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Birmingham in spotlight for German investments

There are more German companies operating in the Southeast than in other areas of the country. Alabama is no exception. Even before Mercedes-Benz came to Vance two decades ago, German businesses were making large investments in Huntsville.

Today, almost 100 German companies have invested more than $10 billion in Alabama—many of them in metro Birmingham. Some daughter companies are now larger than their parents back home.

As a testament to the state’s growing attraction to international investment, Birmingham was recently spotlighted by the German American Chamber of Commerce, which held its annual Small and Medium Enterprise Forum for the first time in the Magic City.

“We cover everything from North Carolina to Texas. And we have a great German-American business community here in Alabama—there are great contacts, great multipliers, friends, corporations, companies,” said Stefanie Ziska, president and chief executive officer of the GACC. “So, it was very easy to choose to go to Alabama.”

Birmingham stands to benefit from increased activity from German automakers and suppliers, aerospace companies and steel processors.

“Alabama is highly attractive at the moment, because it still has some workforce availability. And that’s the difference,” said S.A. de Kock, a managing partner at accounting firm Rode & Partner’s office in Atlanta.

“What’s important for the inbound internationals is that there is a hub—that there’s a hub where they can connect to the home country.”

Michael Johnson, a member of Baker Donelson’s global business team in Birmingham, also serves as honorary consul of Germany in Alabama. He said the event is valuable as it brings business leaders from across the region to Birmingham.

“It’s a chance to showcase Birmingham and showcase the state. Some people—it might be the first time they’re here if they’re in South or North Carolina or even Georgia and Tennessee,” Johnson said. “In fact, the fact that you have it in Birmingham—25 years ago, even 20 years ago—nobody could’ve ever imagined that Birmingham would be the site for this, for GACC.”

Top of mind for participants at the event was old and new concerns. Workforce development and training remains a perennial issue. But with more recent developments, business leaders, lawyers, bankers and government officials are alarmed at the negative impact trade and immigration reform is having on international companies and their ability to invest further in the U.S.

Johnson said German companies in particular are very beneficial to the state because they offer higher training and wages.

“The extent that we can replicate the German workforce training development model, that is what we desperately need, because we’re going to lose a lot of people in the manufacturing sector over the next 10, 15 years, and we have to fill those jobs,” Johnson said.

Trade policy impact

The free movement of goods is one of the top concerns for German companies in the U.S.

Their subsidiaries in Alabama and elsewhere are part of supply chains stretching from Canada to Mexico. An automotive part may cross the border as many as 10 times as it is incorporated into different modules before it becomes part of an automobile. It had been understood by these companies that they would continue to operate in this predictable manner as part of NAFTA. An increase in operation costs due to a global trade war elicited by President Donald Trump’s tariffs on steel and aluminum would hamper their business operations and the local economy.

“My fear is this total lack of foreseeable and predictability, and that’s very dangerous,” Johnson said. “That means people wait on a decision to expand or to locally. It’s pretty scary.”

The GACC event featured a panel discussion on the impact NAFTA and other trade policies, which are currently under review, may have on international companies operating in the U.S. While they recognized that NAFTA should be updated to address developments in technology over the past few decades, the panelists were united in vouchering their support for multilateral trade.

Representative of German Industry and Trade president and CEO Daniel Andrich noted that, when it comes to trade, Americans and Europeans are speaking past each other.

“Due to the Americanization of the new administration gives the impression they want to renegotiate trade deals or renegotiate trade agreements to reduce the trade deficit. In Germany or in Brussels, we want to negotiate trade agreements to open markets to reduce barriers,” Andrich said.

Discussing the current political climate, the panelists noted that there is a communication issue in selling free trade agreements like NAFTA.

“We need to bring the discussion to a different level. Globalization is good. It has helped people all over the world. It has opened markets for almost everybody,” said Dennis Wagner, CEO of BESTAR Steel Group. “We need to educate the people that we talk to. We need to start young, and we need to explain the benefits of the society that we live in.”

Eyes on immigration

Of even more pressing concern are companies’ ability to hire competitively from Europe and elsewhere.

Michael Johnson, far left, moderates a panel discussion on trade policies with, left to right, Dennis Wagner, Javier Díaz de León and Daniel Andrich.

Terri A. Simmons is a partner at Arnall Golden Gregory LLP in Atlanta. She said that while it’s virtually impossible for American companies to hire from overseas, international companies, which traditionally rely on foreign skilled workers and professionals, are struggling to find a visa for the people they want to hire.

“Right now, particularly in the Southeastern United States, German-owned business, other foreign-owned business—they’re really clamoring to find qualified people to work in the United States,” Simmons said. “We have a lot of great folks, but we don’t have enough people who have machine technology knowledge. We don’t have enough people who are bilingual and can deal with some of the global trade issues people have to deal with.”

Industry sectors of particular concern include production, manufacturing, IT and health care. The U.S. does not have enough people who are majoring in STEM fields or who have the language expertise.

“The issues that crop up then is when they’re thinly sourced from another country, where they can fill a particular niche need, they have to figure out whether a visa would be available,” Simmons said.

International companies, like American employers, are accustomed to hiring from competitors to gain an edge in the marketplace. When foreign-owned businesses are operating in the U.S., want to do that now, they face insurmountable obstacles.

The H-1B visa for professionals is limited to 65,000 recipients a year. Within four days of the April 1 opening this year, all 65,000 visas were spoken for. Last year, 199,000 H-1B visa petitions were filed for the 65,000 quota numbers. Simmons said it has become difficult to adjudicate these.

“I recently dealt with a case for a company that has 14,000 people worldwide—for an executive with that company,” Simmons said. “And the immigration service, just as proof that he was going to serve as an executive, wanted to see 60 W-2s of the Americans who would be underneath him. Just because they wouldn’t take it for granted that we were telling the truth that he was coming over as an executive even though he made seven hundred thousand dollars.”

Companies looking to fill critical positions sometimes face the difficult decision of doing so without authorization. For a C-level position, they may rely on visitor visas and have the executive fly back and forth.

In the past, immigration law did not only consider a candidate’s skill set but the importance of the skill set to the company. If it was critical to the company, the candidate was granted entrance. In his executive orders last year, Trump stipulated that companies show that they had recruited for the position before requesting to hire internationally—a time-consuming and costly exercise.

“There’s always a reason why a company wants to hire a foreign national,” Simmons said. “Because of the prevailing wage requirements of our laws, it’s usually not: ‘Come in and undercut the American workforce.’ It’s because they need somebody with a particular skill set. Or otherwise, they wouldn’t pay the fees for processing the visa—the visa is there are attorneys’ fees, there are filing fees, and so forth, they would not normally pay that.”

Simmons said there have been a record number of denials all over the country, even in Birmingham and Alabama. This leaves companies operating in the U.S. less able to compete successfully worldwide.

Another institution that suffers from tightening restrictions on educated and skilled immigration is higher education.

“I just don’t think it’s a smart policy for the United States to close out educated people or to make people work in the University of Alabama or Auburn or anywhere else, to tell them, ‘I’m sorry there’s no visa classification for you to stay in the U.S., so now that we’ve educated you, you may go home and use your education there.’ It’s sad, I think it’s quite sad,” Simmons said.

In the long run, experts said that might not bode well for the economies of Birmingham or Alabama—given the high amounts of investments from foreign companies have made in the state.
Alabama might benefit from Shelby’s mighty Senate perch

But state’s senior senator, mindful of legacy, could rein in federal spending.

Howard Koplowitz  hkoplowitz@al.com

The extent to how much the state will benefit by having Richard Shelby as chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee will depend on how Alabama’s senior senator views the responsibilities of his new role.

Does he want to continue his legacy of bringing home the bacon, or earn national praise for reining in spending?

Shelby has been a member of the prestigious panel for 25 years, and through longevity — and a little bit of luck by being in the majority party in the Senate — rose last week to chair Appropriations Committee following the retirement of former Sen. Thad Cochran of Mississippi.

With the chairmanship, Shelby will be in control of how federal money is allocated, and the first chairman of the committee from Alabama since it was established in 1857.

"Sen. Shelby probably now stands as the most powerful senator we’ve ever had from Alabama, even more powerful than Sens. (John) Sparkman and (Lister) Hill," said Parker Hamilton, an attorney and longtime Shelby confidant who was state chairman of the senator’s first re-election campaign in 1992.

“One of the things that I think now drives him is I think he sees this as an opportunity to help transform the state economically.”

While earmarks — sometimes called "pork barrel spending" — were banned from being included in spending bills when Republicans retook Congress in 2010, Hamilton argued that Shelby could be a larger champion of the state’s universities (Shelby has directed federal funding for STEM buildings at Alabama colleges), aerospace industry in Huntsville and enlarging the Mobile Ship Channel.

“We had some good years,” Shelby told AL.com in a 2010 story about earmarks. "We built a lot of good things, lasting things, that Alabama would never have gotten without direct appropriations.”

Hamilton said he would be shocked if Shelby “did not feel continuing responsibility for developing the state, and I know for a fact he does feel that responsibility and intends to fill it,” Hamilton said.

But William Stewart, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Alabama, said it would behoove Shelby to use his power to be fiscally responsible.

"He’s already gotten so much for Alabama in the past. I wouldn’t expect this to bring about a larger amount of pork our way because the budget problems have increased in magnitude and he would better serve Alabama as the chair of the Appropriations Committee if he could restrain spending rather than expand it,” Stewart said.

“I don’t think that local leaders here in Alabama, to say, ‘Hurrah, Shelby is now the chair of the Appropriations Committee, we’re going to get even more than we have in the past,” commented Stewart. “That won’t be true.”
Like Spider-Man, Shelby inherits more responsibility with his increasing power, Stewart said.

"I would predict that he is concerned about his legacy, and that he would lean toward restraining spending. This may well be his last term in the Senate, and I don't think he'd want to leave that body with the title of 'Pork King,'" Stewart said.

"He could just care about his constituency in the past, but now he is the leader of the committee, and he needs to look out for the requirements of the whole country in order to avoid getting into an impossible debt."

Now 83, Shelby is no doubt mindful of his legacy, Hamilton said, although he said he believed Shelby is thinking more about his impact on Alabama than the country.

He pointed out that Shelby, a voracious reader, was most recently reading a two-volume history of British diplomatic correspondence during World War I.

"Anyone who's interested in reading history like that has a tendency to think about the long term," he said. "He's always had that sense of legacy."
Ed department reorganized, positions and pay cut

Trisha Powell Crain  tcrain@al.com

Alabama’s state Department of Education is $4.7 million leaner, thanks to job cuts and a reorganization, the department’s interim leader said last week.

Thirty-nine jobs were eliminated within the department, Interim State Superintendent Ed Richardson said, and some employees took “substantial” salary cuts.

The Alabama Department of Personnel conducted an audit focused on right-sizing the education department over the past few months, Richardson said. One goal was to reduce the overall number of exempt positions, he said.

“Exempt people serve at the pleasure of the superintendent,” Richardson told state board of education members. “That means when the superintendent leaves, those employees are dismissed and have to be re-employed.” But Richardson said that process has not been followed in recent years, and while departments of its size in Alabama typically had five such employees, the education department had 43. The reorganization announced last week trimmed nearly half of them, and another 13 positions will be reclassified into merit positions by May, he said, leaving the department with 10 exempt employees.

The number of deputy superintendents was reduced from four to two and the chief of staff position was eliminated.

Richardson said no one was laid off or lost their job, but some employees retired, others had their titles changed, and some positions were already vacant.

The agency came under fire last year over budget concerns, and a hiring freeze was in effect until two months ago, when Richardson asked board members to lift the restriction to allow for the reorganization.

State lawmakers, Richardson said, were particularly concerned with the large number of highly paid exempt employees. “Many [exempt employees] were well above any reasonable salary schedule,” he said, with some as high as $30,000 to $35,000 above “normal” salaries.

The reorganization will group popular programs like the Alabama Reading Initiative, Alabama Science in Motion, Technology in Motion and the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative together under a newly-created unit called Professional Learning to be led by Jeff Langham.

For more information on the reorganization, see Crain’s full organizational chart published at al.com/education.
SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH

3 of 4 finalists are from Alabama

Trisha Powell Crain tcrain@al.com

Alabama’s next superintendent of education could very well have first-hand knowledge of state schools.

State Board of Education members on Friday named four finalists in their search to replace Michael Sentance, three of them from Alabama. Finalists include:

- Craig Pouncey, former state deputy superintendent and now superintendent of Jefferson County schools;
- Kathy Murphy, superintendent of Hoover city schools;
- Eric Mackey, School Superintendents of Alabama executive director; and
- Robert Scott, former Texas Education Commissioner.

Board members will interview the four finalists April 20 and plan to appoint a superintendent the same day.

Finalists accumulated the most points in a scoring process designed to objectively narrow a group of seven semifinalists.

Other semifinalists included Kimber Halliburton, director of schools in Washington County, Tennessee; Maria Pitre-Martín, deputy state superintendent in North Carolina; and Jeffrey Moss, superintendent in

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FINALISTS
FROM A1

Beaufort County, South Carolina. Moss has been named an alternate in the final process, and would be invited to interview should any of the four named finalists decline to pursue the job.

The state board of education is searching for a superintendent for the second time in less than two years. Former Massachusetts Secretary of Education Michael Sentance was named to the post in August 2016 but resigned under fire from the board in September. Gov. Kay Ivey, who serves as president of the state board by virtue of her position, started Friday's meeting by telling board members, "This is probably the most important decision we will make during the tenure of our service on this board." Ivey has been hands-on in the search and afterwards said she was pleased with the process.

Interim Superintendent Ed Richardson did not attend the meeting, but in a statement to AL.com, said, "The process was thorough and produced qualified finalists. The interviews are usually more instructive. The State Board is fully engaged and understands the importance of this decision."

Board members spent the morning reviewing candidate applications and used a scoring system to compare one candidate to another for each of the seven semifinalists. Officials with the board's search firm, Ray and Associates, presented the final tabulations and the top four point-getters became the finalists.

ERIC MACKEY

Mackey's 25-year education career has been spent in Alabama's public schools. He started teaching high school science in Calhoun County in 1993 and rose through the ranks as an assistant principal, principal, and then superintendent of Jacksonville City Schools for eight years, from 2002 to 2010. He transitioned from assistant executive director to executive director of the School Superintendents of Alabama from 2010 to 2011 where he continues to work.

The SSA is a professional organization for superintendents and their executive leadership teams, according to its website.

In his application letter, Mackey wrote, "Because I believe in a bright future for our state and the young people who live here, I am compelled by conviction to place my name in consideration."

Mackey, 48, told AL.com on Friday afternoon he was excited to become a finalist. "It certainly would be a great honor to lead Alabama schools."

Mackey has worked with state superintendents since 2011 and understands what is expected in the position. "It's a challenging job," he told AL.com, "but it's one that I'm up for and ready for."
Mackey holds a doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Alabama in 2001.

KATHY MURPHY
Murphy became superintendent of Hoover schools in 2015 after spending four years as superintendent in Monroe County. Murphy began her career in education in 1984, teaching junior high physical education in Auburn City schools. She also taught in colleges, first at Judson College in Marion from 1985 to 1988, and then at the University of West Georgia from 1988 to 1993.

Murphy, 59, has been a principal of Greenville Middle School, Greenville High School, and Charles Henderson High School, all in Alabama. She served as an administrative assistant to the superintendent in Butler County Schools from 2008 to 2010.

In her application letter to board members, Murphy wrote, “After eight years of college teaching and 35 years in public education, I remain steadfast in my commitment to serve children, to support teachers, and to guide the decision-making process in finding solutions to the myriad of issues demanding our attention.”

Murphy told AL.com on Friday she was excited to be named a finalist and looking forward to talking with board members during her interview next week, “I hope that once I have an opportunity to talk with the board that I can demonstrate my record of success, that I can demonstrate the passion in my heart for teaching and learning and for children.”

Murphy earned a doctorate in education from Auburn University in 1987. In 1995, she earned an Educational Specialist degree from Auburn University in Montgomery.

CRAIG POUNCEY
Pouncey has been superintendent of Jefferson County schools since 2014, after spending 11 years in top administration at the Alabama Department of Education. From 2010 until 2014, Pouncey, 59, served as deputy superintendent of Education Administration and Financial Services at the department.

Pouncey’s education career began in 1980 teaching school in Montgomery County. He taught for 13 years in Crenshaw County before serving as assistant principal for one year, then was elected superintendent of Crenshaw County schools. He served as superintendent for eight years prior to working at the state department of education.

In his application letter, Pouncey wrote, “In my 34 years of public service, my commitment to the advancement of public education has never wavered. As State Superintendent, my commitment to the students of Alabama will always be my number one priority as we continue to propel public education forward today and beyond by building a system of partnership under a common leadership focused on moving Alabama forward.”

Pouncey, 59, told AL.com on Friday he was looking forward to working through the process and having an opportunity to share his thoughts with board members. Pouncey said he has experience across the state working to improve education. “When you consider what I’ve done here in Jefferson County for four years,” he said, “my track record pretty well speaks for itself.”

Pouncey earned a doctorate in Educational Leadership from Sanford University in 2010.

He was a finalist for the job when Sessom was hired, and has sued state education officials, including state board member Mary Scott Hunter, over the handling of an anonymous complaint that he alleges cost him the job in 2016. A Dec. 10 trial date has been set. That complaint, a complaint of emails from 2009, alleged Pouncey plagiarized his dissertation and used his office for personal gain, The allegations were proven false.

ROBERT SCOTT
Scott is a former state education commissioner, a position similar to state superintendent in Texas, where he served from 2001 until 2007 after being appointed by Gov. Rick Perry. He served as chief deputy commissioner from 2003 until 2007 and was for two years before that Perry’s public education adviser.

Scott has experience serving as a liaison between the Texas Education Agency and state legislators in various capacities from 1994 through 2000.

His current job as principal at the Texas Star Alliance in Austin, an integrated public affairs firm with offices in Austin and Houston, is to provide “strategic counsel to state and national clients on education issues,” according to his application.

In his application letter, Scott wrote, “As Commissioner, I focused on improving graduation rates in Texas, increasing college-readiness rates and early childhood education.”

Scott earned a law degree from the University of Texas in 2000.

Scott did not immediately return a request from AL.com for comment.
A few highlights from the 2018 Legislative Session

MY TURN
Cities to gain from tax change

New law allows for the collection of sales taxes from online purchases

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

State lawmakers have changed rules regarding sales tax collections that could shore up some of the revenue losses being experienced by local governments across Alabama.

House Bill 470, sponsored by Rep. Rod Scott, D-Fairfield, and signed into law by Republican Gov. Kay Ivey last week, alters the rules of online sales tax collections to include those purchases made from third-party sellers through online marketplaces, like Amazon.com.

The law, which takes effect on Jan. 1, brings these third-party sales under the Simplified Sellers Use Tax (SSUT) program, which allows for the collection of sales taxes from online purchases.

Before the SSUT was launched in 2015, online sellers with no physical presence in the state had no obligation to collect and remit use taxes on sales made within the state.

Not only did this result in millions of dollars of revenue lost, but it also meant that brick-and-mortar retailers in the state, which do collect and remit sales tax, were at a competitive disadvantage.

The SSUT provides a method for eligible online sellers to voluntarily collect and remit a flat, statewide 8 percent tax on all items delivered into Alabama, but the current rules do not require these marketplaces for third-party retailers to collect on behalf of those third parties.

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HB470 changes that by requiring collection or reporting the sales to the state and notifying customers.

Scott’s legislation also changes the distribution of the local share of SSUT collections.

Of the 8 percent remitted, the state now receives half of those collections while municipalities and county government’s evenly split the other half.

About 150 businesses – or about 1 percent of those that actually conduct business online in Alabama – have signed on to the program.

This means that, in fiscal 2017, the city of Tuscaloosa received about $409,000 in SSUT proceeds while Tuscaloosa County got about $533,000.

But with HB470, the state still will get its half, but 60 percent of the local distribution will go to municipalities and counties will get 40 percent.

“This legislation will help bring about a competitive balance between brick-and-mortar retailers in Alabama and third-party online sellers, while streamlining the collection of use taxes that are currently due on online transactions," Ivey said in a news release announcing the signing of the bill. “Use taxes are an important funding resource for Alabama’s General Fund and local governments, and the monies collected will be used to improve and expand much needed services.”

In Tuscaloosa alone, the annual revenue losses from online sales tax revenue is estimated to be about $7.5 million.

While the percentage shift to give cities 60 percent of the SSUT revenue while including third-party sales could stand to shrink this shortfall, it's not expected to close it completely.

But it is, at least, a step toward correcting the problem, which is something federal lawmakers do not seem interested in doing.

Last month, during a visit to Tuscaloosa, U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell told the Tuscaloosa City Council she was aware of the sales tax collection concerns. She also said she was aware of efforts to redress these shortfalls in the past, such as recent attempts that stalled in the U.S. Senate despite Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin telling a Senate Appropriations Committee last summer that the collection of sales taxes from online purchases is an issue "we've been looking at very carefully with the administration, and we expect to come out with a position shortly."

Now, Sewell said, online sales tax reform simply isn't on the Top 10 list of important matters for congressional leaders.

"It's just not on the radar on the House side," she said.

This puts the burden on the state, which the City Council and Mayor Walt Maddox turned to earlier this year in an attempt to address the issue.

In fact, Scott’s bill doesn’t accomplish some of the things requested of the local state delegation in January.

Maddox asked the delegation to consider altering the distribution model of the SSUT by calling the current 50-50 split by cities and counties unfair, primarily because most of the retail centers of a county lie within the corporate limits of municipalities.

"Commercial sales have nothing to do with population. Commercial sales have everything to do with where those sales are occurring," Maddox said then.

And unless some sweeping changes are made toward how online sales are taxed in Alabama, the entire state stands to suffer, he said.

"Sales tax is analogous to a comet hitting the earth. The comet has hit the earth, and sales taxes are the dinosaurs," Maddox said. "We're all going to be impacted by it, from Huntsville to Mobile."

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State allots $11M to behavioral health

Lawmakers assign millions for services for Medicaid-eligible children

The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY
Gov. Kay Ivey said Alabama lawmakers have set aside $11 million in the recently passed budgets for behavioral health services for Medicaid-eligible children.

The funding is aimed at expanding community and home-based services, Al.com reported. It's being offered by the Alabama Department of Mental Health for children and youth with severe emotional disturbance and those with autism spectrum disorder.

"These are needed services that I believe will help many of our children and youth live happier, more productive lives," Ivey said in a statement. "At the same time, these services will help us save money in other areas. This proves that in Alabama, we can be both compassionate and good stewards of taxpayer dollars."

Vivian Spears' adult son lives with autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disabilities. She said she is pleased with the additional funding.

"It definitely should improve the quality of life for children and youth, and it brings hope to families and caregivers who are affected by autism spectrum disorder," Spears said.

Federal matching dollars will add an additional

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$25 million for a total of $36 million in available funding for the 2019 fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1.

Two years ago, the Alabama Disability Advocacy Program and the Center for Public Representation filed a complaint with state officials alleging the state’s Medicaid program was violating federal law by not providing adequate screening and home or community-based services for more than 25,000 eligible children and youth with "behavioral, emotional and/or psychiatric disabilities."

"This funding will enable poor children with severe emotional disturbances and autism spectrum disorders to obtain life-altering services," ADAP's Legal Director Geron Gadd said. "These services are not only clinically effective, they are cost-effective, and we are heartened that the state is acting to meet the long-unmet needs of these children."
Rural economy hinges on internet

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

LIVINGSTON — U.S. Sen. Doug Jones cast high-speed internet access in Alabama’s rural counties as critical to the future of the state’s economy.

“As you look at what is happening in your world, everything is going more online. If we lose out, if we are still far behind, it is going to cost rural communities people, not just jobs,” Jones said to the audience of the Alabama Summit on Rural Technology at the University of West Alabama on Friday.

Jones was among a panel of speakers that included local and county officials, researchers, industry and business leaders and state lawmakers. The summit was presented by UWA and AT&T. The panelists discussed the future and importance of technology in Alabama’s rural counties, including the Black Belt.

The state’s junior senator and the other panelists argued that broadband internet access is critical

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ECONOMY

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infrastructure that affects economic development, education, health care and quality of life. They noted that census projections for the next 30 years predict continuing population declines.

Jones also cast access as an issue of disparity in the state where rural regions struggle with access.

“We have got to make sure we change that,” Jones said. “We are beginning to address those disparities. In the more populated areas it is easier. As we have been discussing today, it is more difficult in rural areas. The cost of fiber is extremely expensive ... But the fact of the matter is, one of the things that I have talked about so much is giving everyone an equal opportunity no matter what zip code they live in, to give every child the same opportunity.”

UWA President Ken Tucker said the summit begins a dialogue among the participants that the university hopes will continue and eventually lead to the development of action plans to address the needs.

“Really for us, it is to identify gaps that exists so we can begin the conversations on how do we fill these gaps” said Tina Jones, executive director of the division of Economic Development and Outreach at UWA.

The problems facing the state’s rural regions are too large to be fixed by one person, she said. The collaboration allows for a conversation that has never existed.

The panelists envision a public-private partnership involving local, state, and federal governments and industry partners.

“I can tell you how we succeed in public policy in Alabama and how we fail. We fail if we sit and wait on Montgomery to solve our problems,” said Sonny Brasfield, executive director of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama.

One of the goals is to identify communities or groups that can take on the tasks based on resources, Tina Jones said.

State Sen. Clay Schofield noted that while the state has created a grant program to incentivize companies to provide service in underserved communities, rural communities need to continue to lobby and advocate for investment in broadband as infrastructure.

The state must approach rural internet access as a generational issue, Schofield said.

“Until we accept that and we realize that and realize that the future is now, we will keep falling behind. Because our young folks are not going to come back. The opportunities are not going to be there,” he said.

Wayne Hutchens, AT&T Alabama president, said the company is adding additional fiber capacity and wireless coverage in the state. Among the efforts is a rural wireless initiative begun last summer, which has reached 32 counties in the state so far.

“We are getting out where it makes economic sense,” he said.

Future technologies may be able to bring connectivity to rural areas via existing power lines, Hutchens said. AT&T is running trials in Georgia and internationally for Project AirGig, which would provide low-cost multi-gigabit broadband over powerlines.

As the summit concluded, Tina Jones encouraged the participants to extend their investment in the effort to bring broadband to the rural areas of the state beyond a day spent in Livingston.

“We can create plans all day long. But we have to have specific action steps,” she said.
FISCAL YEAR 2019 EDUCATION BUDGET

Education Checkbook
Alabama schools net largest education budget in a decade

Education Trust Fund grand totals
BILLIONS OF DOLLARS

$6.7B
The state's highest education funding was in 2008

$6.63B
Largest since 2008, considered high-water mark for education funding in Alabama + $216 million from 2018

Source: Alabama Legislative Services Agency. Note: Numbers not adjusted for inflation.

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Alabama's newly approved $6.63 billion education budget is "a very big deal," according to Rep. Bill Poole, the Tuscaloosa Republican who chairs the education committee in the Alabama House. Being able to invest this much in education, from pre-K through colleges, he said, offers evidence Alabama's economy is recovering after the recession of 2008 and 2009.

Most education revenue comes from income and sales taxes. Alabama has lagged behind other states in the pace of recovery, and school funding dropped by more than a billion dollars after a peak of $6.7 billion in 2008.

The amounts lawmakers allocate in the budget don't represent the full amount of what is spent on education. A large portion of the total spending is earmarked to certain agencies or functions every year and doesn't need approval from lawmakers. For example, for the current year, lawmakers approved a $6.4 billion education budget. But an additional $8.6 billion in federal and local tax dollars will be spent to support education in 2018, bringing the total to $15 billion.

2019 Education funding highlights

First Class Pre-K
$96M
+$18.5M from 2018
Will help add at least 100 classrooms and 1,400 students across the state

K-12 schools
$4.6B
+$146M

Higher education
$1.7B
+$60 million

› Universities +$42M
› Community colleges +$18M
Allocations made to other agencies (including the Department of Commerce, the Department of Examiners of Public Accounts, Department of Archives and History, the Alabama Law Institute) in the ETF total $381 million, or 6 percent of the ETF.

Teacher boost
› Employees in K-12 and community colleges will net a 2.5 percent pay raise, costing $102 million.
› Increases in professional development for K-12 include a $90 per teacher allocation, up from $77 this year. With more than 42,000 teachers statewide, that increase is worth nearly $600,000, for a total of more than $4.2 million.
› Lawmakers also allocated $2.4 million for "Teacher Professional Development Training," up from $1.7 million this year and $974,000 the year before. That money is mostly earmarked for new computer science training.

› Classroom materials and support are provided through the Foundation Program. Schools can expect to receive more than $1,000 in classroom support, the most since 2008, for each teacher for which the state provides funds. That money can be used for classroom tech and student materials.

K-12 textbooks
$51.1M
+$11M
Textbook funding was hit hard during the recession, dropping to $16 per student for 2011 and 2012, around $30 for the next three years, and rising just above $50 to $55 per student by 2016, where it has remained until next year's allocation of $70 per student.

Transportation
$347.5M
+$8.7M
Includes:
Transportation operations
$307M
+$6.1M
Purchase of new buses
$40.5M
+$2.6M

Library funds
$4.5M
+$3M
Free speech at the University of Alabama: History speaks to the present

In the spring of 1970, the Emphasis committee tried to invite Yippie activist Abby Hoffman to debate former Gov. George Wallace. The Tuscaloosa News bailed the incident on campus. The university president vespred students to submit demands to the Dean of Student Affairs for reconsideration by a committee of faculty, administrators, and students. The committee then passed its recommendation to President Rose for final determination. In October 1968, attempts by the newly founded Democratic Students Organization (DSO) to do away with the process failed. DSO challenged the process by submitting a slate of speakers that included Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver and avowed communist Herbert Aptheker. The committee unanimously recommended against the invitation. Rose agreed, DSO sued and lost. The decision was appropriate given the state’s political context. At the behest of the Wallace administration in 1965 and again in 1967, the Legislature had considered a “speak-in” bill. Rose and the university opposed the bill because it gave the state’s local authority as an organization’s agenda. Nevertheless, the principle of academic freedom is fundamentally important. Every student and faculty member can decide whether or not to attend; however, disrupting a speaker who opposes your ideas is unworthy of liberal academia. Doing so will play to Taylor’s constituency while diminishing the academic freedom essential to the liberal scholarly ethos. If that happens, the University of Alabama loses.

Earl Tilford earned his B.A. and M.A. in history at the University of Alabama and his Ph.D. at George Washington University. He taught history at Grove City (Pa.) College. Now retired, he lives in Tuscaloosa.
White nationalist Jared Taylor no longer speaking at University of Alabama

By: Jonece Dunigan

Self-identified white nationalist Jared Taylor will no longer be speaking at the University of Alabama because the student organization that invited Taylor to campus is now inactive.

Political group Students for America First invited Taylor last month for a lecture at Russell Hall auditorium titled "Diversity: Is it Good For America?". He was scheduled to speak on Thursday.

University officials stated in an email on Monday that the group's registered status has been withdrawn.

"For any student group to host an event through UA's student event registration process, it must be a registered student organization, which requires, among other things, having a full-time UA faculty or staff advisor," the statement reads. "This content-neutral policy applies to all student groups, regardless of a group's views or the substance of its proposed event."

UA stated the group had an opportunity to comply with the requirements before the withdrawal, but was unable to do so.

The announcement of Taylor appearance sparked uncomfortable feelings for many students and staff at UA. Taylor is the editor of American Renaissance, a website that publishes theories about how blacks and other minorities are inferior to whites, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

University president Stuart Bell stressed in a statement last month that the student organization invited Taylor on campus and not the school. He encouraged students and faculty not to attend the event.

"Many in the campus community, including campus leadership, have strong feelings against the messages this person may espouse. The security of our campus is our absolute priority," Stuart stated. "Hate and bigotry have no place at The University of Alabama. Our community is diverse, inclusive and accepting, and we are committed to treating one another respectfully. We value the ways diversity enriches our University community."

Bell also noted that as a public university, the law and UA's commitment to free speech do not allow it to refuse the speaker based on the content of speech. Monday's email stated that if Students for America First becomes active again, the group will be able to re-register and will have the ability to host events and invite speakers.
Marlon Humphrey hits the books after his first NFL season

By: Mark Inabinett

Cornerback Marlon Humphrey left Alabama early for the NFL. But that didn't mean he was through with school.

Humphrey has been back in Tuscaloosa this spring working on his degree.

The Baltimore Ravens selected Humphrey with the 16th choice in the 2017 NFL Draft. Returning to school meant a return home for Humphrey, whose father, Bobby Humphrey, also was an Alabama standout as well as a two-time 1,000-yard rusher in the NFL.

The elder Humphrey, who said it would be "very special" to attend his son's graduation ceremony, is hoping Marlon enjoys a football career that's "triple" what he did. Marlon Humphrey played in every game and made five starts as a rookie for the Ravens. He intercepted two passes, made 34 tackles and took over a full-time role in the final four games of the season, when he was on the field for all but three of the Ravens' defensive snaps with Jimmy Smith sidelined.


"I felt like I had a pretty decent year, rookie year," Humphrey said at the end of the season. "I enjoyed the way I came into the season, not coming in the starter at the beginning. I never have really enjoyed special teams as much as I have this year, because (of special teams coordinator) Jerry (Rosburg) ... I never thought I could have that much fun playing special teams, honestly, even running down on kickoffs or playing gunner on punt return.

"I was definitely blessed to receive some reps not being the No. 1 or No. 2 corner. On all the teams I have been on in the past, the third corner has never really played as long as the No. 1 or No. 2 corners were healthy. As the season went on and Jimmy went down, I was able to get out there and start. They definitely used me in a pretty good way, and I felt like when I had to go in and start, I was ready to go."

Humphrey will be working with a new defensive coordinator this season. Dean Pees retired at the end of last season, then changed his mind and became the Tennessee Titans Baltimore promoted linebackers coach Don "Wink" Martindale to defensive coordinator.

"I think he has tremendous upside," Martindale said of Humphrey during the coach's introductory press conference. "He's tough. He's competitive. He has a great skill set. You guys have seen it; you have covered this team long enough. The jump from their rookie year to their sophomore season, where they actually get a little bit of an offseason to recover and start lifting again -- he is going to take off."

At Alabama, Humphrey played on the CFP national-championship team in 2015, the first of his two seasons in the Crimson Tide secondary.

See next page
Humphrey was a three-time All-State selection and an Under Armour, USA Today and Parade All-American and played on two AHSAA Class 6A championship teams at Hoover High School.
United States
celebrating in the
least diversity of
color and conflict at
source of tension
inherently a
Diversity is

- Jared Taylor

- George Hayley

that sort of thing.
I don't see, if you please in a way that
Amendment ap
Right, so the First
amendment
Please have free speech
different groups

White nationalist speaker sparks controversy

See next page
However, a subsection of the organization's constitution contradicts the language in the press release. SFAF's official constitution listed on the Source as of March 30 states that one of the purposes of the organization is to "sponsor speakers that are aligned with the general purpose of this association to bring their message to campus."

Bruce Barrett, an associate professor of statistics in the Culverhouse College of Commerce, was SFAF's original faculty advisor. Barrett resigned his advising position at the end of March, a move that was announced via a tweet from the official SFAF Twitter account.

The tweet read in part that Barrett was "not fully informed of Jared Taylor's polarizing statements on race and identity."

Barrett provided a statement regarding his resignation to The Crimson White.

"As a Follower of Christ, and with the privilege of representing The University of Alabama, I cannot lend my support or even acquiescence to the advancement of ideas that expand racial divisions," Barrett said. He has asked readers to view the statement in its entirety. It is available at the end of the online version of this story.

Some members of SFAF's executive board have also resigned their positions, including Andrew Williams who resigned from his role as president Sunday. Williams wasn't available for comment at the time of publication.

The University reacts:
Members of the UA community were swift to express anger and frustration regarding Taylor's upcoming visit. The flyer advertising Taylor's speech was widely shared on social media, and some posts were accompanied by impassioned captions speaking out against Taylor's views and upcoming visit.

The Harley Barber incident is — that's not a starting point. That's an eruption.

- Amber Scales

Austin Schutz, a graduate teaching assistant in the department of political science, wrote one such Facebook post. It was shared and reposted across social media, especially within the progressive community on campus. The post warned students about the event, and Schutz indicated his disappointment in the University for allowing someone with Taylor's views to come speak.
The campus environment at The University of Alabama is toxic — and as long as students continue to hold views like that of Students for America First — it always will be,” Schutz said in the post.

In an email Schutz sent to The Crimson White, he detailed a meeting he had with Steven Hood, associate vice president for student affairs. Schutz said, “[the University administration's] main concern will be the safety of students during the talk, and they believe the ideal situation is one in which students do not attend, or attend counter events.”

Some progressive groups like the Black Student Union, Crossroads and Spectrum are working together to hold a number of counter-events focused on celebrating diversity.

Amber Scales, a junior majoring in public relations and theatre and director of diversity, equity and inclusion for the Student Government Association, said counter-events are the best way to show opposition to figures like Taylor because they often come seeking spectacle and attention.

“You don’t want to give that person the time of day,” Scales said. “You don’t want to show up and let them make the counter-argument that these people are so snowflake that they won’t even let us have this conversation. So if their whole thing is free speech, fine, have that speech, but that speech should be to the lowest number of people possible.”

Shortly after SFAF publicized the Taylor event, University of Alabama President Stuart R. Bell sent a campus-wide email addressing the issue. The email encouraged students to refrain from attending the event, as well as explained the University’s legal obligation to allow Taylor on campus.

“As a public university, the law and our commitment to free speech do not allow us to refuse a speaker based on the content of speech,” Bell said in the statement. “This speaker was invited by a registered student organization that followed appropriate policies and processes. The best way to demonstrate distaste for hateful dialogue is not to give it an audience.”

The University administration declined to comment further on the matter, directing any request for a statement back to Bell’s email.

Bell’s email echoed the recent messages about Harley Barber and another student who left the University following racist videos. The style of top-down communication to the campus community in response to racially charged events has been criticized by students with views like Schutz.

Some in the campus community such as Scales see the Harley Barber video and Taylor’s upcoming speech as simply a continuation — perhaps even a culmination — of the University of Alabama’s long and sordid history of racism.

“The Harley Barber incident is — that’s not a starting point,” Scales said. “That’s an eruption.”

The campus environment at The University of Alabama is toxic.

- Austin Schutz

“When you have buildings named after eugenacists, Ku Klux Klan dragons and white supremacists, it’s not then odd that there are students who come here with those same views, because if our history isn’t being addressed ... we can’t then expect students to understand everything it means to attend The University of Alabama.”

This University has reckoned with racism in the past, and it’s reckoning with it now. Taylor is but the latest manifestation of The University of Alabama’s history, and it’s up to the students to decide how it’s addressed.
Memorabilia recovered after theft

According to court

The young men will face a trial in the legal proceedings, but no trial date has been set.

All of the items have been returned to the college, and the investigation is ongoing.

and a football

Thieves also took watches.

The Tuscaloosa News

Saturday, April 14, 2018
Blitz raises $1.8M for UA

First-time fundraiser held Wednesday and Thursday

Staff report

A new fundraising effort generated more than $1.8 million in donations, University of Alabama officials said Friday.

Bama Blitz began Wednesday and ended Thursday. The timeframe for the inaugural fundraiser was one day, eight hours and 31 minutes, in recognition of $31, the year UA was founded.

Donors from 49 states pledged $1,810,269 during Bama Blitz, UA officials said. The fundraiser included “challenges” between colleges and schools within UA and gifts were charted on a real-time leaderboard online.

“This type of time-limited, focused fundraising initiative has become very popular in the world of higher education, and we are glad to have our own version off the ground at the Capstone,” said Bob Pierce, UA vice president for advancement.

Of the 1,810 gifts received during Bama Blitz, 98 percent were $500 or less.

Some of the more substantial commitments highlighted by UA included:

· A $500,000 gift from the Frances and Jeffrey Fisher Charitable Foundation for construction of the new Performing Arts Academic Center.

· A $20,000 matching gift from Denise and Phil Webb of Anniston in support of the Crimson Tide Scholarship Fund.

· A $15,000 matching gift from the UA Library Leadership Board in support of University Libraries.

“The greatest success of Bama Blitz are the students who will be impacted through the incredible amount of donations from the UA family,” said Mary Lawhorn, director of annual giving.

UA will conduct the next Bama Blitz in April 2019.
A well-deserved honor for Coach Nick Saban

Coach Saban sent another important message in his first season at Alabama through his commitment to the academic success of his players. His fall 2007 freshmen compiled a 3.1 grade point average, and Coach Saban began a record of consistently producing one of Division I football’s best academic achievement and graduation rates.

The 2009 season became one of the most memorable in Alabama football history when the Crimson Tide went 14-0 and won the BCS National Championship by defeating Texas, 37-21, in the Rose Bowl. The 2009 season reached a milestone in the program’s history when Mark Ingram became the Crimson Tide’s first

Heisman Trophy winner. That 14-0 season earned Coach Saban signal recognition as the first recipient of the Bobby Bowden National Coach of the Year Award.

Over his 11 years at the Capstone, Coach Saban’s teams have achieved extraordinary success: a record of 132-20, 10 wins or more in each of his last 10 seasons, five SEC championships and six national titles. We all take great pride that Alabama is the only team in the country to earn a berth in the national championship playoff in all four years of the playoff’s existence.

Coach Saban’s record also reflects his tremendous talent and proven success as a developer of players and coaches. Alabama has had more players (65) drafted by the pros in the last nine years than any other school. Ten players were drafted last year, which set a new record for the University of Alabama. Six former Saban assistant coaches have gone on to head coaching positions: Kirby Smart (Georgia), Jeremy Pruitt (Tennessee), Mario Cristobal (Oregon), Lane Kiffin (Florida Atlantic), Jim McElwain (Colorado State/Florida) and Curt Cignetti (Elon).
coaching positions: Kirby Smart (Georgia), Jeremy Pruitt (Tennessee), Mario Cristobal (Oregon), Lane Kiffin (Florida Atlantic), Jim McElwain (Colorado State/Florida) and Curt Cignetti (Elon).

The professional success of Coach Saban's players has been matched by their academic achievements. Alabama had 25 graduates take the field for the 2018 Sugar Bowl game, and over the last five years the Tide has had 126 players suit up for bowl games with their degrees in hand.

Following a legend like Coach Paul Bryant is not easy. Coach Saban has done so with success, class and integrity. In 2018, he joined Coach Bryant as one of only two winners of six national championships.

Nick Saban is more than a very successful football coach. He and his wife, Terry, are highly respected and engaged pillars of our community. Through their foundation, Nick's Kids, they have contributed more than $6 million to civic organizations, $1 million to the university's First Generation Scholarship Fund and have completed 17 Habitat for Humanity houses.

The University of Alabama and the Tuscaloosa community are better because Nick and Terry Saban have made our community their family's home. The 2018 Circle of Honor Award is a wonderful tribute to a great leader and role model.

Congratulations!

Robert E. Witt, now retired, was president of the University of Alabama from March 2003–March 2012 and chancellor of the University of Alabama System from March 2012–August 2016.
Activities set for A-Day game

Fans can see title trophy, buy authentic gear

By Ken Roberts
City Editor

Fans at the University of Alabama's spring football game can have their picture taken with the national championship trophy and purchase authentic game gear at an athletic department garage sale.

The A-Day game is set to kick off at 1 p.m. April 21 at Bryant-Denny Stadium. Admission is free.

Some of the other highlights of A-Day include the Walk of Fame ceremony, where the 2017 captains will set their hands and cleats in cement at Denny Chimes, an alumni flag football game with former star players and the opportunity for fans to walk on the field and take selfies after the game.

The UA softball and baseball teams also have games

See GAME, A5

A-Day Spring Game

When: 1 p.m. April 21
Where: Bryant-Denny Stadium
Admission: Free
TV: ESPN

See next page
GAME

Continued from A1

scheduled after the conclusion of the A-Day game.

In addition to free admission to the A-Day game, parking will also be free on the east side of campus. Shuttles will run from the east side of campus and University Mall.

Fans who want to sit in the lower bowl can enter the stadium through the west side gates, 10-13 and 16-19, and the east side gates, 34-36 and 38-40. Upper level seats can be accessed through the spirals at gates 5, 21, 29 and 46. Public elevators at gates 5 and 43 available will be available for fans to get to the upper levels of the stadium.

Last year’s game drew a crowd of 74,326.

Here’s a schedule of activities for April 21:
- **8 a.m.**: Mercedes Benz Fan Fest area opens. Fans can take their picture with the national championship trophy, get autographs from former players and purchase game-worn gear at the garage sale. The fan fest will be adjacent to the stadium.
- **10 a.m.**: Bryant-Denny stadium gates open.
- **10:30-11:15 a.m.**: Alumni flag football game.
- **11:15 a.m.**: Walk of Fame ceremony at Denny Chimes on the Quad. Captains of the 2017 national championship team will put their hand and cleat prints into cement for permanent display.
- **11:50 a.m.**: Walk of Champions; fans can cheer as UA coaches and players enter the stadium.
- **1 p.m.**: Kick-off; fans will have access to the field after the game.
- **4:30 p.m.**: UA softball vs. Tennessee at Rhodes Stadium.
- **7 p.m.**: UA baseball vs. Auburn at Sewell-Thomas Stadium.
MSU students charged in UA break-in

Police say students stole memorabilia from athletic facility

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

Four Mississippi State University students were arrested after police said they broke into the Mal Moore Athletic Facility and stole memorabilia last week.

The University of Alabama declined to answer questions about the investigation Wednesday, including what was stolen and whether the items have been recovered.

MSU Chief communications officer Sid Salter issued a statement Wednesday afternoon:

"Mississippi State University does not condone this activity," he said. "Mississippi State is cooperating with authorities in this investigation. The young men will have to bear responsibility for their actions, whatever they were. The legal process will play out. MSU doesn't have a role in the legal process, but will monitor that process."

According to court documents, the four young men were caught on surveillance video breaking into the complex at 1102 Coliseum Drive at 2:17 a.m. the morning of April 4. A UAPD officer wrote in charging documents that items stolen included "various items of memorabilia from within."

UA Police obtained warrants to charge each suspect Friday. Documents indicate each was arrested on a felony third-degree burglary charge Monday and released the same day on $7,500 bond.

A UA spokesman declined to say how police were alerted to the burglary or provide any further details.

The documents indicate all four men are students at Mississippi State University.

The students arrested include Samuel Tanner Fittes, 21, of Columbus, Mississippi; John Thomas Badley, 20, of Laurel, Mississippi; Joel Harper Hudnall, 20, of Madison, Mississippi; and Joshua Jordan, 21, of Starkville, Mississippi.

The complex was unoccupied when the alleged burglary occurred.
WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump hailed the University of Alabama football team's "win for the ages" in their latest championship season.

Trump hosted Crimson Tide coach Nick Saban and his players at the White House on Tuesday to honor their fifth national title in nine years.

The president attended the championship game in Atlanta, in which Alabama staged a second-half comeback to defeat Georgia 26-23 in overtime. Trump said backup quarterback Tua Tagovailoa's winning touchdown pass in overtime to fellow freshman DeVonta Smith after a sack "will go down as one of the most exciting finishes in college football history — of any sport."

Trump watched the Jan. 8 game from a private box overlooking the Alabama sideline. The president left the stadium during halftime as Georgia led Alabama 13-0.

See FOOTBALL, A7

Online
See more photos from the White House ceremony at www.tuscaloosanews.com.

President Donald Trump, right, holds up a jersey he was presented with by Alabama team captains Bradley Bozeman, left, and Rashaan Evans, center, during an event for the 2017 NCAA National Champion University of Alabama football team on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington on Tuesday. (AP PHOTO/SUSAN WALSH)
President Donald Trump is presented with a team helmet by the 2017 NCAA football national champions, the Alabama Crimson Tide, during a ceremony honoring the champions on the White House’s South Lawn in Washington on Tuesday. To the right of the president is head coach Nick Saban. [AP PHOTO/MANUEL BALCE CENETA]

FOOTBALL

From Page A1

Trump said Alabama’s triumph was “one of the greatest victories ever.”

Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a former Alabama senator, was among those on the South Lawn for the team visit.

Trump praised Saban’s “Process” for success and said the coach could “make a lot of money” if he were able to sell the formula.

“In the national championship game, you stuck to ‘The Process,’ even when it was looking pretty tough,” the president said. “I was watching. I said, ‘Coach, not looking too good.’ Down 13-to-nothing at halftime to a great Georgia team, these champions fought back as they did all season long. And they kept fighting and fighting.”

Trump also singled out individual players, including center Bradley Bozeman, who proposed to his girlfriend on the field after the game. Trump asked: “She’s still with you?”

“She is. Luckily,” Bozeman responded.

Saban talked about what the White House visit meant to the team.

“You know, not many people get invited to the White House, so not many people get invited to see the president and meet the president,” he said. “So this is a special day for our team. A team that is being honored here because of their achievements in terms of winning the college football national championship, which makes me very proud.”
UAB BUYS PROPERTY IN HOOVER FOR MEDICAL BUILDING PROJECT

The University of Alabama at Birmingham Health System has purchased property in Hoover’s Stadium Trace Village development with plans for a new medical office building.

UAB plans to build a 19,000-square-foot facility to house a variety of medical services, including primary care, oral surgery, OB/GYN services and other specialties. According to public records, UAB purchased the property for $1.95 million from Broad Metro LLC.

Stadium Trace Village, a mixed-use development off Alabama 150 and Stadium Trace Parkway at Interstate 459, is being developed by Broad Metro.

The project – one of our Commercial Real Estate Deals of the Year – will include restaurants, hotel, specialty retail and a grocery store on a 40-acre development.

The UAB clinic in Hoover at 2321 Alabama 150 will move to the new location when it opens. Construction is expected to begin in early 2019 and open in early 2020.

“We are committed to providing outstanding health care to Alabamians,” said Will Ferniany, CEO of the UAB Health System. “To achieve that aim, we recognize the need to bring our expertise and our outstanding facilities to the places where people work and live. The Hoover medical office building continues our efforts to make it easier for residents of Alabama, especially west Jefferson County, to access the world-class care available from UAB Medicine.”

Will Kadish, marketing director for Broad Metro, said UAB’s decision to locate in Stadium Trace Village is a giant step forward in the company’s plan to create an enduring development.

“Exceptional health care is vital to the quality of life in all great communities,” Kadish said.

Hoover Mayor Frank Brocto said the project will have a significant impact.

“The UAB/Medical West freestanding emergency department has already added immeasurably to the quality of life for Hoover residents, and we are confident that the new clinic will have an even greater impact,” he said.

For UAB, the project isn’t the only suburban project the health system has in the works.

UAB Health System is also working on a new freestanding emergency department and medical office building in Gardendale.
30% minority businesses sought on BJCC project

Erin Edgemon  eedgemon@al.com

Minority- and women-owned businesses are being encouraged to bid on the massive BJCC expansion project, which includes the construction of a stadium and renovations to Legacy Arena. Here’s the latest:

THE PROJECT

Construction on the estimated $174 million, open-air stadium is slated to start before the end of the year.

The BJCC Authority, city of Birmingham, Jefferson County, UAB and corporate partners are funding the stadium construction, as well as more than $100 million in renovations to Legacy Arena and other improvements at the BJCC. A 3 percent tax on car leases and rentals in Jefferson County also will go toward the project.

HELP WANTED

There will be opportunities for businesses in such fields as civil engineering, structural or mechanical engineering, landscape design, architecture, interior design and more, according to BJCC Executive Director Tad Snider.

An informational session for business owners will be from noon to 1:30 p.m. April 24 at the Arena Club at Legacy Arena.

BJCC officials will explain the various phases of the project, estimated timelines and opportunities for minority and female business owners.

Speakers will include BJCC officials, city and council officials, and project design firm and business consultants who can advise business owners on participation.

Anyone interested in attending should RSVP by emailing reserve@bjcc.org.

Additional informational sessions will be held in the future.

FROM THE MAYOR

"I want to encourage business owners, particularly minority- and women-owned businesses, to attend this important briefing to learn how this major project can benefit them and their employees," Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin said. "This effort will grow our economy and local businesses, as well as help support a fund for the first time in Birmingham history dedicated solely to helping revitalize our neighborhoods. That’s a win-win for our city and all of our people."

MINORITY MINIMUM

The city of Birmingham has asked for at least 30 percent minority participation in the construction process.

"We really want to use this project as a way to create a level of participation in capacity building in local companies that maybe we haven’t been as successful at before," Snider said.
UAB rethinks transit, parking

School could build parking decks, ban freshman parking

Erin Edgemon  edgemon@al.com

UAB will have a shortage of 3,500 parking spaces in five years if it doesn't look at its transit system differently, a recent study found.

The urban campus, with little open space to grow, is now attempting to do just that.

UAB has unveiled a five-year plan for improvements to its transportation and parking network as the student population continues to grow.

The university saw record student enrollment last fall of 20,902. The fall 2017 semester was also the first time the university encouraged all of its incoming freshmen to live on campus; 80 percent did.

"We're excited about the growth of our campus, the projected growth of our campus, and this plan allows us to continue to not just grow, but actually improve our on-campus transportation system," said

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PARKING
FROM A1

James Fowler, director of planning design and construction. "And it helps us continue to move away from being a commuter campus and makes us a part of an urban, vibrant community."

Through a two-year study, the university learned students and employees are excited about UAB moving away from being a commuter campus, he said.

That is going to take a continued investment in other options, including growing the transit system and investing in bicycle infrastructure, Fowler said.

The five-year plan includes managing demand for and improving parking, enhancing transit services, and encouraging pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

NO FRESHMAN PARKING

As part of the plan, UAB is looking over the next five years to prohibit freshmen from bringing a vehicle on campus. Fowler said this move could save about 700 parking spaces and encourage students to stay on campus.

"We are definitely trying to adjust the culture away from being a commuter campus, so this plan does help reinforce that," he said.

To aid this effort, the university is continuing to invest in its transit system, including Blazer Express buses and partnering with the city to build bicycle lanes, enhanced crosswalks and making on-street parking easier.

Improvements to Blazer Express will include the number and length of routes, efficiency and reliability.

According to UAB, changes in parking lot assignments and transit routes were made in early 2017 to save time for employees who park in Express lots or perimeter lots.

These transit enhancements are designed to encourage students to use express parking lots on the outskirts of campus rather than waste time looking for parking in the core of campus, Fowler said.

PARKING DECKS

UAB is studying the feasibility of building two parking decks: one for students and one in the medical district, Fowler said.

The first parking deck will contain about 1,100 parking spaces for students and will be located at the corner of 12th Street South and 11th Avenue. This could replace an approximate 200-space surface parking lot.

Another parking deck could be built near Kirklin Clinic at the corner of Fifth Avenue South and Richard Arrington Jr. Boulevard.

In two years, UAB will evaluate whether there is a need to build two additional parking decks.

Parking decks are necessary as well as the campus continues to grow, add new facilities, and reduce surface parking lots in the core of campus.

Stephen Foster, vice president of Five Points South Neighborhood Association, said a student parking deck in the area of 11th Avenue South is amazing news for the neighborhood.

"If you drive around UAB around 11th, 14th and Colonnade streets, you start to see a number of cars parking on the streets," he said, adding that many residents can't park in front of their homes now because students are parking there.

A parking deck is "going to drastically reduce that occurrence," Foster said.

Fowler said UAB is interested in working with the city of Birmingham to create an on-street parking permitting system so further address this issue.

City Council President Valerie Abbott is leading the effort at the city level. She said council staff is researching best practices in other cities.

Foster said the neighborhood is also partnering with UAB to come up with new ideas to deal with parking issues. One idea is having UAB police ticket students parking on residential streets and requiring students to pay off their tickets in order to graduate.

PARTNERSHIP WITH BIRMINGHAM

UAB has applied for a grant with the City of Birmingham to build bike lanes on 13th Street from 10th Avenue South to First Avenue South.

Fowler said this project will connect UAB with Regions Field and Railroad Park in downtown Birmingham.

This year, bike lanes will also open along 10 blocks of 10th Avenue South.

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS

- UAB is implementing a three-year plan to convert all decks to LED lighting, which is brighter, more environmentally sound, and offers greater security, said Parking and Transportation Services Director Andre Davis.

- Bicycle lockers have been installed to provide protection from theft, vandalism, and inclement weather.

- Three electric car-charging stations were installed in 2017 and will open this spring in select employee lots.

- UAB has promoted employee participation in CommuteSmart, which rewards those who carpool, walk, bike, or travel by bus.

- Car-sharing program Zipcar launched.

- BlazerRide, a van service for employees with limited mobility, has also launched.

- UAB updated its policy last year to permit employees of students who work in non-patient care buildings to park their bicycles in private offices.

To help pay for campus-wide transportation improvements, Fowler said UAB plans to raise the price of student and employee parking permits, which hasn't happened in a number of years.

Student parking permits haven't gone up in price since 2012, according to the university. Employee parking permits haven't gone up in 10 years.

UAB to build new medical facility in Hoover

UAB Health System will build a 39,000-square-foot medical facility in Hoover's Stadium Trace Village development.

The facility will include a variety of medical services, including primary care, OB/GYN, oral surgery and other specialties, the university health system announced Monday.

Stadium Trace Village is a mixed-use development along Highway 150 and Stadium Trace Parkway at Interstate-459. The property will feature specialty retail, restaurants, hotels and a new prototype grocery store.

Broad Metro Commercial Real Estate is developing the project.

"Hoover is very excited that UAB has chosen to expand its presence within our city," said Hoover Mayor Frank Brocato.

The UAB Medicine clinic in Hoover at 2321 Highway 150 will move to the new Stadium Trace Village location when it opens. Construction is expected to begin in early 2019. The facility should open in early 2020.

- Erin Edgeman
Buckhorn High School, UAH dominate in their divisions during 2018 Human Exploration Rover Challenge

By: Staff

The results are in! NASA announced Buckhorn High School and UAH as the winners of their divisions in 2018 Human Exploration Rover Challenge.

Buckhorn won first place in the high school division with 84 points and UAH Team 1 won the college/university division with 61 points.

“We are so proud of this effort and their success,” Madison County Superintendent Matt Massey said in a released statement. “These students work hard every day. They are challenged by exceptional teachers and mentors. Education is working in the Madison County School System,” Massed added.

The competition challenges high school and college teams to design, build and test human-powered roving vehicles inspired by the Apollo lunar missions and future exploration missions to the Moon, Mars and beyond.

“It is truly inspiring to see the ingenuity demonstrated by these students and in their rovers,” said Mona Miller, Rover Challenge project manager at NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama. “I would like to congratulate, not only the winners, but all of the teams for their hard work. Rover Challenge is a great event and it’s exciting to see the next generation of engineers and explorers on display.”

The competition was held on Friday, April 13 at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center. The second day of competition was canceled due to inclement weather.

The complete list of award winners is provided below.

**High School Division**

- First Place: Buckhorn High School (New Market, Alabama), 84 points
- Second Place: International Space Institute (Leipzig, Germany), 66 points
- Third Place: Greenfield Central High School – Team 1 (Greenfield, Indiana), 63 points

**College/University Division**

- First Place: University of Alabama in Huntsville – Team 1 (Huntsville, Alabama), 61 points
- Second Place: University of Colorado Denver (Denver, Colorado), 49 points
- Third Place: East Carolina University (Greenville, North Carolina), 48 points

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AIAA Neil Armstrong Best Design Award

- High School Division: Parish Episcopal School – Team 1 (Dallas, Texas)
- College/University Division: Universidade Federal Fluminense (Niterói, Brazil)

Technology Challenge Award

- Middle Tennessee State University – Team 1 (Murfreesboro, Tennessee)

Drive Train Technology Challenge

- University of Central Missouri – Team 1 (Warrensburg, Missouri)

Featherweight Award

- High School Division: Buckhorn High School (New Market, Alabama)
- College/University Division: University of Colorado Denver (Denver, Colorado)

AIAA Telemetry/Electronics Award

- Middle Tennessee State University – Team 1 (Murfreesboro, Tennessee)

Crash and Burn Award

- Rhode Island School of Design (Providence, Rhode Island)

Frank Joe Sexton Memorial Pit Crew Award

- High School Division: Alfonso Casta Martinez (Manuabo, Puerto Rico)
- College/University Division: University of Houston – Team 1 (Houston, Texas)

Team Spirit Award

- Tecnológico de Monterrey (Xochitepec, Mexico)

Rookie of the Year Award

- East Carolina University (Greenville, North Carolina)

Jesco von Puttkamer International Team Award

- High School Division: CETED Centro de Tecnologia em Educação (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)
- College/University Division: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (Lima, Peru)
AIAA Best Report Award

- High School Division: Parish Episcopal School – Team 1 (Dallas, Texas)
- College/University Division: Tennessee Tech University – Team 2 (Cookeville, Tennessee)

Educational Engagement Award

- High School Division: Greenfield Central High School (Greenfield, Indiana)
- College/University Division: SVKM’s NMIMS Mukesh Patel School of Technology Management and Engineering (West Mumbai, India)

System Safety Challenge Award

- High School Division: International Space Institute (Leipzig, Germany)
- College/University Division: Middle Tennessee State University (Murfreesboro, Tennessee)
Cullman County hailstone now official state record, 1st entry in state’s new hail dataset

By: Staff

A large hailstone that fell in Cullman County on March 19 is now officially the largest recorded hailstone to fall in Alabama.

An ad hoc committee that included the Alabama state climatologist and officials from both the National Weather Service and the National Centers for Environmental Information reviewed data about the hailstone and unanimously agreed it will set the initial state hailstone record for Alabama in four parameters: diameter, weight, volume and circumference.

“Based on federal guidelines and with the coordination of federal and state officials, we established this as the first Alabama hailstone record,” said Dr. John Christy, Alabama’s state climatologist and director of the Earth System Science Center at The University of Alabama in Huntsville.

The record-setting hailstone in Walter (about 10 miles southeast of Cullman) had a maximum diameter of 5.38 inches along its longest axis. It weighed 9.8 ounces (almost 5/8 of a pound) and had a total volume of 19.8 cubic inches. According to the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (IIBHS) in Tampa, a baseball has a volume of about 13.4 cubic inches, while a 12-ounce soft drink can has a volume of 25 cubic inches.

The hailstone fell in the front yard of Cullman Tribune writer Craig Mann, who notified the National Weather Service office in Huntsville. Staff meteorologists from the IIBHS scanned and measured five hailstones Mann collected (including the record setter) as part of its research on hail. The other four hailstones ranged in size from 4.55 to 3.61 inches in diameter.

“Was this the largest hailstone that fell that day or from this event?” asked Victor Murphy, climate and co-op services program manager at the National Weather Service’s southern regional headquarters in Fort Worth, Texas. “We don’t know, but it is the largest one that was kept and recorded.”

“It gives us a baseline in terms of a maximum hailstone that’s been measured in the state,” said Chris Darden, meteorologist in charge of the National Weather Service office in Huntsville.

“This is also the first hailstone measured for volume in the U.S., and that’s a pretty neat thing. It sets a standard for other records in other states going forward.”

“To see that kind of measurement being done, that was cool,” said Deke Arndt, chief of the Climate Monitoring Section at the National Centers for Environmental Information in Asheville, North Carolina. “That technology eliminates a lot of the things that can go wrong when you’re using a measuring tape.”

The east southeastern edge of Cullman continuing to Walter was “kind of the ground zero for this hail storm, where the damage was the worst,” Darden said. Several heating and air conditioning units on the roof of the Cullman County Sheriff’s Office and jail were destroyed by hail. Several cars parked outside were damaged or destroyed.
“The jail has an industrial type freezer it uses to store food for the inmates,” Darden said. “It had hailstones go through its roof and into the freezer. There were several houses that had hail go completely through their roofs, including some with metal roofs. There was one building with a metal roof not far from the jail, and it looks like someone took a jackhammer to it. It’s a total loss.”

Based on surveys after the storm, Darden said the heavy damage was caused not only by the size of the hailstones but also by the number of them.

“That’s probably what did the most damage, was just the sheer number of hailstones,” he said.

Knowing a hailstone that fell March 19 in Walter was the largest to fall in Alabama — and one of the three largest ever documented east of the Mississippi River — is only half of the story.

The other half is learning how the record-setting hailstone compares to others that fell on Alabama in the past. The Cullman County hailstone is the biggest, but how much bigger than other hailstones? Where did those other hailstones fall and what can we learn from those storms to improve predictions of hail, which causes billions of dollars in damage each year?

To document the record and learn how it compares to hailstones from the past, the Alabama Office of the State Climatologist is establishing a state hailstone record.

“We are investigating earlier reports of large hailstones, but these reports are for information only and won’t be part of the official record,” Christy said.

With a record-setting hailstone in hand, researchers would like more information about large hailstones that fell in the past and those that fall in the future.

“For past storms, send documentation by email that must include a photo of the hailstone beside a ruler or tape measure for evidence of the size,” Christy said. “Please include contact information, the date of the event, the exact location and the time of day the hailstone fell.

“We have several historic accounts of 4-and-a-half inch hailstones falling in Alabama. But we don’t need stories. We need evidence. Then we can compile a list of unofficial reports as background.”

“You always have to remember that after an event like this, someone is suffering,” Arndt said. “But one of the things that is unique about hailstones is that anyone can pick up a hailstone and put it in the freezer. It’s very democratic. Anybody can do that.”

For hailstones that fall in the future, “please immediately put the hail in a zip lock bag and put it in the freezer,” Christy said. “Unless it is bagged, hail sublimates (evaporates) directly from ice to water vapor even if it is stored below freezing.”

If the report of a new record hailstone is deemed to be reliable, officials at either the state climatologist’s office or one of the state National Weather Service offices will begin the process of reviewing the data and making a decision about the possible new record.
The largest hailstone ever recorded in the U.S. fell on July 23, 2010, in Vivian, South Dakota. It was 8 inches in diameter, 18.62 inches in circumference, and weighed 1.93 pounds.

The State Climate Extremes Committee — which reviewed the record-setting hailstone — was composed of:

- Deke Arndt, National Centers for Environmental Information, Asheville, North Carolina
- John Christy, Alabama state climatologist, UAH
- Chris Darden, meteorologist in charge, Huntsville WFO, NWS
- Jordan McLeod, Southeast Regional Climate Center, Chapel Hill, North Carolina
- Victor Murphy, Southern Region HQ NWS, Fort Worth, Texas
It's official: March 19 hailstone is a state record

By: Leigh Morgan

There's a new entry in Alabama's weather record books.

A hailstone that fell March 19 in Cullman County during a round of severe weather has been declared the largest on record in the state.

That's according to a committee that included Alabama's state climatologist, the National Weather Service and NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information.

Not only is it a state record -- it's the first state record.

"Based on federal guidelines and with the coordination of federal and state officials, we established this as the first Alabama hailstone record," Dr. John Christy, Alabama's state climatologist and director of the Earth System Science Center at The University of Alabama in Huntsville, said in a statement on Thursday.

The hailstone measured 5.38 inches wide, weighed 9.8 ounces and had a total volume of 19.8 cubic inches.

For reference, a tennis ball has about 9.6 cubic inches, a baseball is about 13.4 and a soda can 25, according to Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety.

That company sent a team of meteorologists and a 3D scanner to Cullman recently to take measurements of the hailstone, which fell in the front yard of Cullman Tribune writer Craig Mann.

Quick-thinking Mann saved the chunk of ice (as well as several others that ranged from 4.55 inches to 3.61 inches) and called the National Weather Service in Huntsville.

"It gives us a baseline in terms of a maximum hailstone that's been measured in the state," Chris Darden, meteorologist in charge of the National Weather Service office in Huntsville, said in a statement. "This is also the first hailstone measured for volume in the U.S., and that's a pretty neat thing. It sets a standard for other records in other states going forward."

IBHS said after examining the hailstone that it believed it was one of the three largest ever documented east of the Mississippi River.

The company has been conducting research on hail and hail damage, which it said causes billions of dollars in property damage every year. It is working with the National Weather Service to improve hail forecasting.

And the state climatologist's office wants all the information it can get about other large hailstones, both those from the past and going forward.
"For past storms, send documentation by e-mail that must include a photo of the hailstone beside a ruler or tape measure for evidence of the size," Christy said. "Please include contact information, the date of the event, the exact location and the time of day the hailstone fell."

For hailstones that fall in the future, put the hail in a plastic bag in the freezer, Christy said, "Unless it is bagged, hail sublimates (evaporates) directly from ice to water vapor even if it is stored below freezing."

The largest hailstone on record in the U.S. fell on July 23, 2010, in Vivian, S.D. It was 8 inches in diameter, 18.62 inches in circumference, and weighed 1.93 pounds.
Alabama Biotech Investment 101

By: Gail Allyn

A strong support network has led Alabama biotechs to land $101 million in venture capital since 2012. Working in one of the toughest investment sectors, research-based startups have well defined paths to commercial success on home turf.

Discovering a medical breakthrough and turning it into a viable commercial product takes brains. Perseverance. Business savvy. And capital. Lots of capital.

But raising enough capital to launch and grow a biotech startup can be a lengthy and somewhat arduous process for any scientist or innovator who spends more time in labs than boardrooms.

Moreover, biotech startups are, by their very nature, built on emerging technologies, which often come with inherent risks, the kind many investors shy away from.

Peggy Sammon knows. She’s one of the founders of the Huntsville company GeneCapture Inc., formerly SLP Diagnostics. The idea for the company was great. Working with his team, Krishnan Chittur, a chemical engineering professor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, came up with the idea for a portable instrument that would detect infections in the body in less than an hour, rather than the days required by other methods. By speeding up the diagnostic process, doctors could deliver the right medications to patients sooner.

“Dr. Chittur, Dr. [Marc] Pusey and I founded the company with private funds and performed some early research on our own time,” says Sammon, “enough to know that we had a very promising opportunity in detecting a broad range of infections in a point-of-care setting.

“Our biggest challenge was overcoming the fear that investors had in biotech,” says Sammon, “the lack of tangible biotech successes, and the risks associated with getting FDA approval. Many investors and angel groups lean on others for technical knowledge in the biotech space, and since our platform is so novel, there was a learning curve.”

To raise monies for biotech startups and to keep the associated research moving forward, innovators go through several rounds of fundraising. Starting out, some inventors may rely on private monies to reach an early milestone, such as building a prototype.

For many, however, the first stage in fundraising is the “seed” round where innovators seek funding from angel investors and early-stage venture capitalists for product development, marketing or the product launch.

Once the startup’s product has a track record, entrepreneurs can raise monies in a “Series A” round. Here, venture capitalists invest their funds in exchange for a percentage stake in the startup. With the new cash infusion, the startup might use the capital for new projects like a study or clinical trial.

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The Auburn-based Vitruvias Therapeutics Inc., which makes specialty generic pharmaceuticals, recently completed its Series A funding round of $11.5 million.

At the Series B stage, a biotech startup can raise even more venture capital for milestones, such as commercializing its products or developing new products.

As the biotech startup continues to succeed and the risk of failure continues falling, the company can attract more investors like private equity firms and large foundations for a Series C round. The additional funding can help a biotech company build a new facility, scale the business or expand its market base.

Eventually a successful startup can pursue an exit strategy by going public in an initial public offering or having a larger, more established biotech company acquire the business.

Initial public offerings, however, are rare and complicated due to SEC compliance, lock-up provisions, overall expense and external stock market uncertainty, says Larry Greer, the founder and senior managing partner of Greer Capital Advisors LLC in Birmingham, which invests in Alabama biotech companies.

"The best outcome is a strategic sale as an integration to an industry partner or affiliate," says Greer. "Often, the parties are already working together on joint research contracts, which are an objective that we try to cultivate."

Harvesting Seed Money
One source of seed funding is the federal Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant program. SBIR awards seed money to early-stage technology companies or entrepreneurs engaged in early research and development who are working to start a company. Entrepreneurs can apply to one of 12 participating federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Defense, Energy, Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Another seed funding source is the federal Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR). Grant recipients, however, must work collaboratively with a nonprofit research laboratory or national laboratory.

In Alabama, biotech entrepreneurs can win seed funds through the Alabama Launchpad, a program of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama. The Alabama Launchpad hosts statewide concept- and seed-stage competitions where ventures compete for cash prizes. The program's aim is to help startups launch, grow and remain in the state.

In 2010, then-SLP Diagnostics won the Alabama Launchpad $100,000 prize.

"We used the funds to build an early prototype," says Samson, "and to demonstrate our proof of concept, which was critical to the next round of funding. Also, a local investor matched the Launchpad award as both a recognition and a show of confidence."

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The Alabama Launchpad also encourages contestants to consult with mentors, and the contest judges review the startups the way potential capital investors would, EDPA Vice President Angela Wier says.

“Even those who don’t win Launchpad funding,” says Wier, “use this experience to refine pitches and pursue other funding, often successfully.”

University Supports
Innovators who work or study at universities may also find the path to funding and commercialization right on campus. The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Harbert Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (HIIE) Commercialization Accelerator, for example, raises UAB researchers’ and innovative students’ and staffers’ opportunities to turn their cutting-edge research into “high-growth startups,” HIIE Executive Director Kathy Nugent says.

After an inventor discloses his or her intellectual property to the HIIE, the HIIE decides whether to pursue commercialization. If so, it assigns the inventor a licensing associate who determines whether to move forward with possible intellectual property protections and licensing strategies. The associate also approaches companies that might want to license the intellectual property.

“We want to take companies and make sure we’re equipping them with all of the right resources,” says Nugent, “including how to get funding or at least helping companies build proof of concept and increase the value of the technologies and products in the company before we send them out and off of our campus to be autonomous and independent.”

More than 40 companies began as UAB technologies, including BioCryst Pharmaceuticals Inc., Discovery BioMed Inc. and VectorLogics Inc., which was later acquired by DNAtrix Inc. Another UAB spin-off, Blondin Bioscience, has been working on a precision cancer diagnostic technology that doctors can use to determine the effectiveness of a chemotherapy treatment within just hours.

In Mobile, the University of South Alabama’s Office of Commercialization and Industry Collaboration assists faculty in turning their inventions into marketable products.

Sammon credits the University of Alabama in Huntsville’s Office of Technology and Commercialization with patent support and UAH with forging collaborations with HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology in Huntsville, which later helped GeneCapture attract investors.

Another resource is BioAlabama. The nonprofit assists startups in a number of ways, including matching them with mentors and helping them identify sources of capital, from grants to early- and growth-stage equity funding.

“BioAlabama’s role is to support, promote and convene a collaborative bioscience ecosystem throughout Alabama,” says Blair King, BioAlabama’s president-elect and Alabama Power Co.’s manager of economic development and existing industry.
“Access to capital is critical to biotech startups and for the commercialization of technology developed at our key research institutions in Alabama,” King says.

Reaping Capital
venture capital firms are another major funding source for biotech startups. These investors often invest in exchange for some governance over a startup’s operations, such as management of the business side or marketing.

“The pace of bioscience funding across [Alabama] has picked up steadily in recent years, although mostly by way of early stage equity financings,” says Birmingham attorney James Childs Jr., a BioAlabama board member and a partner and chairman of venture capital and private equity at the Bradley Law Firm.

Childs points to biotech startups like CNine Biosolutions, Vituro Health and Circulogene, companies that have raised several rounds of equity funding in the last few years. In 2017, IllumiCare Inc. closed on its Series B funding at $3.7 million.

In fact, since 2012, Alabama bioscience companies have received $101 million in venture capital funding, with investments focused in human biotechnology and health information technology, according to a 2016 state-by-state report by the Biotechnology Innovation Organization.


Another fund, the $21.9 million Birmingham Technology Fund (BTF), invested in commercializing technologies established at universities and research institutions. Its investments have included the Birmingham drug discovery firm Discovery BioMed Inc. and Vivo Biosciences, which LifeNet Health in Virginia recently purchased.

Greer says he seeks biotech firms in niche markets and those with novel technologies that have a competitive advantage or the potential for gaining a large share of an underserved or rapidly growing market.

“The ownership share percentage varies from deal to deal, and there is no set requirement,” Greer says. “We have received as little as 3 percent and as much as 72 percent ownership on a per-deal basis.”

For Sammon, after several years of navigating the biotech fundraising waters, she offers cash-hungry startups this advice:

“Find mentors,” she says, “and add experienced business players to your team.”
Stimpson: Youth sports come first

Mobile mayor also urges support for USA campus stadium

Mark Heim mheim@al.com

When it comes to sports, the city of Mobile is at a crossroads.

The city has acquired much charm in its long history. Unfortunately, the passing years have also saddled the city with outdated athletic venues.

The 2018 calendar year hasn’t been a good one to Mobile on that front.

The Class AA baseball BayBears soon head for a new home in the Huntsville area. What becomes of Hank Aaron Stadium? Or for that matter, Ladd-Pebbles Stadium? Just days after the Reese’s Senior Bowl, the all-star football game’s executive director, Phil Savage, talked about “issues” with Ladd-Pebbles. Meanwhile, the University of South Alabama has made clear its desire to exit Ladd-Pebbles, playing its football games at a hoped-for stadium on the main campus.

As gleaming new athletic venues rise around the Southeast, what is Mobile to do?

On Tuesday, Mayor Sandy Stimpson addressed some of the pressing questions about Mobile’s sports future in an extensive interview during “The Opening Kickoff” show on WNSP-FM 105.5.

“We know sports unites communities,” Stimpson said. “It brings people together. If you want to create a ‘One Mobile,’ sports is a way to do that. Secondly, if you want to be a family-friendly city, people want things to do with their children. The sports venues that we have — and the programming we have — are very important to our city.”

The obstacle is money. The city faces $83 million in deferred maintenance for its facilities. Those properties include sports venues like Ladd-Pebbles but also fire and police stations. That’s the cost, said Stimpson, “to fix things that are broken.” He added, “That’s not bells and whistles.”

Also, he said, the city must expend $142 million to keep its facilities “in good operational order.”

Any kind of new funding stream for facilities, Stimpson said, will not come in the form of a tax. He said, “There is a zero chance that we would be taxing to do that.”

Given a choice between focusing on youth sports and professional sports, the mayor didn’t hesitate in his answer. “I would default to our children 100 percent of the time,” Stimpson said. “Our facilities, our citizens, our young people are paramount in my mind.”

‘PRIVATE EQUITY’

Stimpson spoke of a goal of building an indoor facility for youth basketball and volleyball that could house up to 12 courts. “If you had that for our youth, then you can attract outside tournaments that would naturally follow,” he said.

The stands at Ladd-Pebbles Stadium show plenty of empty seats as the pregame festivities for the 2018 Reese’s Senior Bowl get under way. In a Tuesday interview, Mayor Sandy Stimpson spoke frankly about the stadium’s dowdy condition: “The risk we have with Ladd is we have the Senior Bowl or the NFL decide they want to go somewhere else. ... I’m pretty sure they would love to see a better facility to play in.” Mike Kitrell, AL.com

Mayor Sandy Stimpson, shown in his studio interview at WNSP-105.5 FM, says youth sports are front and center in his thinking. “Our facilities, our citizens, our young people are paramount in my mind,” he said. Mark Heim, mheim@al.com

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Also, he said, he’d “replicate what we have at Sage Park” at two more locations. Stimpson said he envisions “nine or 10 artificial-turf fields that are multi-purpose where you can play football, soccer, lacrosse, baseball, and you can have all the tournaments you wanted.”

He said, “I’d love to raise $15 million of private equity to do this. The city has so many competing factors for the money that are in the normal budget. We don’t have the $15 million.”

Stimpson said, “We would very much like to have another franchise to fill up Hank Aaron Stadium, but it is much more important to our community to have great facilities for our youth to play on.”

Stimpson said there have been conversations with teams about occupying “The Hank” once the BayBears depart after the 2019 season.

But what if that doesn’t pan out? Stimpson said that transforming the stadium into a high school venue makes sense, not just for baseball, but for multiple sports. “It’s a good location,” he noted.

Stimpson said there seemed to be little inclination by the BayBears’ new ownership group to keep the team in Mobile.

“I personally did not talk to them,” Stimpson explained. “Our finance director, Paul Wesch, had the conversation with them, but most of the investors are from the Madison area, so they really weren’t interested in investing in a team and keeping it in Mobile.

“I don’t think there was very much chance of keeping them here from the beginning.”

'JUST ANTIQUATED'

On the subject of the Reese’s Senior Bowl, Stimpson said, “The risk we have with Ladd is we have the Senior Bowl or the NFL decide they want to go somewhere else. I think they are really pleased with what Phil and his staff are doing. They love coming to Mobile, but I’m pretty sure they would love to see a better facility to play in.”

He said of Ladd-Peebles: “It’s a very old stadium. It’s just antiquated.”

Deferred maintenance needs at 70-year-old Ladd-Peebles stand at $15 million. “We are doing minimal maintenance, but it’s starting to show,” the mayor said.

Stimpson spoke of a future Ladd-Peebles that served high school teams, but with a new seating arrangement: He’d keep the field intact while adding “bleacher-style” seating that’s popular at many high school stadiums.

“We need the venue,” he said. “We don’t need to scrap the field.”

Of course, that concept hinges on decisions by the University of South Alabama. Stimpson said he welcomes the idea of a new on-campus stadium. He said, “It would behoove the city to support that effort because that would be a potential venue that would touch a lot of bases for the city, and we could work out an arrangement with them.”

Stimpson’s thinking seems to be in line with that of the university administration.

“You don’t want to overbuild a facility in today’s market,” the mayor said. “You want the facility to be full when the game is played. It creates envy and more hype and more enthusiasm. A 25,000-seat stadium for South Alabama would be perfect.”

'ECONOMIC SUICIDE'

If it weren’t for Mardi Gras, there might not be a Mobile Civic Center.

It wasn’t long ago that Stimpson called for the end of the Civic Center, which has stood since 1964 on 24 prime acres in downtown.

On Tuesday, he said, “At the end of year, we should have an idea of what do with the Civic Center.”

A downtown arena, like anything else, Stimpson said, must be a public-private partnership.

“What facility that is built needs to be multi-purpose,” he said. “It has to have music concerts there, needs not to be single-sports focused. You have to be able to program that revenue all year long. It’s economic suicide to have a single-purpose facility, whether it is baseball or football.”

Stimpson acknowledged Tuesday that the sports agenda is only a small slice of his very big job.

“From a big picture, let’s hope we can see the value of this,” he said. “If you gave me three wishes, I would love to us replicate Sage Park and have the turf fields for the kids to play on,” he said.

“I’d love to see an indoor facility for volleyball and basketball where you could have 12 courts or so.”

“My third wish would be South Alabama would be successful in their quest to build a stadium. South Alabama is a huge economic engine for this community.”
Fastbreak to top award for junior athlete

ASWA MR. BASKETBALL

Mountains Brooks, Thompson became the second

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been successful as well,” McMillan said. “Trendon could score 40 points a game if he wanted, but I don’t know if we as a team would be as successful. He chooses to take whatever the defense gives him. That is a sign of a true Mr. Basketball.”

Watford also was named Class 7A Player of the Year. However, both he and McMillan said there is still room to improve.

“I’ve got to just keep getting better,” he said. “I know my coaches and teammates are behind me, and I just have to stay focused and keep working. We aren’t done yet.”

“We’ve actually talked about just that,” McMillan said about Watford continuing to improve. “You can never be too good a shooter, and that is one thing he will consistently work on. He’s 6-foot-9, can shoot the 3, can post up, can play defense. He’s a heck of a player obviously, but he can get better and stronger and he knows that and will do what it takes.”

He is the first Birmingham-area Mr. Basketball since Wenonah’s De’Runnya Wilson in 2013. Current Alabama player John Petty was Mr. Basketball each of the last two seasons. Watford was second in the voting a year ago.

Like Petty did, Watford could repeat as a senior next season.

He has yet to commit to a specific college but plans to take a number of visits this summer.

Top awards

**MR. BASKETBALL**
Trendon Watford, Mountain Brook

**MISS BASKETBALL**
Zipporah Broughton, Lee-Montgomery

**SUPER 5**
*Top five players regardless of classification*

**BOYS**
Trendon Watford, Mountain Brook — 77 (12 first-place)
Dante Wood, Sacred Heart — 39 (1)
Kira Lewis, Hazel Green — 28 (1)
Jaykwon Walton, Carver-Montgomery — 16
Anquaevious Pollard, Lanett — 14

**GIRLS**
Zipporah Broughton, Lee-Montgomery — 59 (8)
Mauri Davenport, Charles Henderson — 49 (3)
Caitlin Hose, Hazel Green — 27
Claire Holt, Spain Park — 19 (1)
LaTascya Duff, Samson — 17 (2)

Mountain Brook’s Trendon Watford averaged 23.3 points, 12.3 rebounds and three assists on his way to leading the Spartans to a state title and Mr. Basketball honors.

Vasha Hunt, file

Players of the year (by class)

**GIRLS**
7A: Zipporah Broughton, Lee-Montgomery
6A: Caitlin Hose, Hazel Green
5A: Mauri Davenport, Charles Henderson
4A: Karleigh Sledge, Deshler
3A: Ailie Craig Cruce, Lauderdale Co.
2A: LaTascya Duff, Samson
1A: River Baldwin, Pleasant Home
AISA: Shaquandria Holton, Glenwood

**BOYS**
7A: Trendon Watford, Mountain Brook
6A: Kira Lewis, Hazel Green
5A: Kobe Brown, Lee-Huntsville
4A: Isaac Chatman, Cordova
3A: Kam Woods, Midfield
2A: Anquaevious Pollard, Lanett
1A: Dante Wood, Sacred Heart
AISA: Lee Crawford, East Memorial

Past winners
1985 — Vincent Robinson, Bridgeport
1986 — Larry Rembert, Keith
1987 — Bryant Lancaster, Valley
1988 — Terrance Lewis, Ramsay
1989 — Queintonia Higgins, Fairhope
1990 — Cedric Moore, Woodlawn
1991 — Victor Newman, Houston Academy
1992 — Darryl Wilson, South Lamar
1993 — Howard Pride, Butler
1994 — Rod Willie, Lee-Huntsville
1995 — Brian Williams, Jeff Davis
1996 — Isaac Spencer, Jeff Davis
1997 — Anthony Williams, Loachapoka
1998 — Sam Hagins, UMS-Wright
1999 — Marvin Stone, Grissom
2000 — Gerald Wallace, Childersburg
2001 — Chris White, Grissom
2002 — Kennedy Winston, Blount
2003 — Ronald Steele, John Carroll
2004 — Ronald Steele, John Carroll
2005 — Richard Hendrix, Athens
2006 — Stanley Robinson, Huffman
2007 — Courtney Fortson, Jeff Davis
2008 — J'Mychal Green, St. Jude
2009 — Kerren Johnson, Madison Academy
2010 — Trevor Lacey, Butler
2011 — Trevor Lacey, Butler
2012 — Craig Sword, Carver-Montgomery
2013 — De'Runnya Wilson, Wenonah
2014 — William Lee, Dallas County
2015 — Dazon Ingram, Theodore
2016 — John Petty, J.O. Johnson
2017 — John Petty, Mae Jemison
2018 — Trendon Watford, Mountain Brook
No. 7 UA golf finishes second at Mason Rudolph Championship

Staff report

FRANKLIN, Tenn. — Three Alabama golfers finished among the top-10 individuals to lead the seventh-ranked Crimson Tide to a second-place finish at the 2018 Mason Rudolph Championship on Sunday. It was the sixth time in nine tournaments this season that Alabama has placed among the top two teams in an event, and was its eighth top-five result of the 2017-18 campaign.

Alabama, which finished runner-up in the event for the third time in the past four years, closed play with a 4-over par 856 (281-281-284). The Tide finished three strokes behind tournament host No. 4 Vanderbilt (853), which carded a 6-under par 278 on Sunday to claim the team title. Liberty, ranked No. 46 in the nation, finished third with an 861, while No. 6 Florida was fourth with an 867. There was a three-way tie for fifth between No. 47 Louisville, Georgia and East Tennessee State, which each carded a team total of 883.

Freshman Davis Shore marked his best finish at Alabama. The Knoxville, Tenn., native ended the 54-hole tournament at 2-under par 211 (72-67-72), closing play five strokes back of medalist John Augenstein of Vanderbilt (206).

Freshman Wilson Furr earned his first career top-10 tournament result, as he tied for seventh overall, while senior Jonathan Hardee tied for 10th to give the Crimson Tide three golfers among the top-10 individuals.

Furr finished play with a 1-over par on Sunday to close the event at 2-over 215 (70-73-72) on the par 71, 7,100-yard Traditions Golf Club South Course layout. Meanwhile, Hardee collected his first top-10 result of the spring, and sixth of his career, with a 4-over par 217 (72-73-72).

The event was the final regular season tournament for the Crimson Tide. Alabama next plays in the 2018 Southeastern Conference Tournament at St. Simons Island, Ga., on the Sea Island Golf Club's Seaside Course on April 25-29.
Taking center stage

Alabama gymnastics benefiting from increased TV exposure

By Terrin Waack
Special to The Tuscaloosa News


Technically the sport is action, so the wording switch works.

Corny Hollywood line aside, the TV coverage of college gymnastics really has increased over the past few years. Six of Alabama’s 11 regular-season meets aired live this season. Another one was tape delayed.

“Well, if I had a percentage, I would tell you I feel like it’s (increased) 3,000 percent because we’re relevant,” Alabama coach Dana Duckworth said. “We’re on national television.”

Next weekend is the NCAA Championships, too. Alabama will compete in the Friday’s afternoon semifinal, which starts at noon in St. Louis’ Chaifetz Arena. The evening session is at 6 p.m.

Twelve teams will be there, splitting up six and six. Three teams from each semifinal advance to Saturday’s Super Six at 6 p.m.

Every single moment of competition can be watched live on TV. ESPN2 will broadcast the afternoon semifinal. ESPNU will have the evening semifinal and then the Super Six.

“It definitely helps me because whenever I know more people are watching, I don’t get pressured but I like the pressure,” UA senior Nickie Guerrero said.

“I feel like it definitely helps me competitive wise. But I also definitely believe that it’s just helping the whole college gymnastics world, getting more exposure, so that’s so awesome.”

The first time gymnastics’ NCAA Championships aired live was in 2016, thanks to ESPN’s different networks. It continued the final round coverage in 2017 and this year.

Not only that, SEC Network added Friday Night Heights to its docket. The series features eight consecutive weeks of SEC regular-season matchups. There were 18 meets aired this year, normally showing more than one every Friday with a doubleheader schedule.

Keep in mind meets ended up on other ESPN channels, too.

“It just represents how awesome of a sport gymnastics is and how people can’t really do this on an everyday basis, but we literally train our lives for that moment,” senior Kiana Winston said. “Just to see college gymnastics out there on the stage because a lot of people see the elite world and how it’s kind of intense, but you don’t get to see a lot of college stuff. When you see the college teams having fun and laughing, it shows a different side of gymnastics.”

It floors Duckworth how far college gymnastics has come. She was a gymnast at Alabama back in the 1990s, then a volunteer and an assistant coach for many years before ultimately becoming head coach in 2014. She has seen the evolution firsthand.

Duckworth never competed on live TV, but she coaches on it now regularly.

“To whom much is given, much is expected,” Duckworth said. “To me, having the opportunity to be on live television week after week is a privilege and you never take it for granted. Just like you never take going to the national championship and the opportunity to compete at that level for granted.

“So it’s probably not 3,000 percent, but I tell you, I feel like it is.”
Nothing ‘little’ about Tua’s injury

Nick Saban said Saturday that Alabama quarterback Tua Tagovailoa had "a little setback" related to an earlier injury on his throwing hand. That's simple enough, right?

Except that when it comes to Alabama quarterbacks in general and Tagovailoa in particular, nothing is going to be treated as "little." Every ramification has to be debated. Every possible outcome has to be

See HURT, C3
considered. If the latest hand issue keeps Tagovailoa out for the rest of the spring, that's a whole summer's worth of debate about how it affected the quarterback battle.

Saban says there is no battle, no scoreboard, no daily judging in which Tagovailoa and Jalen Hurts are evaluated and then a "winner" is declared using the 10-point must system. There is ultimately only one vote — Saban's — and since he also gets to decide when it's Election Day, we will just wait and see.

The first consideration should be Tagovailoa's health. "Getting him back out there" is far less relevant than "getting him well," as it should be for every player, whether starter or fourth-stringer.

There is no indication, based on what Saban has said, that Tagovailoa will be affected by the setback in the fall. There is certainly a chance the sophomore will get his first career start against Louisville. If not, Alabama does have the luxury of an experienced two-year starter in Hurts, which is a positive thing. Most people recognize that.

Will the amount of time Tagovailoa has missed in the spring enter into Saban's decision? It's possible but it also may not be a factor at all.

If Hurts and Mac Jones are the only quarterbacks to play a significant number of snaps in next Saturday's A-Day Game, that might disappoint those in attendance but there's never been any indication someone wins or loses the job at A-Day.

With a week to go, there doesn't seem to be a huge amount of steam for A-Day. That seems to have been true at most SEC schools. The quarterback that got the most attention in Saturday's round of games around the SEC wasn't Drew Lock at Missouri or Feleipe Franks at Florida. It was Johnny Manziel, doing the nostalgia thing on the sideline at Texas A&M. Even if Tagovailoa plays in some limited capacity in Alabama's game, he was never going to come out and do an encore of his second-half performance against Georgia.

In fact, the biggest question for Alabama at A-Day, as it has been all spring, will be the defense. If the game is a straight split 11-on-11 contest as it has been in the past, there will be a challenge in coming up with 10 defensive backs of the expected caliber. Saban gave a strong hint about secondary depth last week, when DeVonta Smith (that other hero of the Georgia overtime) stayed on defense even though Tyrell Shavers joined Jerry Jeudy on the "out for spring" list.

Defense doesn't sell tickets, though, not even free ones at A-Day. Quarterbacks do, and a "quarterback battle" does even more. We probably won't hear anything official on whether Tagovailoa will play or simply wear an inflated mitten and wave until Thursday, when Saban holds his next press conference.

The best case scenario is if it stays as "a little setback." Anything more and there may be as much consternation as confidence over the summer.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
What really happened between Hugh Freeze, Alabama and the SEC

By: John Talty and Mark Zenitz

If Nick Saban had gotten what he wanted, Hugh Freeze would be in Tuscaloosa this week helping Alabama prepare for its annual A-Day spring game.

It's what the former Ole Miss coach wanted, too.

The Southeastern Conference, though, wasn't in favor of that happening.

Alabama was one of at least five SEC schools that had contact with Freeze about on-field jobs this offseason. Saban wanted to hire Freeze as a co-offensive coordinator and position coach, sources told AL.com.

However, SEC commissioner Greg Sankey encouraged Alabama not to hire a man as well known for the personal shortcomings that led to his Ole Miss resignation as he is for his success as a coach.

It's the primary reason why Saban, the highest-paid and most powerful coach in college football, couldn't add Freeze to his staff this offseason, according to multiple sources familiar with the situation who provided previously unreported details about Alabama's pursuit of the former Ole Miss head coach.

It was only a few days after Saban's mid-January meeting with Freeze that he learned he couldn't make the hire. Sankey informed both Freeze and Alabama that it would look bad for the SEC for Freeze to be back coaching in the league while Ole Miss suffered from NCAA penalties incurred under his watch. The SEC preferred that Freeze, who resigned in July following a "pattern of personal misconduct," go off the radar for at least a little while before trying to return to work at one of its schools.

The SEC declined to comment for this story.

Sankey's stance left Saban disappointed. Saban has a strong respect for Freeze, who bested him twice as Ole Miss' head coach -- one of only three SEC coaches to beat Saban multiple times during his time in Tuscaloosa.

Alabama ultimately hired Josh Gattis away from Penn State to be its co-offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach and promoted Mike Locksley to offensive coordinator as part of a staff shakeup. When asked in late January about the possibility of hiring Freeze, Saban said, "I think Hugh Freeze is a really good coach, so we'll keep evaluating and trying to make our staff as strong as we can make it."

It wasn't just Alabama that considered adding Freeze this offseason.

Multiple SEC schools looked into hiring Freeze as their offensive coordinator, including LSU and Missouri, but no deal was ever reached primarily because of the league's opposition,

See next page
according to sources. Freeze was publicly linked to the Missouri offensive coordinator position before Barry Odom hired former Tennessee head coach Derek Dooley.

While it seems implausible a coach as influential and successful as Saban couldn't get what he wanted, a nearly year-old SEC bylaw gives the league's commissioner additional oversight into schools' hiring practices. According to bylaw 19.8.1.2, a school must consult directly with Sankey before offering a job to a coach "who has engaged in unethical conduct as defined under NCAA Bylaws or who has participated in activity that resulted, or may result, in a Level I, Level II or major infraction."

That's relevant because Ole Miss received a two-year bowl ban, scholarship reductions through 2018-19 and had to vacate wins after the program was deemed to have "fostered an unconstrained culture of booster involvement in football recruiting," according to the NCAA Committee on Infractions. The committee, though, seemingly viewed it as more an institutional than Freeze issue at Ole Miss. While multiple Ole Miss assistants and staffers received multi-year show-cause penalties, Freeze was hit with only a two-game conference suspension should any school hire him as a head coach before Nov. 30.

Roger I. Abrams, the Richardson Professor of Law at Northeastern University, says the SEC bylaw doesn't legally prevent a school from hiring someone like Freeze -- a school could have its president make a case to Sankey on why it wants to hire him -- but "it's exactly what the SEC wanted to happen."

"We have seen especially in basketball that coaches who get their programs into NCAA hot water, if they are a good coach, they'll get another job fairly quick," Abrams said. "What the SEC is saying is 'Not in our conference.' I think it makes a lot of sense. Like everything else, the effect of the consultation with the commissioner depends on the personalities involved. Not all universities are equal within any conference."

To this point, the former Ole Miss head coach hasn't fought back against the SEC's stance. Even if he did, he likely wouldn't have any legal recourse against the conference.

"I would conclude he does not have a case," Abrams said. "If someone doesn't like the bylaws, go change your conference."

As spring practice wraps up across the Southeast this week, it looks increasingly unlikely that Freeze will have an on-field coaching job for the 2018 season. It's possible he could land an analyst or consultant job, but sources have indicated he's reluctant to uproot his family from Oxford for that type of position.

Freeze, who compiled a 39-25 record in five seasons in Oxford, has kept a relatively low profile since his July resignation but has expressed remorse in his few public appearances.

"I really believe I have a lot to offer a program whether as an assistant or a head coach, and I'm hopeful it's very soon," Freeze told Gridiron Now in December. "That program will get a very determined, motivated, better coach Freeze if given a second chance."
COMMENTS

‘Everyone hates Bama’ mantra a nice motivator

Has the epidemic of Alabama fatigue, the national ailment of college football, finally come to this?

Four Mississippi State students were arrested Wednesday for breaking into the Mal Moore Athletic Facility complex and absconding with memorabilia — trophies and such, one assumes — for unknown purposes.

Now, let’s not make burglary a laughing matter. It’s a crime and there are consequences. On the other hand, the time frame — right up to the 2:17 a.m. time stamp on security video — suggests contributing factors like “too much beer” and “dumb college prank.”

Again, those aren’t excuses, just possible motivation beyond trying to sell a Jim Thorpe Trophy on EBay.

It also shouldn’t reflect on Mississippi State athletics.

No one would be more mortified at such behavior than MSU AD John Cohen. So the thick encyclopedia of jokes one could tell at MSU’s expense should remain unopened, as will the issue of whether MSU has an actual claim on the 1941 national championship.

See HURT, C3
There’s a lot of teams left in the tournament – need to prepare for new levels of anyone but the athletes, their coaches, and the colleges.

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ALABAMA

Program will earn $14M from upcoming neutral-site games

Michael Casagrande
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With the topic of future non-conference football scheduling in the news, this was a good time to look at the contracts Alabama signs to play these neutral-site, season-opening games.

Available through public records requests, AL.com obtained copies for the three games on the books in 2018 with Louisville, 2019 against Duke and 2021 against Miami. This year's game with Louisville in Orlando, Florida, is organized by ESPN Events, and the next two are in Atlanta through the Peach Bowl.

It’s worth noting the payouts for these games have flattened out, even dipped a little. Alabama will get $4.5 million for the 2018 and 2019 games and $5 million for 2021 against Miami. The school got $6 million in 2016 to play USC in Arlington, Texas, and $5 million to face Florida State in Atlanta.

Show me the money

The list of payouts for neutral-site games from 2014 through the games scheduled moving forward:

2021: Miami, $5 million
2020: No game scheduled yet
2019: Duke, $4.5 million
2018: Louisville, $4.5 million
2017: Florida State, $5 million
2016: USC, $6 million
2015: Wisconsin, 4 million
2014: West Virginia, $3.2 million
A few things we learned from reading over these contracts:

- Alabama will be the home team in crimson jerseys for the Louisville and Duke games. But for the first time since the 2009 with Virginia Tech in Atlanta, it will be the visiting team in white jerseys for the 2021 game with Miami in Atlanta.

- In Orlando, Alabama will play its first outdoor neutral-site game since 2007 in Jacksonville. It will occupy the east end zone, which means it could be facing the setting sun if there's an evening start.

- For this year’s game, Alabama has an allotment of just 18,000 compared to nearly 30,000 for the two games in Atlanta.

- Alabama will have to pay for hotel rooms for the 2018 game in Orlando while complimentary rooms are included in the deal for the 2019 and 2021 games in Atlanta.

- "ESPN will obtain favorable, competitive rates," for the room in Orlando, the contract states. Transportation costs are up to the school for all three games.

- Though ESPN Events is the organizer of the 2018 game in Orlando, the contract acknowledges the game could appear on CBS under the SEC’s media rights deal.

- The contract with ESPN for the Orlando game is just four pages long dated Aug. 4, 2015, and addressed to then-athletics director Bill Battle.

- Lower level tickets in Atlanta that cost $200 for the Duke game will cost $250 for the Miami game. Club and suite face-value tickets will cost $300 for both games. The least-expensive ticket will be $125 for both games.

- For the Atlanta games, the exact price for the allotment of tickets is spelled out in the contract. For 2019, it has to purchase $5,377,925 worth of tickets to sell for its $4.5 million payout. In 2021, the total ticket cost is $5,696,750 for the $5 million guarantee.

- The Atlanta game contacts call for 75-100 downtown poll banners to promote the game, along with "limited welcome signage in team hotels.”

- Alcohol is specifically addressed in the Atlanta game contracts. Beer will be sold at both, but sales will be cut off at the end of halftime.

- If ESPN’s "College GameDay" originates from Atlanta before either game and ESPN requests cheerleaders, mascots or bands "each school will have the discretion to determine if it will accommodate this request," though it’s up to Alabama to pay for their lodging.

- In Atlanta, the contract states Alabama "will consider" participating in official team walks when arriving at the stadium. It hasn’t done these kinds of things in season-opening neutral site games in the past as the team buses pull up directly to the stadium door minus the fanfare.

- Alabama agrees to allow Chick-fil-A do promotional activities at the spring games prior to the seasons it has games. That includes video board ads and providing complimentary food to "media, staff, and teams.”