collaboration with the state of Alabama and the city of Huntsville, MTMUS will soon begin land preparation for the new plant.
Alabama Department of Education planning top personnel cuts

By: Trisha Powell Crain

Changes are coming for 31 high-ranking Alabama department of education employees, state interim Superintendent Dr. Ed Richardson told board of education members at Thursday's work session in Montgomery.

Richardson said reducing the number of those employees, known as "exempt" or "at-will" employees, is necessary as the department has been criticized by lawmakers and others for bureaucratic bloat, and he is prepared to do what it takes to get the number of at-will employees to a reasonable number.

"I cannot solve the issue of titles, positions, salaries without making some hard decisions," Richardson said. "And I intend to do it."

Richardson said state lawmakers were preparing to cut the department's budget because of what they saw as unnecessary spending on high-ranking personnel. Those cuts could have negatively impacted statewide instructional programs, he said.

Richardson and others started work on the reorganization since last October. A consultant hired by the Alabama Personnel Department conducted a study to look at job tasks, titles, and salaries, he said.

Along with cutting top employees, the areas within the department will be realigned, he said.

The overall goal, Richardson said, "Is to organize this department so that it has fewer moving parts and will be able to function better, communicate better and more efficiently," he said.

To right the ship, Richardson first recommended board members rescind a 2015 resolution giving the state superintendent full authority to hire at-will employees. Richardson said the resolution violates state law which requires the board to approve all hires by the state superintendent.

The board adopted that resolution at former Superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice's recommendation, Richardson said, and that's where the problem started.

That resolution gave Bice and all future superintendents the ability to hire people as deputy superintendent, assistant superintendent, directors, and coordinators without board approval.

"It left the door wide open both in terms of number and salary of individuals [who were hired]," Richardson said.

A document obtained by AL.com last September showed 37 at-will employees working under Sentance, while there had been 41 under Bice. AL.com has not yet received a response to a request for an updated list.
Richardson pointed out that not only does the law require board approval for the initial hire of at-will employees, it also states that employment of at-will employees ends when the superintendent leaves office.

That part of the law has not been observed in the past, he said, but needs to be considered as a new superintendent will be seated by April.

The current organizational chart has the department divided into four major divisions, with a Deputy Superintendent heading each area. The proposed chart divides the department into two divisions, instruction and administration, and reduces the number of Deputy Superintendents to two.

Richardson said he will meet with all at-will employees as a group tomorrow to discuss the reorganization and then he "will meet individually with the 31 individuals to explain what the options are."

"It has to be done now," Richardson said. "That way the next superintendent doesn't have to do this."
Alabama ranks third in auto exports in the U.S.

By: William Thornton

Alabama is the third largest exporter of automobiles in the United States.

The state ranks behind perennial auto power Michigan and South Carolina. In all, Alabama produced $7.75 billion in motor vehicles destined for markets in 88 countries.

The state exported $21.7 billion in goods in 2017, 6 percent higher than its 2016 tally of $20.5 billion. Its vehicle exports are up more than 11 percent over the last two years.

China was the biggest market in 2017, with more than $2.2 billion in vehicles. That was ahead of Germany, with $2 billion, and Canada, just slightly under $2 billion.

Rounding out the top 10 were Mexico, Belgium, South Korea, Australia, the United Arab Emirates, India and South Africa.

Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield said Alabama's "skilled auto workers continue to deliver" what customers around the globe are looking for.

"The success of Alabama exports, and particularly automotive exports, helps create jobs and transform communities here at home," he said.

Alabama's biggest vehicle exporter, and largest exporter overall, is Mercedes-Benz in Tuscaloosa County. MBUSI is responsible for about $5 billion in annual exports. The majority of the plant's annual output is designated for international sales, a fact borne out by the company's decision last year to locate a global logistic hub in nearby Bibb County.

The logistics hub, which broke ground last year, will cover 800,000-square-feet and supply overseas assembly plants with car kits - basically everything to assemble a vehicle. It is expected to open in 2019. The kits will be largely for local markets in Asia.

Honda in Talladega County's Lincoln ships about 8 to 10 percent of its vehicles globally, while Hyundai in Montgomery exports about 5 percent of its output, mostly to Canada.

Hilda Lockhart, director of Commerce's Office of International Trade, said the growth of the Chinese market shows how that country's middle class is growing as its GDP is rising. Down, though, is the UK market, possibly as a consequence of Brexit. Africa is also on the move, as the market has a growing population with many relocating to cities.

"The main transportation is vehicles via the roads," Lockhart said. "If the trend continues, Africa is an emerging market and is home to some of the top fastest-growing economies in the world."
State ranks third among US auto exporters

By: Ken Roberts

Alabama is the No. 3 auto exporter in the U.S., according to a survey by the Alabama Department of Commerce, with the Mercedes-Benz U.S. International in Tuscaloosa County leading the way.

The state’s automobile exports totaled $7.75 billion in 2017, trailing only Michigan and South Carolina. Mercedes-Benz is Alabama’s top auto exporter, responsible for around $5 billion in vehicle shipments annually. The Vance plant produces luxury SUVs and cars that are sold in every corner of the world.

“Customers around the globe continue to seek the high-quality, high-performance products of Alabama’s auto industry, and our skilled auto workers continue to deliver what they’re looking for,” said Greg Canfield, secretary of the Alabama Department of Commerce, in a news release. “The success of Alabama exports, and particularly automotive exports, helps create jobs and transform communities here at home.”

The survey also notes that MBSUI is the state’s biggest exporter overall. Automotive exports played a key role in Alabama reaching a record $21.7 billion in exports during 2017, along with aircraft components, chemicals, paper and minerals. Alabama exports have climbed 50 percent in the past decade, according to the survey.

MBUSI opened Alabama’s first automobile production plant in 1997 in Tuscaloosa County. Since then, Honda has opened a plant in Talladega County and Hyundai has a plant in Montgomery County, while Toyota and Mazda have plans to open a Huntsville plant in 2021.

Honda Manufacturing of Alabama’s Talladega County operation exports about 8 to 10 percent of its annual output of SUVs, minivans and pickups. Exports of its products are limited because the plant only produces left-hand-drive vehicles, and some models are too large for countries with high fuel costs and narrow streets and roads. The most popular markets for Honda’s Alabama products are Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, South Korea and the Middle East.

Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama exported about 5 percent of its Montgomery-built SUVs and sedans last year. The vast majority of the vehicles were sent to Canada, but a small amount went to Puerto Rico and El Salvador.

In 2017, Alabama-made vehicles were shipped to six continents. China was the No. 1 market, with more than $2.2 billion in state-built vehicle exports last year, a 10 percent increase from 2016.
Director of Commerce’s Office of International Trade Hilda Lockhart said, “China is still seen as a good growth market for vehicles. Their GDP continues to grow, and the middle class income level is increasing – thus buying cars.”

China was followed on the list of top importers of Alabama-made vehicles by Germany, Canada, Mexico, Belgium, South Korea, Australia, United Arab Emirates, India, South Africa, Chile and Saudi Arabia.

Elsewhere, vehicle exports to the United Kingdom decreased, a trend that experts say could be connected to political and economic uncertainty related to Brexit.

“As for Africa, this market continues to have a growing population and a lot of the people are moving to the cities. The main transportation is vehicles via the roads,” Lockhart said. “If the trend continues, Africa is an emerging market and is home to some of the top fastest-growing economies in the world.”
The EF Hutton of Alabama politics

As the June primaries for our statewide races get closer, there is a lot of media attention on the power being wielded by special interests, PACs and big money. They focus on the large amount of cash and influence being bet on the horses for governor and the Legislature.

The Business Council of Alabama and the Alabama Farmers Federation are preparing to protect their friends and allies and punish their enemies. These two powerful and money-laden special interests will be players in the 2018 horse races. Surprisingly, these two pro-business organizations are not riding the same horses in a good many races, especially statewide.

Quietly behind the scenes is another power in Alabama politics, Milton McGregor. You can bet he is playing ball. McGregor’s influence is felt in decision-making races throughout the state, from governor to every legislative race. McGregor is the EF Hutton of Alabama politics. When he speaks, people listen, and more importantly, when he speaks, politicians listen. He also transcends party. He supports people who are his friends, regardless of political party.

He epitomizes the golden rule of politics. He is loyal to his friends. In a day when some people’s word is no good, McGregor’s is solid as a rock. In politics and business your word is your bond, and that is why McGregor is revered and respected by the majority of Alabama’s political folks.

If McGregor tells someone he is their friend and will support them, they know they can take it to the bank. There is a political maxim used by longtime political veterans who have been in the Legislature for years and have fought major battles over controversial issues -- the type of battles where you have to get a good toehold and stake out your position and stay put. Thus, the saying is analogous to being in a monumental battle where you get into a foxhole to survive. Therefore, if a politician says about another that he is someone I would want in my foxhole in a war they are talking about someone they would trust with their life.

That saying has been used to describe McGregor on more than one occasion.

Most people assume that Milton McGregor’s only interest is gaming. However, he is invested in the nursing home industry, the real estate business and farming. He has been successful in each of these endeavors.

McGregor grew up in the Wiregrass. His family was very politically connected, so he got his love for politics honestly. McGregor idolized his older brother, Tom, who was a political icon in the Wiregrass. Tom McGregor was instrumental in electing the legendary George Andrews to Congress. In fact, Tom McGregor got Andrews elected to Congress while he was still overseas in the Navy. Andrews was elected to Congress in the 1940s and served in Congress more than 20 years, became a power and is the reason Fort Rucker is located in Ozark/Enterprise. The elder McGregor was Andrews’

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right-hand man for more than 20 years.
Milton McGregor loves politics, but he loves his wife of over 50 years, Pat, more than life. He is considered one of the most loyal family men in the state. Unlike many of his so-called religious and pious detractors, there has never been a hint of personal scandal around Milton McGregor.

His generosity is unlimited. There are stories about his allowing politicians to ride in his luxury airplanes, and they have. The truth is he is doing it more out of friendship rather than for personal gain or favoritism. There are 10 times more occasions where he has given free use of his planes with his pilots to shuttle an indigent cancer patient to a hospital.

Milton reached the point financially, long ago, where he does not need any more money. He plays politics for the love of it. He has given more than $300 million to charities over the years. That is $300 million more than the Indian casinos have given Alabamians.

My mama always said that you can tell who a real gentleman is by the way he treats the person less fortunate. Milton McGregor epitomizes this quality. He treats the lowest janitor in his racetracks with the same sincerity, warmness and dignity that he does to the wealthiest people in America, whom he rubs shoulders with every day.

*Steve Flowers served 16 years in the Alabama Legislature. Readers can email him at www.steveflowers.us.*
MEDIA

Tide sports leaving WJOX

Alabama athletics will have a new radio home in Birmingham beginning this fall.
No longer will the Crimson Tide be heard on WJOX as the school's multimedia rights holder signed a five-year deal with SummitMedia. That means coverage is moving to their portfolio of stations.
The Crimson Tide Sports Network broadcasts of Alabama football games will be heard live on 106.9-FM. It will also carry Nick Saban's weekly radio show, pregame and postgame shows. Alabama men's basketball will air on 97.3-FM while women's basketball and baseball games will move to 1320-AM and 100.1-FM.
The network, operated by Learfield Sports, has 80 radio affiliates across six states. It currently airs on WJOX, 94.5-FM and 690-AM in Birmingham. The switch does not take effect until the fall.
UAPD officer named Officer of the Year for actions

By Niles Bernabe | Contributing Writer

UAPD officer Brad Thomas has been recognized as the Exchange Club of Tuscaloosa’s Officer of the Year for UAPD for his service and actions during a shooting in front of Rounders on the Strip.

Last October, a shot rang out outside of Rounders on the Strip. The 28-year-old victim was shot in the lower back and the suspects fled the scene in a car.

Thomas was several blocks from the scene working a traffic incident when he saw the suspects’ vehicle heading toward his direction. Thomas pulled his car across University Blvd. to stop the suspects’ vehicle. He then held the suspects at gunpoint until additional units arrived to assist in taking them into custody.

“It was an honor to be recognized by my department and my peers for doing a good job,” Thomas said. “It’s humbling to know someone recognized that what you did was good.”

UAPD Chief John Hooks said in an interview with UA News that Thomas’ actions earned him the award.

“I can’t tell you how proud I am of Officer Thomas,” said Hooks. “His actions exemplify what it means to be a police officer at The University of Alabama ... he remained conscious of the safety of those around him throughout this highly dangerous and stressful encounter. His quick and thoughtful actions leading to the subsequent apprehension of the suspect cannot be understated.”

The Exchange Club of Tuscaloosa is a service organization that supports youth and community service programs as well as charitable organizations. Ken Swindle from the Exchange Club has been running the annual award program since the late 80s.

“Once a year, we honor the five top law enforcement agencies in Tuscaloosa County: Tuscaloosa Police Department, Tuscaloosa Sheriff’s Office, University of Alabama Police Department, Northport Police Department, and the Alabama State Troopers,” Swindle said. “We let them submit to us a recommendation, and we take that person and we give them an award as top law enforcement for that agency.”

It was an honor to be recognized by my department and my peers for doing a good job.

- Brad Thomas

The award ceremony, which Thomas could not attend, was held to celebrate the service of outstanding law enforcement officers in the community.

“We want to say thank you for all that they do. We invite their families in with the recipient and let them be there with them when they receive the award to let them know how much we appreciate what they do for the community day in and day out.”

Swindle said the event celebrated Thomas’ courage while facing multiple suspects who were known to be armed. Many of his peers and community officials were invited to recognize his composure during the incident.

“We usually have about 125 to 150 plus members come in to Indian Hills country club,” Swindle said. “We also have a guest speaker, this year we had the Attorney General Steve Marshall. We always try to get someone related to law enforcement to honor them and say how well they’ve done and how much it means to have law enforcement out there every year.”

Thomas has been in law enforcement for about 15 years, spending eight and a half years with the Tuscaloosa Police Department starting in 2003. During his time with the TPD, Thomas served as a field training officer, an investigator for the juvenile division, a sniper for the SWAT team and worked on the Major Crimes scene response unit.

In 2012, Thomas decided to transfer to UAPD where he currently works as a patrol officer.

BRAD THOMAS: BY THE NUMBERS

- 14 total years in law enforcement
- Six years at UAPD
- Eight and a half years at TPD
- SWAT team at TPD for four and a half years
- Responded to shooting call on Oct. 15, 2017

Info courtesy of UA News press release
Study highlights need for workforce training

Alabama business leaders say it’s top issue facing state

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Workforce training is the top issue facing the state and its industries, according to a survey of business executives by the University of Alabama’s Center for Business and Economic Research.

“If you look at that survey that CBER did, it pretty much lines up with what is going on across the country. There is a disconnect between education system and needs of employers,” said Donny Jones, executive director of West Alabama Works.

In November 2017, about 80 business executives participated in the survey created by the center housed in UA’s business college. The survey of business leaders on issues facing the state and businesses has been conducted since 2013 among panelists on the Alabama Business Confidence Index.

The top five issues facing the state include:
* Education/workforce training
* Infrastructure improvement
  * Economic and business development
  * Dissatisfaction with government
  * Job growth

Education and workforce training remained atop the list, though infrastructure improvement moved up in the rankings from previous years.

“Five to 10 years ago, the keys for growing our industry base were do you have infrastructure, do you have spec buildings, a site, and what are your incentives? Now, the key, No. 1 driver for all economic development is workforce development,” Jones said.

Workforce also tops the list of issues facing companies, which also includes government regulation and taxes, the economy in general and company finances and development.

“Business leaders expressed concern in their comments over the lack of skilled and educated workers,” said Viktoria Rankin, socioecononic analyst at UA’s Center for Business and Economic Research, in a statement released by the center.

Workforce development moved to the top of the list in the latest survey of issues facing companies, up from third in 2016.

“Obviously, that is a major, major issue for us,” said Jim Page, president of the West Alabama chamber.

West Alabama Works, a partnership between the state’s Region 3 Workforce Development Council and the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama, is focused on workforce development, Jones said.

“Essential skills, workforce training, preparedness, all of those are key issues that our industries are having. We have been working on this issue for the last couple of years and have pipeline strategy,” Jones said.

West Alabama Works recently launched a workforce initiative in conjunction with

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the state community college system to help develop employees for major industries in West Alabama. West Alabama Works' two-year initiative will teach basic workplace skills for ready-to-work programs at two-year colleges in region, Jones said.

Jones estimated the region has more than 4,000 jobs available in the automotive sector and more than 2,000 jobs in healthcare and manufacturing.

"The key needs ... 70-75 percent of all those jobs are entry level jobs that can be obtained by a short-term certificate that can be obtained in anywhere from five to eight weeks," Jones said. "All of these jobs we have available right now are available to individuals that go through those (basic workplace skills) courses."

The business leader's confidence in the state and national economies remains high for the first quarter of 2018, based on the most recent Alabama Confidence Index published by the center. The state index was 63.1 percent, up 4.4 points from the last quarter of 2017. The national index was 66.8 percent. Businesses expect growth in sales, profits, and hiring in the first quarter.

"I have had several conversations in the past couple of weeks that are very positive about what is taking place (in the economy). The outlook is very good with steel industry, automotive industry and production and manufacturing," Jones said.
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Nick Saban, Crimson Tide football players get to work building Habitat for Humanity house

ONLINE

www.ledesports.com
See Built '98

PLANNED - Although work
was made almost seven years
ago, the Sabans have yet to
begin building. Habitat for
Humanity board member and
Saban work coach Nick
Saban players and
toadball players are
invited to join the
Saban work and
construction site
on a weekend.

IT'S A DAY of
service for the
Saban family,
and it's about
helping others.

"To me, "Habitat is the
good work,"" said
Terry. "It's a
day of service, a
day of helping others, a
day of giving back.
"

Nick Saban is in the
model for other young people to come
forward. Through Habitat, we can give
back and help others."

Heard coach Nick Saban is in the
model for the community and a role
earby. It's not just the Sabans;
we're all about giving back.

"The Sabans have
been here for
years," Terry said. "They've been
involved in Habitat for
Humanity for a long
while."

Habitat for
Humanity

Terry said,
"This is the
best day of
the week.
"

"So proud of our players for
taking a day off to
help build a
home for
someone
else."

Join Huts

and help Huts at the
Habitat for
Humanity site.

Special to The Tuscaloosa News

By Terrin Wade

Sunday, March 4, 2018
Four weeks from the day the foundation was laid, the house had risen to the rough floor plate. It was still in the early stages of construction, but it was a visible sign of progress. The walls were up, and the windows were being installed. The roof was still under construction, but it was clear that the house would be complete soon.

The owners were delighted with the progress. They had been planning this house for years, and now they could see it taking shape. They had chosen a modern design, with clean lines and a lot of natural light. The materials were high quality, and the craftsmanship was excellent.

The construction crew worked long hours, and the owners often visited the site to see the progress. They were excited to see the house taking shape, and they couldn't wait to move in.

As the construction continued, the owners made a few changes to the plans. They wanted a few extra features added, and the contractor was happy to accommodate them. The house was coming along beautifully, and the owners were thrilled with the result.

It was evident that a lot of hard work had gone into the construction of this house. The owners had chosen a reputable contractor, and they were sure that the end result would be worth the effort. They couldn't wait to move in and start creating memories in their new home.
Charge Against Humphrey Dropped
that the Uber driver was the aggressor and escalated a situation that could have been resolved without wasting the time and resources of our local law enforcement. Marlon can now continue on the path of success in the NFL. As I stated in the beginning, Marlon has 11 million reasons why not to steal a $3 phone charger.” Humphrey, a former Alabama football player, is a cornerback with the NFL’s Baltimore Ravens. The son of former Alabama player and NFL running back Bobby Humphrey signed a four-year contract worth $11,847,480 with the Ravens on May 4, 2017, that included a $6,756,348 signing bonus.

The dispute with the Uber driver occurred during the early morning hours of Jan. 13 after driver Patton dropped off Humphrey, 21, and a woman at the hotel on Bryant Drive. The UAPD investigator said Patton called police between 10 and 15 times during the hours after the incident, saying he wanted to press charges. He ultimately spoke to a magistrate and had a warrant issued for Humphrey’s arrest on a felony third-degree robbery charge. “He seemed to become more alarmed as the incident unfolded,” UAPD Investigator Hunter Christian testified during the preliminary hearing Thursday. “He was very anxious to move forward with this.” The witness, 21, testified that the driver became angry when Humphrey exited the car, saying he had damaged a speaker and wanted him to pay $200 for it. “Marlon put his arm up in, what I would say, self-defense,” she said. “I honestly thought the Uber driver was going to punch Marlon.”

Humphrey will be refunded the $2,500 bond he paid after his arrest on Jan. 25.
Whistleblower awarded $14.7M in organ center probe

BIRMINGHAM

Friday, March 9, 2018
Long-running stroke study gets $20M grant

William Thornton
wthornton@al.com

The National Institutes of Health is giving a long-running UAB study another infusion of grant money as it looks into high incidences of strokes in the South and among African-Americans.

UAB’s Regions for Geographic and Racial Differences in Stroke study will receive $20.4 million in grant funds through 2023. The money comes through the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.

The study, based in UAB’s School of Public Health, has received almost $100 million in grant funding over the past 15 years. It also includes collaborators from the universities of Vermont and Cincinnati, and Indiana, Drexel and Columbia universities.

More than 30,000 people have participated in the study. Researchers initially assessed stroke risks in 30,329 people, ages 45 and older, between 2003 and 2007.

They recently finished visiting more than half of the patients for second in-person assessments and follow-up exams.

Some of the study participants have participated going back 14 years, according to the university.

Lead study principal investigator George Howard, UAB professor of biostatistics, said the stroke mortality rate between the ages of 45 and 65 is 200 percent to 300 percent higher for African-Americans.

Howard says 11 percent of deaths from strokes in white people happen before age 65, but that same number rises to 28 percent in African-Americans.

In 2013, experts found that living in the “Stroke Belt” states of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee early in life increases the risk of stroke.
UAB stroke study receives $20M grant

The Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM — The University of Alabama at Birmingham’s stroke study received a $20 million grant to help look into strokes in the South and among African-Americans.

UAB’s Regions for Geographic and Racial Differences in Stroke will receive funds through 2023, AL.com reported. The study has gotten almost $100 million in grant funding in the past 15 years.

More than 30,000 people have participated in the REGARDS study. The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke is funding the grant.

University officials say study participants have taken part in the program for 14 years.

The study is based in UAB’s School of Public Health. It includes collaborators from the University of Vermont, University of Cincinnati, Indiana University, Drexel University and Columbia University.

UAB professor of biostatistics George Howard said the stroke mortality rate between the ages of 45 and 65 is 200 to 300 percent higher for African-Americans. He also said 11 percent of deaths from strokes in white people happen before age 65, but the number rises to 28 percent for African-Americans.

Experts found that living in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee early in life increases the risk of stroke, the newspaper reported.
New study says long audit tenure slows corrections

By: Tammy Whitehouse

Recently published academic research suggests there is indeed a detriment to audit quality when audit firms hold long tenures on audit engagements.

“We find that longer audit firm tenure leads to less timely discovery and correction of misstatements, which is consistent with a negative effect of long auditor tenure on audit quality,” write authors Zvi Singer of HEC Montreal and Jing Zhang of the University of Alabama in Huntsville. “This finding speaks to the benefit of a fresh look by a new auditor.”

The study is based on the timeliness of the discoveries of errors in financial statements, comparing audits performed by relatively newer auditors against auditors that have served for long periods on the same engagements.

The research uses data produced by the massive turnover in audit engagements that occurred when public companies fled Arthur Anderson in 2002 as it crumbled under the Enron scandal. The analysis determined misstatements of former Arthur Andersen clients were discovered and corrected faster than those of comparable companies who retained the same audit firm through a misstatement.

The analysis also concludes longer auditor tenures lead to bigger misstatements. And it identifies 10 years as the sweet spot for tenure. "Beyond 10 years of auditor tenure, the association between auditor tenure and misstatement duration is insignificant," the authors wrote. "The benefits of a fresh look exist only in the first 10 years of the auditor-client relationship."

The debate over auditor tenure has long rested on some key arguments for and against long-standing relationships. Opponents of audit firm rotation say long-standing relationships produce institutional knowledge at audit firms that makes the audit more meaningful and efficient. Proponents say such long-standing relationships lead to personal ties that cloud judgment, which a fresh set of eyes can overcome.

The study, which appears in the academic journal of the American Accounting Association, takes a more skeptical view of long-standing relationships than capital markets currently hold, where long auditor tenures are associated with lower corporate borrowing costs, enhanced responses to earnings reports, and higher stock ratings. Prior studies have concluded, the authors say, that short tenure leads to lower financial reporting quality. An alternate view, they assert, is that low financial reporting quality leads to short auditor tenure because disagreements are more likely.

The study tries to control for that uncertainty over cause and effect by focusing on serious accounting errors that occur or are corrected during the tenure of the same auditor. The data is based on nearly 3,500 misstatements reported by U.S. companies over 14 years.

Sarbanes-Oxley attempted to address concerns about long auditor tenures — breaking up the cozy ties between management and auditor that former over long-standing relationships — by

See next page
requiring audit firms to rotate engagement partners on all public company audit engagements every five years. Driven by its former chairman, James Doty, the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board explored whether to set term limits on audit engagements, but failed to gain support for such a move, even among board members. Even the House of Representatives joined the protest, passing legislation to prohibit the PCAOB from establishing any kind of mandatory rotation system.
Nomination made for UWA trustees board

The governor's office has nominated a University of West Alabama alumna to fill the vacant District 1 seat on the board of trustees and tapped three existing members for additional terms.

The governor's office has nominated Baldwin County Circuit Court Clerk Jody Wise Campbell to fill the vacant District 1 seat. Alex Saad, the former District 1 representative, resigned from the seat last summer citing health issues.

Board President Jerry Smith, Vice President Randy Hillman and trustee Victor Vernon have been nominated for additional terms on the board. Smith is an at-large member. Hillman represents District 6 and Vernon holds the District 2 seat.

The appointments were presented to the Alabama Senate's confirmation committee on Tuesday. A term on the board is six years.
UWA plans 242-bed dorm

Trustees say rooms needed for enrollment growth

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

LIVINGSTON — The University of West Alabama needs a new 242-bed dorm to cope with enrollment growth.

UWA plans to seek a federal loan to finance the $12.6 million dormitory, which will be named after Terry Bunn Sr., a longtime member of the board of trustees.

The UWA board of trustees on Monday authorized planning to begin for an application to the U.S. Department of Agriculture to finance the dorm project and allocated up to $45,000 for environmental and feasibility studies required for application process.

Once developed, the application will return to the board for final approval. The team tasked with studying options for the new dorm considered private financing, bonds and seeking funding from the USDA’s Community Facilities Direct Loan Program.

“We feel like we have got their support. There is just a long involved process as we understand it,” Vice President

See UWA, A5

See next page
of Finance Affairs Lawson Edmonds said.

UWA President Ken Tucker said the loan program is competitive, and UWA’s proposal would be considered with other applicants.

The loan would finance a $12.6 million project to build a 242-bed dorm, with a potential site near the tennis courts on campus, said Jeremy Sheffield, assistant director of housing and residential life. If the loan is secured, the dorm would open in 2020.

If the loan application is unsuccessful, Tucker said the university would likely go with a bond issue.

The team studying options to build the new dorm recommended USDA financing because it has a positive cash flow projection in year one, Sheffield said.

The trustees previously approved firm Seay, Seay, Litchfield Architects as the architect for a potential new dorm project. The board is considering new housing after launching initiatives to increase enrollment.

UWA is anticipating about 500 new students on campus in the fall, exceeding its capacity for freshman dorm space on campus and forcing the university to place students in aging Selden Hall, Sheffield said. UWA requires most students to live on campus during their freshman year.

The university anticipates on-campus enrollment will grow beyond on-campus bed capacity by 2019, Sheffield said.

Jerry Smith, the UWA board president, proposed naming the new dorm after Bunn, who did not attend the meeting on Monday.

“I really think, certainly, this is appropriate to honor one of our own who has given so much to our university and I don’t mean financially, but so much of his time,” Smith said.

In other business, Provost Tim Edwards gave a brief report on UWA’s partnership with online education company Learning House.

“The numbers are good. We are very pleased,” Edwards said.

The university entered into an agreement with the company in 2016. As part of the agreement, Learning House is marketing of UWA’s online programs and providing enrollment management services in exchange for a share of tuition revenues from new online students it helps recruit.

The total online enrollment from 2016 to 2017 increased by 2,830 to 12,485 during the first year of the partnership, Edwards said.

Revenue in 2017 increased by about $636,000.

Tucker said a conservative estimate is revenue will grow by $1 million in 2018.

Learning House President Todd Zipper said the company has a team of 35 employees working on UWA. It spent $500,000 on marketing in 2017 and plans to increase the budget to $2.3 million this year.

The company predicts UWA will add about 350 new students in the second online term this spring, Edwards said.

The company’s goal is to see online enrollment at UWA see consistent growth of about 20 percent growth for the next five years, Zipper said.

“That is what we are modeling out on our end and pushing for,” Zipper said.
White Student Union speech at Auburn prompts backlash from faculty, students

By: Leada Gore

Auburn University officials will be meeting with student groups over concerns following an Honors College event that included the president of the White Student Union.

The Feb. 26 event included the screening of a documentary on skinheads and white supremacists along with a presentation by the president of the WSU, an Auburn student who uses the alias "Wyatt Mann." Mann was originally set to appear in person at the event but opted instead to deliver his message via Skype audio, concealing his identity.

Mann continued to speak until a student who had entered the room walked to the front and closed the laptop, ending the call, according to online reports.

According to transcripts posted online by the WSU, Mann's talk included long portions on the racial elements of prison rape and espoused a "no-fault divorce" for whites no longer wanting to be in integrated communities.

The meeting drew the attention of a group of faculty, staff and students, who sent a letter to Auburn President Steven Leath and Provost Bill Hardgrave expressing their concerns.

"We are in favor of allowing free speech and a diversity of perspectives on Auburn's campus, and we encourage people from different sides of controversial issues to engage in dialogue and face tough questions," the letter said. "But there is a difference between allowing free speech and sponsoring a hate group, which is what the Auburn White Student Union has been designated by the Southern Poverty Law Center. This group operates in the shadows."

In a statement, the university said it is "committed to creating an inclusive campus environment where all students are welcome and encouraged to engage and thrive."

However, it added, the content of the Honors College event "left some with concerns over its impact on our campus.

"We do not support the beliefs expressed by members of the White Student Union, a group that is not affiliated with the university, nor do we support our campus becoming a platform for the advancement of them. Auburn University will continue to rise to the challenge of learning and demonstrating the merits of productive civil discourse," the statement read.

Last year, a group of AU student organizations called on the university to take a stronger stance against the WSU after it distributed a series of anti-Semitic fliers on campus.

"This group isn't an Auburn student organization, and we find the views expressed in their materials reprehensible and unrepresentative of those of the university," the University said at the time.
Blazers coast past Owls

UAB athletics

FRISCO, TEXAS — UAB trailed for just 14 seconds during Wednesday night's 83-72 victory over 11th seed Florida Atlantic in the first round of the Conference USA Tournament at The Star.

That deficit came during the opening minute of the game. William Lee erased it quickly with a three-pointer and the No. 6 seed Blazers (20-12) were off and running. It wasn't always pretty but it was more than enough for UAB to survive and advance to Thursday night's quarterfinal matchup with No. 3 seed Western Kentucky.

"If you take away the last five minutes, we played a really, really, really good game," UAB coach Robert Ehsan said.

It was a particularly good night for Blazers freshman guard Zack Bryant and seniors Lee and Chris Cokley. Bryant, who was playing in his first postseason game as a college player, contributed a career-best 25 points on 10-of-13 shooting from the field, 2-of-4 on three-point attempts and 3-of-3 from the free throw line. He also added six rebounds, two assists and one turnover in 34 minutes.

"Just so efficient," Ehsan said. "He let the game come to him, he wasn't pressing. He took his shots when he had them. That was the most impressive thing. It was a quiet 25 points, to me."

Lee and Cokley each played like a pair of seniors trying to make sure their college careers continue. Lee had 20 points, four three-pointers, six rebounds and two blocked shots in 25 minutes. Cokley had 15 points, 10 rebounds, an assist and two blocked shots in 28 minutes.

Cokley's efforts in the first half sparked the Blazers to a 40-30 lead at halftime. He had 12 points and seven rebounds before halftime. Six of his points came over the final three minutes of the half.

Lee opened the second half with an impressive run of a 17-foot jumper, a three-pointer from the left wing and a three-pointer from well beyond the top of the key. The second three-pointer gave UAB a 48-35 lead. Florida Atlantic (12-19) hit one of two free-throw attempts before Bryant scored seven consecutive points and Nate Darling converted a layup to give the Blazers a 57-36 lead with 15:23 remaining.

"When we shoot the basketball like that, in particular William Lee, we play really well," Ehsan said.

Soon after that run, Ehsan sent Cokley, Lee and Bryant to the bench to limit their minutes. Florida Atlantic took advantage of their absence to crawl back to within 13 points with just over 10 minutes.

Ehsan hustled the three back in the game, and Bryant responded immediately with a three-pointer. That began a quick 10-2 run that also included a three-pointer and layup by Bryant and a 15-foot basket by Cokley.

UAB hurt itself with turnovers down the stretch, but Florida Atlantic was never able to get closer than nine points.

Point guard Nick Norton had a solid game for the Blazers, even though he just three points and missed all three of his three-point attempts. Norton had eight assists, five rebounds and just one turnover in 26 minutes. Over the past four games, Norton has 28 assists and one turnover.

C-USA scoreboard

Wednesday's games

No. 9 Southern Miss 69, No. 8 FIU 68
No. 5 UTSA 71, No. 12 UTEP 58
No. 10 Louisiana Tech 68, No. 7 North Texas 62
No. 6 UAB 83, No. 11 Florida Atlantic 72

Thursday's games

No. 1 Middle Tennessee vs. No. 9 Southern Miss, late
No. 4 Marshall vs. No. 5 UTSA, late
No. 2 Old Dominion vs. No. 10 Louisiana Tech, late
No. 3 WKU vs. No. 6 UAB, late

Friday's games

Semifinal 1, 12:30 p.m., CBSSN
Semifinal 2, 3 p.m., CBSSN

Saturday's game

Championship, 7:30 p.m., CBSSN
Another point of view

Defensive backs weigh in on Alabama's upcoming quarterback battle

Michael Casagrande mcasagrande@al.com

The spring of Jalen vs. Tua has an opening date set for March 20.
Alabama's quarterback competition initiated at some point in the third quarter of the national championship win over Georgia will get a 15-practice spring preview.

Coach Nick Saban, who doesn't always enjoy the hoopla surrounding such a scenario, floated the idea of using both in an interview with ESPN. That would break precedent from previous quarterback battles.

It's the kind of situation that also tends to get contentious when too many questions are asked a long way from the finish line. Players have to play it close to the cuff with the potential to create friction within the locker room.

So, to gain perspective on the Jalen Hurts vs. Tua Tagovailoa competition, we spoke with former players at the NFL combine who saw both quarterbacks last season in games or practice.

"With Jalen, you had to be a little more cautious on the run play and the run/pass options," former Alabama safety Ronnie Harrison said. "With Tua, he can do the same thing. He can beat you with his feet, but mostly, with his arm. You had to pay attention to the routes because he could let it fly."

Tagovailoa's 77 passes represented only a fraction of Hurts' 255 throws. The freshman, however, had the final 24 passes of the season. They changed everything in the national-title game comeback win over Georgia.

Bulldogs safety Dominick Sanders had a close-up view of Tagovailoa's final throw — a 41-yard game winner in overtime to DeVonta Smith. Sanders said they didn't prepare much for Tagovailoa since he didn't appear to be in the game plan. Clemson's Dorian O'Daniel also said they didn't expect to see the true freshman in the Sugar Bowl.

Tagovailoa, however, left an impression on Sanders and Georgia.

"That young guy came in and he was very accurate," Sanders said. "He made some pretty good passes or whatnot. You have to give it to the guy. They won, so we had to learn from that but it's time to get ready for this combine. The main thing was to get past that and speak good on them. He did good when he got in."

"I'm very proud of him getting in and doing what he had to do and not having that type of time during the season. But when he had his name called, he got in and pretty much every pass he threw."

Tagovailoa had 10 incompletions, including an interception amid the three-touchdown performance in Atlanta.

"Both skilled," former Alabama cornerback Levi Wallace said. "Jalen is a little bit more of a runner, and Tua sits in the pocket a little bit longer. Both are great quarterbacks, (have) different skill sets. They can both throw the ball as far as the eye can see. Definitely both talented. I know coach Saban has a great plan for them next year."

The 3-for-9 first half against Georgia is the last memory of Hurts' sophomore season. Alabama's offense didn't have a drive longer than 42 yards in a scoreless opening 30 minutes that saw the Bulldogs own momentum with a 13-0 halftime lead.

"You can't put it all on Jalen," Wallace said. "It's on the receivers to get open. It's on the O-line to block for him. Jalen is a talented quarterback. We know he can throw. The team knows. Tua does a great job as well. They both beat up on the defense every day in practice. I'm sure they're going to keep improving and keep working towards something."

The Tide's offense kicked into gear after an initial three-and-out with Tagovailoa taking snaps in the third quarter. He led scoring drives that covered 56, 15, 71, 66 and 25 yards.

Former Alabama cornerback Anthony Averett said the left-handed delivery changes things for the secondary. He said there weren't too many differences in the games of Hurts and Tagovailoa other than that.

"Tua can definitely sling it," he said. "We just had to prepare for that."

Harrison doesn't envy the task charged to new offensive coordinator Mike Locksley, quarterback coach Dan Enos and Saban.

"It's tough to say," Harrison said. "Both are great guys. Jalen did a great job for two years. He got us back to the championship back to back. Tua stepped in and did his thing in the championship game, so it's really hard to decide."

Michael Casagrande is an Alabama beat writer for the Alabama Media Group. Follow him on Twitter @ByCasagrande.
NFL coaches, scouts check out Alabama players at Pro Day

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

Calvin Ridley didn't have much fun at the NFL Combine, but he felt right at home Wednesday afternoon during Alabama's Pro Day at the the Crimson Tide's Hank Crisp Indoor facility.

It's not that job interviews should be fun per se, but Ridley didn't particularly enjoy himself in Indianapolis over the weekend. Mainly, he didn't run the time he wanted in the 40-yard dash.

Ridley was one of 19 former Alabama players who participated in front of all 32 NFL teams on Wednesday. Among those in attendance included New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick, Pittsburgh Steelers head coach Mike Tomlin, Detroit Lions head coach Matt Patricia, Cincinnati Bengals coach Marvin Lewis and Tennessee Titans head coach Mike Vrabel.

"That week is kind of tough," Ridley said. "I'm real tired. I was trying to get ready for my 40, which I was upset about, too. I didn't have a good Combine like I wanted to, but I'm very happy right now. I know I'm going to be in a great position."

In his mind, Ridley wanted to go to the Combine, run the 40, interview with teams and go home. But he took part in a variety of drills, including the broad jump, which served as the focus of Ridley's annoyance.

"I'm not going to get into a wide receiver's stance and broad jump before I run a route," Ridley said jokingly.

Saban said Ridley is a safe pick for any NFL club.

"He certainly ran well at the Combine. His production here has been fantastic," Saban said. "He's got enough speed to get on top of people. He's got great one-step quickness out of the break. He doesn't take long to accelerate coming out of the break. He's got really good hands, and he's been a consistent performer. He's tough. I don't think he has a lot of downside, and I think he can play all the positions, outside and inside."

Ridley said he's got one simple pitch for why teams should draft him.

"I am the best," he said. "You're going to get a good player in me. I'm going to come in and work hard. I'm

See PRO DAY, C3
coming in to play right away.”

Ridley is projected as a first-round selected along with Minkah Fitzpatrick, Da’Ron Payne and Rashaan Evans. Fitzpatrick’s and Evans’ stock is bolstered by the fact they can play multiple positions.

“The more things that you can do from a versatility standpoint creates value for you in terms of the roles that you can play for any team, especially in the NFL, where you have a limited roster,” Saban said. “Guys might have to play multiple roles if somebody gets injured or something like that. I think the versatility is a huge advantage for them.”

Evans chose not to run the 40-yard dash in scouting events – he injured his groin in September during the Florida State game. Alabama has a second Pro Day scheduled for March 28.

Saban talked up his inside/outside linebacker.

“Rashaan’s been a fantastic player for us,” he said. “He’s always been a good person. He’s been a good leader. He’s always set a good example in terms of the things that he’s done. He was a very productive player for us. I can’t say enough good things about what he’s done in terms of his contribution to the program on and off the field.”

Wednesday’s event was a chance for players not invited to the Combine to get to showcase their skills.

“I think when we have these kind of days we attract more people because we have good players, which also helps the sort of next-level guys get a chance to get exposure,” Saban said. “A lot of people look at them. That’s probably a good thing for guys who weren’t in the Combine. It usually doesn’t fall so close on the calendar to the combine, but the way spring break is this year it kind of worked at that way.”

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
Sexton, a senior on the Alabama basketball team who hails from Danville, Kentucky, was named the co-Freshman of the Year by the Associated Press. Sexton was also named the SEC Newcomer of the Year by the SEC Coaches' Association and the SEC Newcomer of the Year by the SEC Coaches' Association. Sexton was selected as the SEC Newcomer of the Year by the Associated Press.

By Ceceil Hurt

The Tide guard Named to AP All-SEC Team Selected as SEC Newcomer of the Year

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SEXTON

From Page C1

also being selected to the league's All-Freshman team. Furthermore, junior Donta Hall was named to the league's All-Defensive team.

Sexton became the second Alabama rookie to earn all-freshman honors in as many years, joining 2017 All-Freshman team honoree Braxton Key. Sexton leads the Crimson Tide and ranks second in the SEC with 18.3 points per game, while also topping the team in assists per game (3.6), field goals made (157) and field goals attempted (364).

He leads Alabama and is ranked third in the league in both free throws made (164) and attempts (213), despite missing three games this season. The Mableton, Georgia, native has 24 games with double-figure scoring and two 30-point contests.

Hall leads Alabama in blocked shots, rebounds (6.9), dunks (65) and field goal percentage (.733), while ranking second on the team in points per game (10.9).

The AP and coaches' All-SEC selections varied in several particulars, including SEC Player of the Year. Georgia's Yante Maten was chosen by the 15-voter AP panel, while the coaches selected Tennessee forward Grant Williams.

Alabama opens the SEC Tournament on Thursday with Texas A&M, a game that will be critical to any lingering Crimson Tide hopes for an NCAA Tournament bid.

"I feel like the confidence in the locker room has never been higher," Sexton said. "We're ready to play and get this win."
UA spring football starts March 20

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

The Alabama football team opens spring practice Tuesday, March 20, the university announced Tuesday afternoon.

The 15 combined practices and scrimmages culminates on Saturday, April 21 for the annual spring A-Day game. All other practices/scrimmages are closed to the public.

In Nick Saban’s 12th spring with the Crimson Tide, Alabama begins preparations with six new assistant coaches, including Karl Scott, Pete Golding, Craig Kuligowski, Jeff Banks, Dan Enos and Josh Gattis.

Pro Day

Thirteen Alabama players will participate in Wednesday’s Pro Day scouting event for NFL teams, including Bradley Bozeman, Rashaan Evans, Robert Foster, Joshua Frazier, Da’Shawn Hand, JC Hassenauer Austin Johnson, Jamar King, Calvin Ridley, Bo Scarbrough, JK Scott, Cam Sims and Levi Wallace.

Other players will not participate in the drills but will take part in team interviews, including Anthony Averett, Tony Brown, Minkah Fitzpatrick, Shaun Dion Hamilton, Ronnie Harrison and Da’Ron Payne.

All of the players except Hamilton recently participate in the NFL Combine last weekend in Indianapolis.

Reach Aaron Suttles
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Alabama’s new assistant is a ‘game-changer’

Jeff Banks brings personality and a much-needed expertise in kicking game to Nick Saban’s staff

Rainer Sabin
rsabin@al.com

One look at Jeff Banks’ bio raises curiosity.

How does a former all-conference college punter evolve into an offensive assistant?

How does someone who once played an outlier position that usually attracts the quirky become an ace recruiter who has the ability to connect with top-flight prospects?

And just how did this guy distinguish himself enough to merit a spot on Nick Saban’s staff at Alabama?

Mike Price, the man who once coached the Crimson Tide for less than four months back in 2003, can give some insight.

“He’s got flair,” Price said. “He’s a real aggressive guy, a 100-percenter. He’s a workaholic. And yet he’s fun to be around.”

Coming up for the Tide

March 20: Alabama opens spring practice

April 21: A-Day Game, 1 p.m. ESPN

When the hiring of Banks as a tight ends coach and special teams coordinator was announced by Alabama earlier this winter, it created a buzz.

One assistant who works at another Football Bowl Subdivision program called the addition of the 42-year-old Banks a “game-changer.”

For the Tide, a program that already seemed to have everything, it just might be. After all, Banks gives the Tide something it hasn’t had during Saban’s tenure at Alabama — expertise in the kicking game. At times, Alabama has struggled in this area. A reminder of that came in the College Football Playoff championship game, when Andy Pappanastos shanked a 36-yard game-winning field-goal attempt at the end of regulation — necessitating Tua Tagovailoa’s heroes in overtime for the Tide to claim its 17th national title.

The miss by Pappanastos was emblematic of a larger problem as placekicker has been considered
the program's weakest position since the departure of Leigh Tiffin following the 2009 season. But there wasn't a coach on staff who could offer much guidance to Pappanastos or even the team's outstanding punter, JK Scott. Joe Pannunzio, who supervised the special teams last season, once played quarterback and was primarily responsible for directing Alabama's tight ends.

"It's really, really hard for a guy that's never kicked a ball to help a kicker or punter do his thing because they just don't have the experience," Scott said.

Price understood that more than most people in his line of work. That's because his son, Aaron, was a kicker. And at Washington State, Price took a particular interest in special teams, recognizing, he said, "how important it was."

It's one of the reasons why Price gave Banks his first opportunity in coaching, offering him a role as a graduate assistant with the Cougars in 1998.

Another?

"I liked his personality, the garrulous Price said. "He's a social butterfly."

Price remembered Banks, as a player, ingratiating himself with his teammates. And he also recognized the former punter was a hard worker with ambition. Banks set out not just to coach the specialists but also learn the Cougars' high-octane one-back offense, which helped spawn elite quarterbacks Drew Bledsoe and Ryan Leaf.

After Banks went off on his own and did a four-year tour at Idaho State, Price lured him to UTEP once he was hired there in 2004 — with the embers from his short-lived tenure at Alabama still smoldering.

Price soon assigned Banks to oversee the Miners' recruiting efforts. It's here where Banks began to distinguish himself as he developed strong relationships with high school coaches in Texas and his native California.

"He had a gift for gab, was a good speaker, very bright, smart and remembered everyone's names," Price said.

He also won over the players on the roster. Because Banks presided over special teams, he worked with almost everybody — linebackers, defensive backs, receivers, running backs and linemen on both sides of the ball.

Armed with a communications degree he earned at Washington State and an excitable demeanor, he made his presence felt wherever he went.

The best talent on the team gravitated toward him.
It was no different at Texas A&M, where Banks held the exact same role he now has at Alabama for five seasons in Aggieland.

"Just the way he's able to portray a message and the culture he set in the room, guys buy into it really easily," said former Aggies receiver Christian Kirk, a prolific return specialist who is considered a first-round pick in this year's NFL draft. "I know every guy in that locker room would run through a brick wall for him just because of the love he shows for us. But at the end of the day, he's always working to get us better."

As Price said, "He's not afraid to burn the midnight oil. He's moving all the time. He doesn't let any grass grow underneath his feet."

That's particularly true on the recruiting trail, where Banks made his mark. He wooed Kirk and also lured Kyle Allen, the top pro-style quarterback in the 2014 class, to College Station.

At one point last summer, Banks was rated the top recruiter in the nation, according to 247Sports.

His success in this arena caught the eye of Saban, who noted his new assistant's track record of reeling in highly-regarded prospects when his appointment at Alabama was made official.

"Jeff is well-respected across the country for his knowledge of the game and his ability to recruit," Saban said in a statement.

But is he a game-changer as he's been purported to be?

Price wasn't ready to commit to making such a definitive statement.

"I don't know," he said.

"Then Price thought some more about it before offering this verbal pledge: "I know his impact will be positive. He's got a personality people like."

And that — more than anything else — helps explain how a former college punter is now a valued coach at college football's premier program.

Rainer Sabin is an Alabama beat writer for the Alabama Media Group. Follow him on Twitter @RainerSabin
COMMENTARY

Alabama showing its best at NFL Combine

Cecil Hurt

On one hand, there's no surprise that Alabama is taking top billing at the annual NFL Combine in Indianapolis. Talent in, talent out, after all. Recruit the best and you will likely have the best after three or four years. Minkah Fitzpatrick, Da'Shawn Hand, Calvin Ridley, Rashad Evans — all fit the description, Da'Ron Payne — all fit the description.

But if you look deeper, the combine reveals Alabama as something more than a warehouse for highly athletic players. The players, for the most part, look poised and prepared. There's been no repeat of last year's Reuben Foster hysteria, where Foster's admittedly volatile personality led to an argument (or an altercation, depending on the version of events you embrace) with a medical staff member. That provided ample grist for the two-month NFL Mock Draft comments on social media, to the extent that some prognosticators dropped Foster out of the first round — and may have let the 49ers get a valuable asset at a spot that he would not have otherwise reached. (To be fair, Foster does need to get all of his off-the-field peccadilloes under control in order to have the best career possible.)

This year, the worst thing that happened was that Tony Brown said a bad word when he was whistled for a false start in one of his 40-yard dash attempts. Yes, that was picked up as a "character flaw" by some observers, even though it seemed more like a momentary frustration. Brown also turned in a 4.35 40 time, which was impressive.

For the most part, things went smoothly from the drills to the interviews. The performances of Fitzpatrick, Anthony Averett, Brown, Ronnie Harrison (who chose not to run a 40) and Levi Wallace, a walk-on who adds a different dimension to the "great recruits" narrative, sparked an on-line debate between Alabama fans, LSU fans and Florida State fans about which deserves the title of "DBU," or "Defensive Back University." Debates

See next page
are easier to win than actual games, after all. Even Texas A&M tried to get into the act, thanks to Jimbo Fisher's FSU connection. Florida State's Derwin James — hyped since the preseason — is a great athlete and a first-round pick. LSU has several outstanding defensive backs in the NFL. Shots were fired via Twitter. Alabama even put out a recruiting-style online poster with its NFL Combine participants and the comment “#DBU. Some hashtag it, others live it.”

Recruiting never stops. Alabama was well-represented at other positions, of course. Payne, who was without argument the defensive MVP of the College Football Playoff, further secured his

See ALABAMA, B4
never go away completely as
the league hires them. They are
not that noticeable. It will
never be completely free

This group seems fine.

The NFL has done its part to
battled in the receiver
in the league. He has reached
the combine and then the
NFL Draft. He is hoping to

Meanwhile, Alabama and its
longest last season is a thing.

Along with the 706-pound and
likely

Hand, who weighed in
was impressive as well.

Invisible for much of 2017,
it is rare to see a receiver
that would be the best in the
league. The combine that the

Bama has been earning. He
improved his stock.

From Page B1

ALABAMA

performance although he
jumped and 40-yard-dash
doubled the excellent broad

defensive line. So, Scantor-

first-round status on the
UA Women's Golf Takes 3rd Darius Rucker Title

The Tuscaloosa News
Monday, March 5, 2018
Tuscaloosa News garners top-10 APSE honors

By: Staff Report

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. – The Tuscaloosa News has been honored with the highest award by The Associated Press Sports Editors for the fifth time in the last six years, garnering Grand Slam status for top-10 finishes in the daily sections, special sections, Sunday sections and website categories in its division for work done in 2017.

The Tuscaloosa News has been honored with either Grand Slam or Triple Crown (top 10 in three of the key categories) for excellence since 2009. APSE honors are based upon judging by sports editors from across the country.

The Tuscaloosa News has earned top-10 honors in the website category for its Tuscaloosanews.com and Tidesports.com entry for nine straight years, since the category’s inception. It is joined by The New York Times and The Washington Post as the only news organizations to garner website honors in each of the last nine years.

Additionally, The Tuscaloosa News had four top-10 finishes in the writing/multimedia categories:

• Cecil Hurt was honored in breaking news for his story on Alabama firing Kobie Baker from its athletics administration staff after his involvement in matters covered by the FBI probe into college basketball.

• Ben Jones was honored in feature writing for his story on Alabama’s athletic training staff and its role in helping players get back on the field after injuries.

• Tommy Deas and Molly Catherine Walsh made top five in multimedia for their “Your Guide to Tuscaloosa Regional Softball” entry, which included stories, capsules, video and social media posts.

• Deas was honored along with Walsh, Joey Chandler, Drew Taylor and Drew Hill in the projects category for “Should Your Kid Play Football,” an in-depth report on the risks and benefits of the sport, covering issues ranging from the medical to social to economic impact of football.

Final rankings in the writing and multimedia categories will be announced in March.

Six other news organizations garnered Grand Slam honors: The Boston Globe and Los Angeles Times in the over-175,000 circulation division, The Indianapolis Star and The Seattle Times in the 75,001-175,000 division, The Tulsa World in the 30,000-75,000 division and the Wyoming Tribune Eagle in the under-15,000 division. The Tuscaloosa News competes in the under-30,000 division.
UA needs to think SEC instead of NCAA

Cecil Hurt

The Alabama basketball team now has to hope one of the true shaggy dogs of the sports cliche world — “the postseason is a new season” — turns out to be true. There is very little the Crimson Tide needs more right now than a clean slate. Saturday’s loss to Texas A&M was its fifth in a row and while it was a step forward in competitiveness from last week’s loss to Florida, it still wasn’t a win.

UA did have an open 3-pointer with about 12 seconds remaining that would have potentially put the game into overtime. It even grabbed the rebound off the missed shot but couldn’t get another look before a turnover.

Still, it was more of the “SEC games on the road are tough” variety than it was the “don’t let children under 12 watch the game tape” train-wrecks from earlier in the streak. There’s plenty of reason for pessimism but no grounds to absolutely dismiss the possibility that Alabama can win on a neutral court against a team that it played to a two-point decision.

See hurt, C4
on its home floor. That's all Alabama needs to be thinking about — the game, not the potential ramifications of the tournament. That will all be hashed out on Thursday.

Looking at the tournament as a whole, there are some intriguing matchups. There are probably seven teams that are already in the NCAA Tournament, with only Alabama having a realistic chance to play its way into the field without winning the whole enchilada (or, since the party is in St. Louis, the whole toasted ravioli.)

Mississippi State was getting some mention as a possibility despite its inadequate pre-conference schedule, but got blown out twice in the final week and ended its at-large hopes.

Anyone that doesn't have to play Wednesday and win five games in five days (not going to happen) has at least a chance. Auburn certainly could win it as the No. 1 seed but one wonders if AU's limited depth is suited for a three-day run.

The wins AU earned without Anfernee McLemore down the stretch were pumped with home-court adrenaline that may not translate, either.

Tennessee has more players and its inside/outside game might translate well in a tournament setting. Florida, which was teetering on the NCAA bubble, closed with wins against Auburn, Alabama and Kentucky — the opposite of Alabama's finish — and are the hottest team going in.

Kentucky always has a realistic shot at winning the tournament, and if, amazingly, there is a Friday afternoon session featuring Alabama vs. Auburn and Kentucky vs. Missouri.

(Perhaps with freshman phenom Michael Porter Jr. making his return), that could be electric.

It could also show whether Mizzou fans will support an SEC event in their backyard. Texas A&M and Arkansas will be dangerous but the Aggies may be too slow to win four in a row and Arkansas might be too frenetic.

Even one win would be some salve for Alabama, a brief respite from the negativity that has surrounded the program on the Internet and the radio airwaves since somewhere in the second half of the Auburn game. So for Alabama, the correct approach isn't to worry about the tournament. It needs to try and win one game, then go from there.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Study Links Big College Football Games to Spike in Rape Reports

Economists say alcohol-fueled partying may drive spikes in sexual assaults around Division I football games

Researchers analyzing crime data from police agencies covering U.S. colleges with NCAA Division I football programs found that reports of rape surged on the day of a home football game. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

By

Ben Leubsdorf
Mar 7, 2018 6:00 am ET

Reported rapes of college-aged victims spike on the days of college football games, suggesting that alcohol-fueled partying on college campuses tied to the contests may lead to more sexual assaults, according to new research.

The study, published in January by the American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, analyzed crime data from police agencies covering 96 U.S. colleges with NCAA Division I football programs. It found reports of rape involving victims aged 17 to 24 surged 41% above average daily levels on the day of a home football game, with a 15% increase when there were away games that likely entailed less partying on campus.
The researchers studied football games because they wanted “an event that very clearly intensified partying and drinking, so we could use that event to estimate the causal effect,” said Montana State University economist Isaac Swensen, who co-authored the paper with fellow economists Jason Lindo of Texas A&M University and Peter Siminski of Australia’s University of Technology Sydney.

More broadly, Mr. Swensen said, “this does provide new information on some of the nonmonetary costs and benefits – costs in particular – of these big football programs.”

The economists extrapolated from their sample that football games appear to drive 832 additional rape reports each year across all 253 schools with Division I football programs. Such crimes often go unreported, according to the researchers, which may mean the actual number of sexual assaults could be far higher.

The issue of sexual assault on college campuses, and how universities handle those cases, has gained growing national attention. Researchers have long linked violent crimes with alcohol consumption, finding that many assaults are committed by perpetrators who have been drinking and many victims are intoxicated. An estimated 97,000 college students each year are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, which is part of the National Institutes of Health.

The three economists who did the study, in their analysis of data collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation from local law-enforcement agencies, found reports of rape involving college-aged victims increased on the day of and early morning following a college football game. They said the increases were larger for home games, higher-profile teams and games, and on campuses ranked as well-known party schools by the Princeton Review.

The study acknowledges that it “cannot say with certainty that the estimated effects on reports of rape are driven by the increase in partying associated with football games.” But Mr. Swensen said the economists assembled much circumstantial evidence supporting the idea that “alcohol and partying are the causal mechanism.”

He said the study should prompt campus policy makers to think about how to make partying safer, and how to avoid or mitigate spikes in partying that appear to drive alcohol-related crimes, as well as consider whether the benefits of large football programs outweigh their costs.
"Researchers are very much still in the thick of trying to figure out what works to reduce sexual assault," he said.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association in 2016 created a "Commission to Combat Campus Sexual Violence" and last year adopted a policy requiring all college athletes, coaches and staffers to complete annual education on preventing sexual violence. "There can be no room for this scourge anywhere in higher education," NCAA President Mark Emmert said in January.
Pearson Family Sues University of Chicago

BY DOUGLAS BELKIN

A family foundation that gave the University of Chicago $100 million in 2015 to fund research aimed at reducing conflict around the world is suing the school for breach of contract and accusing the university of incompetence and deception.

The Pearson Family Members Foundation, led by Thomas Pearson and his brother Timothy, hopes to recoup the $22.9 million it has already given the school to create the Pearson Institute.

The suit, filed in federal court in Oklahoma on Feb. 20, charges that the school "failed to deliver on the most fundamental of its obligations," including appointing a director, creating an academic curriculum and filling faculty positions.

"The Pearsons are profoundly disappointed, and regrettably have been left with no other choice or course of action," said a spokesman for the Pearson Family Foundation.

The University of Chicago said the lawsuit is without merit and emphasized that all hiring decisions were up to them.

"In the short time since its formation, the Institute has hosted dozens of events, enrolled more than 200 students in courses related to the study of global conflict, and fostered an engaged community of scholars," the school said in a statement. "All academic and hiring decisions are the sole purview of the University and its faculty, guided by the principle of academic freedom."

News of the lawsuit was first reported by the Maroon, the University of Chicago's student newspaper.


Still, Amir Pasic, dean of the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University, said universities around the country are looking at the situation in Chicago "and seeing this as a cautionary tale."
Banks Want a Bigger Piece of Your Student Loan

By: Josh Mitchell and AnnaMaria Andriotis

Private lenders are pushing to break up the government’s near-monopoly in the $100 billion-a-year student-loan market.

The banking industry’s main lobbying group, the Consumer Bankers Association, is pressing for the government to institute caps on how much individual graduate students and parents of undergraduates can borrow from the government to cover tuition.

That could lead more families to turn to private lenders to cover portions of their bills, meaning lower interest rates for households with good credit histories and constrained funding for households with blemished records.

A group of investors also is lobbying for legislation to provide a clearer legal framework for “income-share agreements,” under which private investors provide money upfront to cover tuition in exchange for a portion of a student’s income after school. Firmer rules would help spur more agreements, the group said.

At stake is potentially billions of dollars in new business for private lenders, a group dominated by SLM Corp., better known as Sallie Mae, Wells Fargo & Co., and Discover Financial Services.

The U.S. Education Department makes about 90% of student loans annually, a market that totaled $107 billion in new originations in the most recent academic year, according to the College Board.

Student debt has more than doubled over the past decade, driven by a boom in college enrollment during the recession and rising tuition. Roughly a fifth of all student debt outstanding—excluding debt held by borrowers still in school—sits in accounts that are at least 90 days delinquent, according to the New York Federal Reserve.

Private lenders pushed for legislative changes in previous years to no avail, but now they are receiving a more welcome reception from congressional Republicans and the Trump administration.

House Republicans, looking to revamp higher-education policies for the first time in a decade, have included the industry’s proposals in a wide-ranging bill unveiled in November, which they hope to pass this year.

Student loans made by lenders other than the federal government during the last academic year, 2016-2017, totaled $11.6 billion, down 51%, after inflation, from a decade earlier, according to the College Board.

Private student lending has fallen in part because banks tightened underwriting standards after the 2007-2009 financial crisis. It also has dropped because of moves by Congress to allow students to borrow more directly from the government. Starting in 2006, most graduate students

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have been able to borrow unlimited amounts. Parents also face no restrictions on how much they can borrow under the Parent Plus program.

The Republican bill—Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform, or Prosper, Act—calls for limits on the total federal student-loan amounts certain borrowers can receive. Many graduate students wouldn’t be able to borrow more than $150,000 in total federal loans for undergraduate and graduate studies. Parents in many cases would be limited to about $56,000 per dependent. That could mean students who attend pricey schools or those who go on for advanced degrees will go to the private student lenders to cover additional borrowing needs.

The House bill—introduced by Rep. Virginia Foxx (R., N.C.), chairwoman of the House education committee, late last year—cleared the panel in December and now requires approval of the full House. A vote hasn’t been set. Her Senate counterpart, Lamar Alexander (R., Tenn.), has yet to introduce companion legislation this year.

Critics say some of the industry’s proposals would hurt taxpayers and students who lack the credit to qualify for private-sector loans. Some schools and student advocates add that setting stricter dollar limits on federal loans would limit many students from attending schools of their choice.

“The number one priority of Wall Street banks is their own bottom line,” Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D., Mass.), a member of the Senate education committee, said in a statement. “Pushing more students to borrow private loans from banks without consumer protections is a terrible idea.”

Banks counter that the government’s policy of extending loans to college and graduate students, no questions asked, has led to high default rates, runaway tuition inflation and taxpayer costs.

“We absolutely believe there is a role for the federal government. What we don’t want to see is continued nearly unlimited lending that has been fueling a rise in tuition costs,” said Kristen Fallon, vice president of congressional affairs for the Consumer Bankers Association.

Private lenders won’t make loans to cover tuition at schools of dubious quality, Ms. Fallon says. “They’re making some assessment on the value proposition” of individual schools, she said. “We think that is absolutely necessary.”

CBA leaders have met with lawmakers and Trump administration officials to push for the changes, a spokesman said. The group spent $3.5 million in lobbying last year on all issues, according to the nonprofit Center for Responsive Politics.

Private student lenders target the most creditworthy borrowers. That includes parents of undergraduate students and graduate students with an established history of paying debts on time. Most private lenders require high credit scores, and about 90% of the loan dollars they extend to undergraduates have parent or other adult cosigners attached to them, according to MeasureOne, which tracks lending in the private student-loan sector.

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Several private lenders are offering lower interest rates than what the federal government charges to the most creditworthy borrowers. And unlike federal loans, most private loans don’t charge an origination fee when borrowers sign up for the loan.

Private lenders hope low interest rates, which often start at about 4% to 5% for the most creditworthy borrowers, will persuade applicants to take out private loans. A federal program known as “Plus” loans for graduate students and parents of undergraduates that are given out during the current academic year have rates of 7%, regardless of how high or low borrowers credit scores are. The government currently charges rates of 4.45% for undergraduate loans.

The government relies on interest payments from creditworthy borrowers to offset the money it loses on defaults from other borrowers and thereby keep the federal loan program solvent.
Harvard Professor Resigns Amid Allegations of Sexual Harassment

By: Stephanie Saul

A prominent government professor at Harvard who has been accused of sexual harassment and inappropriate behavior by as many as 18 women over several decades resigned on Tuesday following a decision by the university to place him on leave.

The professor, Jorge I. Domínguez, 72, was the subject of a Feb. 27 article in The Chronicle of Higher Education that reported that at least 10 women had accused him of sexual harassment. A subsequent article, published on Sunday, reported that additional women — including Harvard professors, students and staff members — had come forward alleging inappropriate behavior by Dr. Domínguez, bringing the total to 18.

The reaction to disclosures about Dr. Domínguez — many just now coming to light despite occurring years ago — reflects a marked shift in the type of behavior tolerated in the workplace since the reports last year regarding inappropriate sexual behavior by high-profile men like Bill O’Reilly and Harvey Weinstein.

Those disclosures led to a string of forced resignations and firings in entertainment, the media and beyond. Academia has not been immune, with a number of universities forced to confront fallout from the #MeToo movement as professors, students and graduates have come forward with allegations of past abuses.

Late Sunday evening, Michael D. Smith, the dean of Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences, sent an email to the university community announcing that Dr. Domínguez had been placed on leave while Harvard investigated the allegations. In a brief email to colleagues on Tuesday, Dr. Domínguez announced his resignation, which he described as his retirement, effective at the end of the semester.

Jennifer Hochschild, the chairwoman of the government department, then announced the resignation to students and alumni in her own email.

“His forthcoming retirement does not change the active review of the facts and circumstance that have recently come to light,” she wrote.

Dr. Domínguez did not respond to email and telephone messages seeking comment on Tuesday, but he told The Chronicle that he had tried to “behave honorably” in all his relationships. “I do not go around making sexual advances,” he said. “Any behavior like that, I would regret it under any circumstances.”

The Chronicle article told the story of Terry L. Karl, an assistant government professor at Harvard during the early 1980s, who said Dr. Domínguez, regarded as the university’s leading authority on Latin American politics, had made repeated attempts to kiss her, attempted to run his hand up her dress and, at another point, made a reference to raping her. As she rebuffed his advances, Dr. Karl said, Dr. Domínguez reminded her of how powerful he was.
In one letter to Dr. Domínguez at the time, she warned that she found his overtures uncomfortable. “I must reiterate what I have said before: for me, any type of sexual involvement with you can only be destructive.”

Following her repeated complaints, the university punished Dr. Domínguez in 1983, finding he had committed serious misconduct, and temporarily stripped him of administrative duties.

Dr. Karl left Harvard and built a successful career as a professor of political science and Latin American studies at Stanford.

But she told The Chronicle that she was contacted last year by other women, emboldened by the #MeToo movement, who knew of her case and revealed to her how Dr. Domínguez’s behavior continued, even as he rose to higher and higher levels of responsibility.

The allegations from the other women ranged in severity, from inappropriate full-body hugs to claims by one woman that he grabbed her buttocks and tried to put his hand down her pants. The Chronicle reported that one graduate student in the early 1980s complained to the university about comments from Dr. Domínguez that made her feel uneasy, and that Harvard found that he had “behaved inappropriately.” Other women said they had discussed Dr. Domínguez’s behavior with Harvard employees, but had not filed formal complaints.

The Cuban-born Dr. Domínguez, who had been on the Harvard faculty since 1972, ultimately served a long stint as vice provost for international studies and as director of Harvard’s Weatherhead Center for International Affairs.

Reacting to Dr. Domínguez’s announcement, Dr. Karl said his retirement would not resolve the underlying problem.

“They kept promoting him and giving him additional administrative powers, which gave him more power over others to abuse those people, to decide their careers, to sexually harass them, all kind of things,” Dr. Karl said. “And what I don’t understand and will never understand is — if they knew, if they were warned, how could they have promoted him?”

After the original Chronicle article, Harvard’s provost, Alan M. Garber, sent a Harvard-wide email calling the allegations “heartbreaking,” adding that the university “immediately began contacting students and post-docs in the government department to ask about their experiences.”

At a faculty meeting on Tuesday, Drew Faust, who is stepping down as Harvard’s president this year, said that despite the university’s efforts to address sexual harassment, “it remains the case that very clearly there is more to be done,” according to a transcript released by the university.