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What sales tax change means for Alabama

A U.S. Supreme Court’s recent decision will allow states to collect sales taxes from online retailers that don’t already have a presence in the state.

It’s a decision many brick-and-mortar retailers and others have been advocating for, saying the previous system created an unfair advantage for online sellers. That could provide another lift to local retailers who have helped Birmingham weather a turbulent time in the national retail landscape.

While Amazon and a number of other retailers were already collecting online sales taxes through Alabama’s Simplified Sellers Use Tax program, there is hope the Supreme Court’s decision also will give local governments a revenue boost at a time when many are facing financial hurdles.

But experts say realizing the rewards of the program won’t happen immediately. “The decision will eventually level the playing field for our brick-and-mortar retailers, at least in terms of sales taxes, but it’ll take time,” said Bruce Ely, partner at Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP.

“And the revenue impact on the state and local governments will likely take some time. The major triggering event will be new state legislation, but unless Governor (Kay) Ivey decides that a special session this fall is needed, that can’t happen until next spring.”

Ely said that delay will give the business community, the Alabama Department of Revenue, self-administered cities and counties – and their contracted audited firms – time to develop legislation.

Ely said much work already has been completed in that regard through previous task force efforts.

Representatives from the Alabama Department of Revenue said the department is reviewing the decision and will determine over the coming weeks how it will affect tax collections in the state.

ADOR also noted it is in the process of drafting rules to implement recent changes made by the Alabama Legislature with regard to online sales tax collection. State lawmakers earlier this year passed a bill that would allow the state’s Simplified Sellers Use Tax program to collect taxes from third-party sellers – many of which operate on sites like Amazon.

The ADOR said those rules will likely be available for public comment later this summer.

Kennon Walthall, senior vice president of Avenu Insights & Analytics, said there will certainly be a lift for local governments from the decision – although perhaps not as much as some estimates have projected, since Amazon and numerous other online-focused retailers were already collecting sales tax.

Even so, he said an extra 3 to 5 percent would still be great for city budgets.

On the business side, Walthall said the change shouldn’t result in a huge challenge for most businesses. “The technology is there. It’s not a burden on the businesses,” Walthall said.

He said a number of states offer free software and that, over time, it has become much easier for companies’ accounting software to interact with tax-filing lookups.

Ely said he hopes the states, including Alabama, ultimately consider a higher sales threshold for small retailers and eBay fans.

He said many are also hopeful Congress will step in and approve states joining what is now called the Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement or enact a separate set of compliance rules and filing thresholds, or a combination of the two.

-Ty West
Canary steps down from BCA

Business Council of Alabama’s president takes position at U.S. Chamber of Commerce

The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY — Business Council of Alabama President Billy Canary stepped down Friday in the wake of a wave of high-profile departures from the organization.

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BCA

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Canary announced his retirement from the BCA and has accepted a position as senior fellow at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. He has led the group, long a major player in state politics, for the last 15 years.

"During my tenure, we have worked every day to make the BCA the most relevant and effective business advocacy association in Alabama," Canary said in a statement.

The move comes after some of the state's largest companies parted ways with the lobbying group, with some openly questioning its leadership. Alabama Power Co., Regions Bank, Blue Cross Blue Shield and Power-South Energy Cooperative left the organization.

BCA Chairman Perry Hand said Canary had provided exceptional service to the BCA over the last 15 years and was the longest-serving leader in the group's 33-year history.

"From day one, Billy has worked to create partnerships, both statewide and nationally, that have served our organization — and Alabama's business community — well," Hand said in a statement.

BCA Senior Vice President for Governmental Affairs Mark Colson has been temporarily assigned the duties of president.
BIRMINGHAM

City's tech evolution gets major boost

Atlanta-based technology company setting up shop with flagship data center

William Thornton  wthornton@al.com

An overgrown stretch of land within sight of downtown Birmingham, which once powered the city to its reputation as a manufacturing dynamo, might be the site of the next step in its evolution into a regional tech power.

DC BLOX on Monday announced it intends to open the first phase of a technology and innovation campus in Birmingham early next year, employing 20 to start. But the Atlanta-based technology company says the site, which will be its flagship data center, could see $785 million in investment over the next decade.

Groundbreaking is expected to take place next month. The first phase will be 31,000 square feet and will be able to deliver 5 megawatts of customer capacity by early 2019. It will also have 13,000 square feet of office space with conference rooms, staging areas and work stations.

The center is being marketed for business, health care, government and hyperscale cloud edge deployments.

DC BLOX CEO Jeff Uphues said the Magic City became the company's destination after it scouted 40 cities based on fiber optic networks, power rates, office space availability, an analysis of area Internet traffic and other factors.

Yet Birmingham was the largest city in America without a purpose-built high security multi-tenant data center, he said.

The company's first look at the 27-acre property off Sixth Street South came on a rainy day last August, Uphues said. It was a deserted tract of land with a view of the Birmingham skyline and the sounds of traffic from Interstate 65 audible just beyond the trees.

The site had been home to Ingalls Ironworks, built in 1910 and at one time the largest single-unit steel fabricator in the South, until the company's shipbuilding works grew beyond it. Trinity Steel bought the property in 1981.

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The site was purchased in 2005 by the Jefferson County Economic and Industrial Development Authority on behalf of the county and the city of Birmingham. It became a brownfield through an EPA grant. Over the years, proposals were floated to turn the land into public housing, or as a home to a UAB football stadium.

Uphues said the property was much bigger than what the company originally had in mind. However, its position so close to the city’s heart, along with its proximity to fiber optic routes, utilities and the UAB campus made the company rethink its idea. The data center vision was born as a technology and innovation campus.

Still, DC BLOX had to wait until January, when it was finalizing plans for a Huntsville data center, before a clear path emerged in securing the land in Birmingham, he said. The company had briefly pivoted to another location at Blazer Station, but that was unworkable, Uphues said.

He credits several people, including Birmingham Business Alliance CEO Brian Hilson, county Commissioner David Carrington, Alabama Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield and Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin for keeping the project alive.

The estimated economic impact of the project during the construction and operational phase is $94 million on the Birmingham metropolitan area, more than $80 million of which will be in Jefferson County, according to an analysis prepared by the University of Alabama’s Center for Business and Economic Research. Economic impact on Alabama is estimated to be $99 million.

The project also means revitalization for North Titusville, Woodfin said, on land that hasn’t seen economic activity in more than 30 years. The $500,000 from the sale of the property will be the first deposit in the city’s neighborhood revitalization fund.

“It’s a tremendous achievement for this community and a much-needed investment in our neighborhood,” Woodfin said. “Areas like Titusville have been underinvested for far too long.”

At the announcement Monday, Uphues said the project could transform the Birmingham area into a “technology-focused alternative to Atlanta.” Carrington said the project could have many ramifications — not just for education but as a magnet for more tech companies.

“We believe this site will be a highly compelling alternative in the Southeast to data centers in Atlanta, and those firms who use or are considering using a data center in Atlanta, you should think Birmingham first,” Uphues said.
BHAMS HOAR CONSTRUCTION LANDS
NASHVILLE SKYSCRAPER PROJECT

Birmingham-based Hoar Construction's Tennessee division will build a skyline-changing project in Nashville.

Hoar has been awarded the contract to build a tower that could be up to 40 stories and would include space for a high-end hotel and luxury condominium units, according to information from Huntsville developer Propst Properties and reported by our sister publication Nashville Business Journal.

Representatives of Hoar declined to discuss further project details.

Propst purchased the site for $36.9 million earlier this year. Propst includes two well-known Birmingham CRE professionals – former Daniel Corp. President Chris Brown and former Colonial Properties Trust executive John Hughey.

The hotel and condo tower would be one component of the larger 1.1 million-square-foot Broadwest development on a prominent site in Nashville's West End. The project also includes a 500,000-square-foot office tower. The two skyscrapers would substantially change the surrounding area, and possibly vie for the highest elevation in the Music City.

Hoar and Turner Construction would partner as general contractors on the project, while Cooper Carry would be the architect.

A deal has not yet been finalized for the luxury hotel brand, and developers said a scenario Hoar presented for the tower to include 15 floors for a hotel and 21 floors for condos is one of four proposals still being considered. Propst said the project plans are not finalized and could change.

Developers told the NBJ that site work at the project could begin in the fourth quarter. The price of a development like Broadwest is expected to cost hundreds of millions of dollars.
State’s new law protecting stone soldiers might block wrecking balls at a plethora of public properties

John Sharp jsharp@al.com

Perhaps the record will one day show that Alabama’s last shot of the Civil War was fired in Mobile at Ladd-Peebles Stadium.

Mayor Sandy Stimpson, favoring a new football stadium at the opposite end of the city, hopes to tear down much of the dowdy but famous Ladd-Peebles, where Paul “Bear” Bryant coached his first game for the University of Alabama.

Intriguingly, the 69-year-old stadium’s salvation might be a new state law meant to protect Confederate monuments: the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act of 2017.

The law, in fact, could turn out to have unusual consequences statewide, as it protects all manner of “architecturally significant” structures or memorials more than 40 years old on public property, regardless of their attachment to the Civil War. “I think those that wrote the bill thought it was a clever way to prevent removals/alterations, etc., to Confederate memorials but also knew it could include a lot of other places,” said Pamela Sterne King, an assistant professor with a focus on public history and historic preservation at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

“T’m sure the law will be tested,” King said. “Maybe the Mobile case will be the one to do it.”

Critics of the law believe that it was poorly thought out to begin with, and now is being exposed.

“The act never should have become law, and the fact it may interfere with other sorts of local government decision-making underscores the need to repeal it,” said David Dinielli, deputy legal director with the Montgomery-based Southern Poverty Law Center.

‘ADAMANT ABOUT THAT’

In Mobile, two City Council members are calling for further legal interpretation of the law. “It would appear to be applicable to Ladd just as it would be applicable to any of these Confederate statues they want to protect,” said council President Levon Manzie.

Said Councilman Fred Richardson, “If it’s 40 years or older, you need permission to tear it down. The overwhelming input I’m getting from citizens is they do not want the stadium torn down and are adamantly about that.”

Indeed, the Preservation Act prohibits relocating, removing, altering, renaming or “other disturbance of any architecturally significant” building, memorial building, memorial street, or monument that has been on public property for 40 years or more.

Manzie and Richardson say the 2017 law blocks the city from demolishing Ladd-Peebles, which it owns.

George Talbot, a Mobile city spokesman, said the mayor’s administration is researching the law and whether it can apply to Ladd-Peebles. “One question is whether it meets the definition of a ‘monument,’” Talbot said.

Attorney General Steve Marshall’s office, since the law’s signing by Gov. Kay Ivey in May 2017, has issued three opinions about its particulars. None of those related to whether
a sports or entertainment venue falls under the law.

According to the law itself, exemptions are available, to be decided by an 11-member committee. Committee members consist of appointees from the governor, speaker of the House and Senate president pro tem.

The committee has met only once since the law's adoption. That meeting, according to committee members, was simply an organizational session to decide a slate of directors.

"As I understand it, if things come before the committee, they will call a meeting and we'll run to Montgomery and hear the materials that are presented," said Opelika Mayor Gary Fuller, a committee member.

Fuller said he saw no reason that the law wouldn't cover a football stadium. "The way I look at that, if the community wants it, then that is something for the committee to consider and listen to the pro's and con's and go from there," he said.

'COMMUNITY'S VISION'

The fate of Ladd-Peabees is wrapped into a future $70-80 million stadium project that's 20 minutes to the west at the University of South Alabama.

Stimpson supports an on-campus football stadium for the university's Jaguars football team, which has played its home games at Ladd-Peabees since 2009. The new 25,000-seat stadium would also host the Reese's Senior Bowl, Dollar General Bowl and the Gulf Coast Challenge, among other events.

The project hinges on a donation of about $10 million in city funding, or about $500,000 annually through 2027. In return, the university would give the city $2.5 million toward transforming Ladd-Peabees into a new, smaller venue for high school athletics and community events. Around the new venue would be green spaces and new recreation amenities.

Stimpson's administration argues that Ladd-Peabees is a "challenge" that could cost the city up to $33 million to maintain over the next 20 years. The administration points to the stadium's "D-plus" grade in an 87-page independent engineering report that found water leaks and insufficient guardrails.

Manzie said it's "unfortunate" that the university's new stadium and Ladd-Peabees' fate have been tied together. Said Manzie: "I don't want to see a decrepit stadium there, but I want to see something done that is in alignment with the community's vision."

For Ladd-Peabees supporters, there are few preservation alternatives other than the 2017 law.

The stadium lies within the Maysville neighborhood, which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2013. Under the designation, any alterations to properties within the boundaries of the historic district must undergo extensive review if a project is funded with federal dollars.

There is no indication that Ladd-Peabees' future would be linked to federal funding.

State law allows cities to enact procedures to protect historical properties by establishing a preservation commission and then passing preservation ordinances applying within certain specified boundaries. Mobile has an architectural review board that oversees work within seven venerable districts, but Ladd-Peabees is outside its jurisdiction.

Nonetheless, Joshua Rothman, chairman of the history department at the University of Alabama, said he can see a scenario where a lawyer makes a case that the stadium "simply can't be touched."

The stadium was originally dedicated in 1948 as a "memorial" stadium in honor of Ernest F. Ladd, a former president of Merchants National Bank in Mobile. It renamed "Ladd-Peabees Stadium" in 1997 to also honor longtime community leader and Senior Bowl chairman E.B. Peabees Jr.

Said Rothman, "It's old enough to fit within the law, and while I don't know that it has any real architectural significance, the name of the stadium as built was 'Ernest F. Ladd Memorial Stadium.' And it's definitely a building."

He added, "I'm sure counter-arguments could be made as well, of course, but I'd guess the whole thing could be a mess."

"No architecturally significant building, memorial building, memorial street, or monument which is located on public property and has been so situated for 40 or more years may be relocated, removed, altered, renamed, or otherwise disturbed."

Alabama Memorial Preservation Act of 2017
Millport native earns state school board post

Jeff Newman will serve as president pro tem

Staff report

The state school board member who represents Tuscaloosa County has been named president pro tem of the board.

Jeff Newman, who represents District 7 on the State Board of Education, was elected to the post Tuesday. Cynthia McCarty, who represents District 6, was elected the board’s vice president.

Gov. Kay Ivey serves as president of the board by the virtue of her office.

Newman is in his second term on state school board. In his first term, Newman served as the board’s vice president.

He is a native of Millport and earned master's degrees from Mississippi State University and the University of West Alabama.

Newman has more than 32 years of experience in the field of education. He retired as superintendent of the Lamar County School System before his election to the state school board.

Other posts he has held include administrator of federal programs, career technical principal and director, high school assistant principal and an agribusiness teacher.

In addition to Tuscaloosa County, Newman represents Lamar, Fayette, Walker, Jefferson, Marion, Winston, Franklin, Lawrence, Colbert, Lauderdale and part of Limestone counties.

Other board members include Jackie Zeigler in District 1, Betty Peters in District 2, Stephanie Bell in District 3, Yvette Richardson in District 4, Ella Bell in District 5 and Mary Scott Hunter in District 8.

Eric Mackey is the state schools superintendent.
HUNTSVILLE

Endangered fish holding up Mazda-Toyota

Work stopped to study impact on pygmy sunfish

Paul Gattis pgattis@al.com

Work on the $1.6 billion Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA plant in west Huntsville has been temporarily suspended because of environmental concerns.

Huntsville city officials said in a statement Thursday to AL.com that the project has been put on hold briefly "for final technical surveys to be completed and ensure there is no impact on the habitat of the Spring Pygmy Sunfish."

Toyota confirmed the delay in its own statement.

The spring pygmy sunfish is a tiny fish that rarely grows more than an inch. It lives in the dense aquatic vegetation around springs in the Tennessee River drainage, near the site of the plant in Limestone County.

The Center for Biological Diversity filed a federal lawsuit in June seeking an injunction asking the court to require the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect the sunfish habitat. The lawsuit is not against Mazda Toyota Manufacturing.

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SUNFISH
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“This is a short-term suspension that reflects a shared goal of environmental preservation by Mazda, Toyota and the City of Huntsville,” the statement from Huntsville officials said. “Crews anticipate construction to resume shortly with minimal disruption.”

A groundbreaking for the plant is expected later this year and production is planned to begin in 2021.

“We are aware of the Center for Biological Diversity’s concerns regarding the sunfish,” Toyota said in a statement to AL.com.

“Throughout the planning and design of this project we continue to work closely with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the city of Huntsville and our joint venture partner, Mazda, to ensure that the necessary protections are in place. Mazda and Toyota continue to make environmental preservation a priority and we are committed to developing the property sustainably.

“We have temporarily suspended construction to allow for additional technical surveys to be completed and confirm that the sunfish will be protected. We anticipate that this will be a short-term suspension and that construction will resume shortly with minimal disruption.”

Elise Bennett, an attorney for the Center of Biological Diversity, said she believed a compromise could be reached to preserve the fish habitat as well as allow construction to go forward on the plant.

“We’re hopeful that there is,” she said Thursday in an interview with AL.com.

“We’re working with spring pygmy sunfish experts that we know to determine what those factors are. We’re in that process right now, seeing what kinds of things Toyota can do.

“Our hope is there can be a future for the plant and a future for the fish and that they don’t have to be mutually exclusive.”

AL.com reporter Lee Roop contributed to this report.
UA signs 10-year deal with Coca-Cola

Contract gives company exclusive rights for vending, fountain drinks

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Coca-Cola Bottling Co. United-Central and the University of Alabama have entered into a 10-year agreement for the exclusive rights to fountain drinks and beverage and snack vending on campus.

The 10-year contract began July 1 and is independent of an agreement for UA’s athletic facilities. As part of the deal, the company will pay the university around $2 million annually for the exclusive rights and other contributions including scholarships, in-kind support, promotions, and funds for capital improvements in dining facilities.

The contract was awarded after a request for proposal by the university, Associate Vice President of Communications Monica Watts said. The contract was previously held by Buffalo Rock Co. but Coca-Cola’s bid offered higher revenue, Watts said.

“Coca-Cola United is thrilled about our expanded partnership with the University of Alabama to serve its students, faculty and staff on
DEAL

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campus," said Bo Taylor, vice president of Coca-Cola United's central region, in a statement released by the company. "Coke United's business culture for more than 100 years has been based on relationships."

This year, Coca-Cola United and the Coca-Cola Co. also extended its contract with Crimson Tide Sports Marketing for pouring rights and marketing at all UA athletic events.

As part of the agreement for pouring and vending rights on campus, the beverage company is granted exclusive obligations and rights to fountain pouring rights, beverage and snack vending on campus, multi-product dispensers in dorms, retail shelf space and non-permanent cooler space in retail locations, and 80 percent of the space in fixed coolers in retail locations on campus with first choice of placements in the displays.

The company will provide the university a guaranteed annual minimum vending sales commission of $650,000 in year one with a 5 percent annual increase for the remainder of the contract until it reaches $977,337. It will also pay $1.15 million for a sponsorship fee and promotion and advertising rights annually.

The university will receive a monthly vending commission on the gross sales of beverage and snacks ranging from 27.5 percent to 54 percent. The beverage company will provide and maintain the vending machines.

The beverage company also agreed to:
- Pay the university $10,000 annually for the university recycling program
- Provide $10,000 worth of beverages as an in-kind contribution for university activities with a 5 percent annual increase for the remaining years of the contract
- Spend $10,000 in discretionary funds for capital improvements
- Pay $70,000 annually for scholarships
- Spend $20,000 annually on mutually-agreed upon marketing programs to promote sales on campus
- Spend $10,000 annually for dining enhancements.

The company will also provide benefits, such as:
- Including UA in its campus ambassador program
- Providing two speakers for a campus speaker series
- Providing a summer internship for a student
- Providing product sampling events on campus throughout the year
- Providing advertising messages that promote university activities on the beverage company’s trucks.

UA will not permit the sale or distribution of competing beverages on campus unless permitted as a recognized exception by the contract. The permitted exceptions include beverages from Starbucks, Dunkin' Donuts, Smoothie King, or other future restaurants that may locate on campus.

The restaurants currently serving Pepsi in the Ferguson Center will be changed to Coca-Cola products, Watts said. Starbucks, Dunkin' Donuts and Smoothie King are allowed to serve their drinks in their cups, she said. Starbucks is allowed to market its products, including on social media.

The contract also includes an exemption for Chick-fil-A lemonade.

Beverages not subject to the exclusive rights also include products used for academic research, bulk dispensed dairy and dairy alternative products, fresh-brewed tea and coffee, hot chocolate, and unbranded smoothies and milkshakes made fresh on site.

Under the deal, the company will sell products to the university for a discount of about 45 percent.

The prices will increase annually by no more than 4 percent.

As part of the agreement, Coca-Cola is licensed to use the university’s marks on a royalty-free basis for marketing, advertising, or promoting its products without approval of the materials by UA.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.
Office to bolster gifted education

UA consolidates efforts to help state's gifted students

By Ken Roberts
City Editor

The University of Alabama has launched a program aimed at strengthening the state's efforts to educate gifted students.

The Gifted Education and Talent Development Office will consolidate all of the UA College of Education's research, teaching, service and programming in gifted education. The office will also offer more professional development for educators and outreach to parents.

Jennifer Jolly, associate professor of gifted education at UA, will serve as the office's director. She says she wants to begin by identifying research partners in schools throughout Alabama.

"We'll also begin learning more about schools' early childhood programs to understand how this fits into our research agenda," Jolly said in a news release. "Identifying children for gifted education at an early age is extremely important, especially for low-income kids."

The goal of gifted education is to identify students who show potential to develop beyond traditional benchmarks set for children at their age level. But the method of identifying such students and the level of resources allocated to gifted education vary from state to state and country to country.

For instance, Jolly said that an over-reliance on aptitude scores can disproportionately exclude racial and ethnic minorities or students from low-income households.

"I'd also like to get a better sense of what is happening with gifted education across Alabama," said Jolly, who researched gifted education at the University of New South Wales in Australia for three years and for eight years at Louisiana State University.

"Anecdotally, from the teachers I've worked with

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in the state, if kids don't get identified in the second grade, there's not a lot of looking for them after that. I think the awareness drops off the radar. Those are things that are worth investigating, in terms of views and awareness of what that might look like in later grades, especially in middle school and high school, where kids may have hidden their talents, and are getting to a point in their schooling where they can take classes that they are really interested in."

Jolly's research has focused primarily on parents of gifted children and homeschooling of gifted children. She's also written about the history of gifted education and recently published "A History of American Gifted Education."

She said the Gifted Education and Talent Development Office will offer a variety of materials for parents to access on its website.

"I want them to engage with us because they are so important in the education and success of their children," Jolly said. "And definitely reach out to parents who may not naturally come to us."
UA part of cosmic discovery

By: Ed Enoch

An international team of scientists including three University of Alabama researchers have discovered the first evidence of a source of cosmic particles known as high-energy neutrinos, a breakthrough that they say will enhance our understanding of how the universe is built and behaves.

The announcement on Wednesday coincided with the publication this week of two papers in the journal Science based on observations of high-energy neutrinos emitted from a galaxy billions of light-years away made by the IceCube Neutrino Observatory in Antarctica last fall and confirmed by telescopes around the globe and in Earth’s orbit. The IceCube team includes 300 scientists from 12 countries.

Marcos Santander, a UA assistant professor of physics and astronomy; Dawn Williams, a UA associate professor of physics and astronomy; and William C. Keel, a UA professor of physics and astronomy, were co-authors on the project.

“Today, I am proud to announce that using data gathered by NSF’s IceCube and an international coalition of scientists we have taken a major step toward solving the high-energy cosmic ray mystery,” said National Science Foundation Director France Córdova, at the NSF headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia.

Neutrinos are part of a century-old mystery about what sends cosmic rays and subatomic particles such as neutrinos speeding through the universe, said Francis Halzen, IceCube principal investigator, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“It is one of the oldest open questions in astronomy. And of course the issue fascinates particle physicists because cosmic ray accelerators routinely accelerate particles to 10 million times the energy of the large hadron collider in Geneva,” Halzen said.

On Sept. 22, 2017, one high-energy neutrino passed through the ice lighting up the sensors, Halzen said. Computers at ICE CUBE reconstructed the energy and direction of neutrino and made it available for any telescope that was interested in it, he said.

Telescopes observing high-energy gamma rays were able to find the source, a flare in elliptical galaxy visible in the Orion constellation with a supermassive black hole at its center, spewing jets of mass and energy, the scientists said. The galaxy and its jets, known as a blazar when pointed at Earth, accelerate cosmic rays and particle collisions that create high-energy neutrinos.

The flare last fall was the largest ever observed from the blazar, said Regina Caputo, Fermi-Large Area telescope collaboration analysis coordinator, at University of Maryland/NASA
Goddard Space Flight Center. The team behind the Fermi-Large Area telescope use the orbital
telescope to constantly searching for changes in gamma rays. It observes more than 2,000 blazars
in the sky, Caputo said.

When the IceCube team reviewed its decades worth of data, Halzen said it discovered in 2014
there was a flare in neutrinos, more than 12, that were recorded in a 150-day period. The energy
distribution and pattern of the 2014 neutrinos exactly matched what they expected from cosmic
accelerators, he said.

“For the first time, we have been able to associate high energy neutrinos with a high-energy
gamma ray source. This is what we have been waiting for. This is the first evidence for a high-
energy cosmic accelerator. A pivotal moment for multi-messenger astronomy,” said Olga Botner
of Uppsala University.

Multi-messenger astronomy combines observation from multiple from devices such as gamma,
X-rays, optical, radio telescopes. The team’s discovery combined observations of the blazar from
multiple instruments and data on the neutrino from IceCube.

“We’re beginning to do astronomy using means other than light, combining electromagnetic
(light) observations with other measurements in what we now call multi-messenger astronomy,”
said Marcos Santander, UA assistant professor of physics and astronomy, in a statement released
by the university. “This is the first evidence that we have of an active galaxy emitting neutrinos,
which means we may soon start observing the universe using neutrinos to learn more about these
objects in ways that would be impossible with light alone.”

The IceCube Neutrino Observatory, funded in part by the NSF, was built in Antarctica to track
the high-energy particles, Halzen said.

At the observatory, a sensor array of more than 5,000 digital optical modules is suspended along
86 cables embedded in a cubic kilometer of ice beneath the South Pole. The array is designed to
observe evidence of the collisions between nearly mass-less neutrinos, capable of passing
through most matter unimpeded, and the nuclei of the ice atoms.

The high energy neutrinos from cosmic events such as the births, collisions and deaths of stars
stand out from the lower-energy neutrinos generated within our solar system and earth’s
atmosphere.

High-energy neutrinos are of interest because of their tendency to travel great distances straight
from their sources, typically without interference.

“A neutrino is invisible unless it collides with an atom. This happened very rarely, so you need
to monitor a tremendous amount of atoms to stand a chance of catching a neutrino,” Botner said.
IceCube monitors 1 billion tons of ice at the South Pole station, she said. In the 2014 flare of neutrinos, 13 were detected through collisions in the ice, but Botner said more than 15 million passed by IceCube without a collision.

While the team has collected an incredible amount of data on the blazar, Halzen said the discovery of blazars as one source of high-energy neutrinos is only the beginning.

"These first results will raise new questions and open doors for new research. As in all good science, this is only the beginning and that is exciting," Córdova said.
UA astronomer aids discovery

Team finds evidence of rare mid-sized black hole

Staff report

A University of Alabama astronomer is part of an international team of researchers who found a rare mid-sized black hole.

"It's a class of black hole that we don't have a lot of data evidence they exist," Jimmy Irwin, UA associate professor of astronomy and physics, said in a news release. "If we understand how intermediate-mass black holes form, we can understand how large black holes form."

The finding, which demonstrates an effective method to detect the intermediate class of black holes, was announced in the journal Nature Astronomy in June.

"This is incredibly exciting: This type of black hole hasn't been spotted so clearly before," says lead scientist Dacheng Lin of the University of New Hampshire and a former post-doctoral researcher under Irwin at UA. "A few candidates have been found, but on the whole they're extremely rare and very sought after. This is the best intermediate black hole candidate observed so far."

According to the UA news release, two types of black holes are well-known:
- Stellar-mass black holes, which are created when massive stars die.
- Supermassive black holes, with masses equivalent to millions or billions of suns, which are hosted at the centers of galaxies.

Between these extremes are intermediate-mass black holes.

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They could grow into supermassive black holes as they take in more mass from stars and cosmic particles that pass too close, but few robust candidates have been found.

Irwin was an adviser for a team of researchers who used data from the European Space Agency's XMM-Newton X-ray space observatory, as well as NASA's Chandra X-Ray Observatory and Swift X-Ray Telescope.

They detected an enormous flare of radiation in the outskirts of a distant galaxy, thrown off as a star passed too close to a black hole and was subsequently devoured.

One way intermediate-mass black holes are thought to form is the merger of massive stars lying within dense star clusters, making the centers of these clusters one of the best places to hunt for them.

However, by the time such black holes have formed, these sites tend to be devoid of gas, leaving the black holes with no material to consume and little radiation to emit, which makes them difficult to spot.

To find a good candidate, Lin and colleagues sifted through data taken by XMM-Newton, Chandra and Swift along with other telescopes.

They identified it in observations of a large galaxy some 740 million light-years away.

The data showed the star likely began falling into the black hole in October 2003 in observations from Earth, producing a burst of recordable and visible energy that tapered off over the next decade, Irwin said.

The scientists believe the star was disrupted and torn apart by a black hole with a mass of around 50,000 times that of the sun.

Such star-triggered outbursts are rare for this type of black hole, so the discovery suggests many more might lurk in a dormant state in galaxy peripheries across the local universe.
UA engineering team enters antenna design contest

Technology could help with search-and-rescue operations

Staff report

A team of engineering students at the University of Alabama is one of six selected to compete in an international contest to design a portable radio system capable of locating a hidden radio transmitter in real time.

The UA team is competing in the 2018 Annual Student Antenna Design Contest, held by the Antennas and Propagation Society of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, the world’s largest technical professional organization dedicated to advancing technology. The UA team won the contest a year ago.

“We are very fortunate because this is a worldwide competition, so we are very happy our students were one of the top six,” said Yang-Ki Hong, team adviser and the E.A. “Larry” Drummond endowed professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering in the UA College of Engineering.

The UA team is made up of students from Hong’s lab including Hoyun Jay Won, a graduate student from Incheon, South Korea; Katelyn Isbell, an undergraduate student from Chesapeake, Virginia; Leo Vanderburgh, an undergraduate student from Dayton, Ohio; Jonathan Platt, an undergraduate student from Lumberton, New Jersey.

The other teams include Michigan State University, the Colorado School of Mines, two teams from Greece and a team from Spain.

For the contest, the teams where challenged to create a portable, battery-powered device to locate a hidden radio transmitter at the frequency of a common Wi-Fi router, as opposed to the lower frequency used by amateur radio enthusiasts in transmitter-hunting contests. The teams will demonstrate their devices during the annual IEEE Antennas and Propagation Symposium this week.

The possible applications, especially if tuned to higher frequencies used by mobile phones, include search-and-rescue operations and wildlife management.

The compact, low-cost device designed by the UA engineering students uses a four-pronged antenna system to create a Doppler shift to discern shifts in the signal that can help reveal the location of the source of a radio signal.

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CONTEST

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As stipulated in the contest rules, the device also uses channel sounding technology to sifting out the signal’s location around obstacles, such as walls in a building that can block or create multiple ways for a signal to travel.

“To our best knowledge, nobody has fabricated the antenna system that has the capability of both radio-location and channel sounding,” Hong said.

The six finalists receive stipends of as much as $2,500 to help develop the antenna system and travel to the symposium.

The top awards for the teams are $1,500 for first place, $750 for second and $250 for third place.
Two art exhibits debut downtown

Works will remain on display for a few weeks

Staff report

First Friday, a monthly effort to show off arts and entertainment downtown Tuscaloosa, marked the opening of two art exhibits.

"BAM! Black Panther and the Black Arts Movement in the Paul R. Jones Collection" opened Friday night at the Paul R. Jones Museum, 2308 Sixth St., along with "The Story So Far...." a exhibition of work by local artist Tony Brock at the Dinah Washington Cultural Arts Center, 620 Greensboro Ave.

The "BAM!" exhibition, curated by Emily Bibb and Wendy Castenell of the University of Alabama, was inspired by the recent blockbuster movie "Black Panther." The exhibition displays 30 works, including sculptures in wood and stone as well as photographs.

The exhibition will remain at the museum through Aug. 31. The Paul R. Jones Museum hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Admission is free.

Brock’s work focuses on pop-culture, music, movies, comics, and monster magazines. Brock's exhibit features 20 acrylic-on-canvas paintings, including some of the his most recent and popular work.

"The Story So Far...." will remain at the Dinah Washington Cultural Arts Center through July 27. Viewers can see the exhibit from 9 a.m.-noon and 1-4 p.m. on weekdays. Admission is free.

For more information about First Friday, go to www.firstfridaytuscaloosa.com.

Online

For more photos from the art exhibits, go to www.tuscaloosanews.com.
Reward increases for stolen artifacts information

More than 260 items taken from Moundville Archaeological Park in 1980

The Associated Press

MOUNDVILLE — The reward for information leading to the recovery of more 260 artifacts stolen from Moundville Archaeological Park decades ago has been increased from $15,000 to $20,000.

Dr. Jim Knight, professor emeritus of anthropology at the University of Alabama, said several private citizens who hope to see the artifacts returned are offering the reward.

Al.com reported Knight said 264 pottery vessels and other artifacts were stolen from the Erskine Ramsay Archaeological Repository in 1980. An appraisal revealed the artifacts — jars, bottles, bowls, ornaments and jewelry — are worth around $1 million. Since the theft, none has shown up for sale or trade, leading Knight to believe the collection may still be intact.

"With the availability of the internet, it is now possible to distribute these photographs much more widely than was previously feasible. Also, Native American pottery vessels are now routinely sold in internet auctions," Knight told

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The Tuscaloosa News. “These can be monitored by a public aware of this 40-year-old crime and the great need to reunite these rare artifacts with the citizens of Alabama and the South.

“The reward, together with advancements in technology that allow for the rapid dissemination of information by news outlets and social media, offer new hope in an effort to recover the artifacts.”

At the time, the stolen items represented about 70 percent of the museum’s exhibit-quality artifacts and 20 percent of the entire Moundville vessel collection that was curated by the Alabama Museum of Natural History. Experts believe the thieves were knowledgeable about the artifacts because they targeted the highest-quality pieces.

Excavated in the 1930s, the artifacts are high-quality engraved or painted ceremonial pots and bowls, some which held food offerings that were buried with the dead. Others were ordinary cooking pots, bottles and shell jewelry. Many of the vessel engravings depict supernatural creatures, such as the flying serpent, which would guard a person’s passage into the afterlife.

The designs were highly distinctive of Moundville, which is considered a world heritage site. The Mississippians Indians settled in what is now the Moundville area at the beginning of the 11th century. The area reached its peak activity and population around the year 1300 when it had about 1,000 residents. About 10,000 resided in the entire Black Warrior Valley floodplain at the time.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act makes it illegal to sell human remains or cultural artifacts of Native Americans unless a person legally owns the item. Collectors pay millions for antiquities such as the Moundville vessels, Knight said in a 2003 interview with The Tuscaloosa News.

The Alabama Museum of Natural History has established a tipline at 205-348-2800 that will allow those with information about the thefts to leave confidential messages or information.

For more information, including photographs of the artifacts, visit www.museums.ua.edu/oas/stolenartifacts.
Tide adds Penn State to basketball schedule

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

The University of Alabama men’s basketball team will face 2018 NIT champion Penn State, a team that is considered a strong NCAA contender out of the Big Ten, tentatively at Coleman Coliseum on Dec. 21.

The date was listed as a part of Penn State’s non-conference schedule, which was released on Wednesday.

The Nittany Lions finished the 2018 season with a 26-13 record, winning the NIT with an 82-66 win over Utah.

The top six scorers from that team are expected to return for Penn State.

Alabama has not released its full 2018-19 non-conference schedule yet but the Nittany Lions will give UA a second Power Five conference opponent at home.

Arizona has announced it will play in Tuscaloosa on Dec. 9. The Crimson Tide is also expected to host Murray State in December although no venue (possibly Huntsville or Birmingham) or date has been announced.

Also on Wednesday, the bracket for the Charleston Classic, Alabama’s November Tournament destination, was announced.

The Crimson Tide will open on Thursday, Nov. 15 against Northeastern University. The other game in Alabama’s side of the bracket will match Ball State against Virginia Tech, a team Alabama eliminated from the 2018 NCAA Tournament.

Purdue, Wichita State, Davidson and Appalachian State will make up the other half of the bracket.

Alabama will also participate in the SEC/Big12 Challenge in January, playing at Baylor in Waco, Texas.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Alabama reports minor NCAA violations

By: Tommy Deas

Alabama self-reported 13 violations of NCAA Level III and IV rules in the 12-month period that ended June 30, nine fewer than in the previous year, according to a document posted Friday on the school’s athletics website.

Of those, eight involved phone calls, texts, emails or social media posts directed at prospective student-athletes or their families either before contact was allowed due to the prospect’s age or during periods when recruiting contact was not permitted.

The NCAA moved to a four-level violation structure in 2013. Level III violations are considered breaches of conduct “that are isolated or limited in nature” and “do not include more than a minimal impermissible benefit,” according to the NCAA website. Level IV violations are “incidental issues” that are inadvertent, isolated or technical in nature “and result in a negligible, if any, competitive advantage.”

The posted document does not address whether Alabama reported any more serious Level I or II violations, or whether allegations of any serious violations were investigated during the past year.

Of those violations that did not involve phone calls, text messages or the like, Alabama baseball twice failed to provide a day off for players “during an institutional vacation period,” with the violation reported late last month; walk-on members of the rowing team participated in two practices without signing a drug-testing consent form; women’s basketball graduate student manager served without being a full-time graduate student; a men’s tennis player was provided travel expenses to attend an away competition while ineligible; and the diving coach allowed enrolled prospects to participate in tryouts prior to submitting required documents verifying their enrollment status and medical clearance.

The Alabama athletics administration issued nine letters of admonishment to coaches and staff members. Three were issued to coaches in women’s soccer, two to coaches in gymnastics, one each to coaches in men’s tennis, baseball and women’s swimming and one to a staff member in women’s softball.

Women’s soccer had the most violations with three: one involving a pocket dial cell phone call, one for a coach calling the prospect of a father “whom he believed was old enough to receive telephone calls” and one for an email reply to a prospect prior to the permissible contact period.

Gymnastics reported two violations: one for a pocket dial to a recruit prior to the allowed contact period and one for a text response to a recruit who had not yet reached the age of permissible contact.

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Only one violation involved the Crimson Tide football program: an assistant coach responding to a text message last July from an unknown source, which turned out to be a parent of a 2019 prospect, according to the report. The coach reported the violation to the compliance office.

Men's basketball had a violation in March when a player used the Twitter handle of a prospect in a social media post. The tweet was deleted and both players and staff received rules education.
Libba Vaughan is new Leadership Birmingham executive director

By: William Thornton

Libba Vaughan will be Leadership Birmingham's new executive director.

The organization's board of directors announced the move today. Vaughan will take the role Sept. 1.

She is the organization's fourth executive director, replacing Ann Florie, who held the post for 14 years.

Vaughan currently serves as executive director for the Freshwater Land Trust, and previously directed its philanthropy and communications. She also served as the director of UAB's Office of Service Learning and Undergraduate Research.

A 2018 graduate of Leadership Birmingham, Vaughan led Freshwater Land Trust's Red Rock Trail System projects, including the Kiwanis-Vulcan Trail. She also raised funds for the organization's largest operating budget increase during her tenure. At UAB, she launched a faculty development program.

"Leadership Birmingham is vital to the success and prosperity of Greater Birmingham," Vaughan said, in a statement. "It is the incubator and inspiration for ideas and connections and actions that make our region a better place for all of us, not just its graduates."

Chairman Mike Warren called Vaughan "an extremely talented and community-focused leader."

"Her drive to help make our city better now and for future generations is evident in her accomplishments with the Freshwater Land Trust and with other efforts she continues to successfully lead today," he said. "We are thrilled she is joining us."

Guin Robinson, chair of the executive search committee, said Vaughan's "enthusiasm for connecting people and bringing businesses and communities together to accomplish great things is infectious."
Amid less CUSA revenue, UAB forced to make tough cuts

By: Joseph Goodman

The ever-widening gulf between the haves and have-nots of modern day college athletics hit UAB like a punch in the gut last month.

The athletic department was forced to cut or eliminate 12 positions before the start of its new fiscal year in July. The estimated savings are about $400,000. Caught in the middle of the sudden layoffs was Zac Schrieber.

Schrieber was a sports information director at Samford University for 14 years. Last month, he was offered a position by UAB to be the Blazers' new SID for men's basketball. For a father with two young children, it was a major step for his family and his career.

Then came the call from UAB's human resources.

Just before the end of business on Friday, June 15, and two days before the start of his new job at UAB, the university's human resources department informed him the position was no longer available.

Schrieber said the call came at 4:29 p.m. Samford's human resources department closed at 4:30 p.m.

"If I would have been told just four hours earlier, I could have most likely stopped everything on the Samford end of things and kept my job there," Schrieber said in a text message.

Schrieber is now unemployed for the first time in 23 years.

In addition to eliminating Schrieber's position, UAB director of athletics Mark Ingram had to cut 11 others in his department before the start of UAB's new fiscal year on July 2. The downsizing included the loss of Marla Townsend, the Blazers' longtime softball coach who last year accepted a new position as a senior associate athletics director. According to public records, Townsend's salary was $96,000.

"I don't take this lightly, and I certainly don't make decisions like this on a whim," Ingram said. "These are things that take a lot of thought and energy. I wouldn't speak specifically to anybody or any individual about their personal situation, but generally I just say that everyone affected was a very hardworking person that was dedicated to UAB.

"And so it was a hard thing to do, but the decrease in our revenues was a huge hit to our budget, and that had to be planned for as we head into the new fiscal year."

Townsend was a beloved figure inside UAB athletics, and beyond. In May, UAB faculty voted for her to represent them on the university-wide staff council. Townsend was a vocal leader inside UAB athletics for the reinstatement of football when it was eliminated in 2014.

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Fans of UAB athletics, still wary of their own university after the return of UAB football, have cried foul on Twitter and social media since Townsend's last day at UAB, but she told AL.com that she doesn't think her position was eliminated for political reasons. Townsend said she will still support UAB athletics, and doesn't want any fans boycotting the program to protest her forced retirement.

"We need all the support and money we can get right now," Townsend said.

Generating revenue this season through football season tickets is important, she said. The money would make up for for losses in television payouts from Conference USA, and help bridge the gap between now and the completion of Birmingham's new downtown stadium. The stadium is expected to be completed in time for the 2020-2021 season.

UAB could be facing some lean years between now and then, but Ingram said the loss of TV revenue by Conference USA in recent years forced him to make the cuts. While TV revenue has exploded for the Power 5 conferences, Conference USA schools saw their annual TV payout drop from $1.1 million per school to about $200,000 in 2016.

The loss in revenue from the conference coincided with the return of UAB football. It was terrible timing.

"We're in stable financial shape, and have been, but what has occurred is just a build up of lack in conference revenues," Ingram said. "The conference revenues that we had anticipated having when we reinstated football have diminished significantly, and so that really is the issue. And that's the same with the other schools, too."

The staff downsizing came amid record fundraising for the football program as well as UAB's investments in a new soccer stadium, track and field facility and beach volleyball courts. The new football facility is entering its second year.

"There's a big difference between one-time facility expenses ... versus ongoing, long-term annual expenses in your operating budget," Ingram said. "Those are two separate things. You have capital budget, which are your facilities and projects, and, so, if we spend $100,000 or $1 million or $20 million on a facility, once we raise those dollars and spend it on that [facility], we have it and we don't have to then do it the next year.

"That's, I think, where the confusion is," Ingram said. "Yes, we have had record fundraising, which is wonderful and is putting our teams and our coaches in a position to win, and be successful, but those expenses are one-time expenses. They're not annual expenses that repeat themselves year after year."

Conference USA entered into a new multimedia rights deal early this year with CBS Sports. Another deal with ESPN for digital content on ESPN+ was also recently announced. The new media contracts are expected to bump television payouts per school from $200,000 to $400,000. Those additional sources of revenue should help the future, but, ultimately, UAB is banking on football season ticket sales and donations to keep its program afloat.
That has always been the challenge for UAB, an athletics department operating on the outside of college football's Power 5 conferences, but in the heart of college football country. UAB shuttered its football program in 2014, but now Ingram is banking on that team to lead his department into the future.

"As we build that team back, we're going to do it the right way, which, you'll hear Coach [Bill] Clark and I say with regularity," Ingram said, "but it's not something football has done that has caused a problem per se. It is simply the lack in conference distribution that we have received versus what we expected to receive that has been a significant difference. And now over time that has put us in a position to make an adjustment, so we've made that adjustment and we're in a good place, and we're moving forward."
Office for Civil Rights investigating UAB for possible Title IX violation

By: Abbey Crain

The Office for Civil Rights division of the Department of Education is investigating the University of Alabama at Birmingham for a possible Title IX violation involving an alleged sexual assault.

Blake Kitterman, a student at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga, said he was sexually assaulted in November 2016 by a University of Alabama at Birmingham student while the student was visiting Chattanooga. Following the alleged assault, Kitterman worked with his university's Title IX office to file a complaint with UAB.

UAB's Title IX office initially found that the accused student violated the school's sexual violence and sexual misconduct policy, but later dropped the Title IX case after months of investigation, citing limited jurisdiction under its current policy.

"After thorough review of the record, I have determined that the UAB's Title IX Office did not have jurisdiction to investigate this case. As a result, I have decided to vacate the findings of the Hearing Panel and the related sanctions," John R. Johns, Vice President of student affairs at UAB, said in his letter to Kitterman.

According to UAB's sexual violence and misconduct policy, the Title IX office covers cases when the conduct occurs on campus or at a university-sanctioned event, but also when "the conduct occurs outside the context of a University employment or educational program or activity, but has continuing adverse effects on or creates a hostile environment for students, employees or third-parties while on campus or University property owned or controlled by the University or in any employment or education program or activity."

The Office for Civil Rights is investigating UAB for possible Title IX violations. The investigation will look into whether or not UAB provided prompt and equitable responses to Kitterman's sexual harassment complaint and if Kitterman was subjected to retaliation when his request for a transcript of the investigation was denied.

UAB's most recent sexual violence and misconduct policy was updated on November 22, 2016, four days after Kitterman's school sent correspondence to UAB's Title IX office. Kitterman and AL.com were unable to review a previous copy of the policy.

Jessica Davidson, interim director of End Rape On Campus, said it is common for schools to change their policies mid-investigation. She said university Title IX policies should cross school divides and cover students who violate the policy outside of school settings.

"Courts have upheld that one single act of rape can make an entire learning environment hostile," Davidson said.

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center one in five women and one in 16 men are sexually assaulted while in college. More than 90 percent of these cases go unreported, sometimes for victims' fear of not being believed.

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Kitterman said that was the reason he was afraid to report his assault to the police. He hoped by going through his school's Title IX policy, he would find solace.

"We know that very few victims report as is. When they do report they need to be believed. It takes a lot of emotional and physical strength," Kitterman said in an interview with AL.com.

Universities have more leeway when prosecuting sexual assault cases since Education Secretary Betsy DeVos rescinded Obama-era guidelines for enforcing Title IX violations. The guidelines previously demanded schools use a "preponderance of the evidence," or the lowest standard of proof to determine sexual assault cases on campus.

The UAB guidelines do not appear to be system-wide. In Tuscaloosa, the University of Alabama has similar language regarding its Title IX scope, but off-campus assaults are more clearly included in the policy language. According to UA's Title IX policy "all students and employees regardless of sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation and regardless of where the alleged violation occurred" are included under its jurisdiction.

Kitterman said he hopes his case will be resolved in a way that encourages other to come forward about their sexual assaults and that they will be believed.

"It's on UAB at this point. I gave them everything," Kitterman said. They found him responsible, but they let him go."
UAB picks XpertDox for clinical trial recruitment platform

By: William Thornton

UAB has selected Birmingham data analytics firm XpertDox to help with patient recruitment for clinical trials.

By using XpertDox's XpertTrial platform, UAB hopes to improve clinical trial enrollment timelines and accelerate medical research.

XpertTrial is described as a language processing search engine matching 50,000 keywords to a list of active clinical trials across all diseases, procedures, symptoms and specialties.

XpertDox co-founder Sameer Ather said UAB is an "ideal partner." Using the platform has the potential to change medical trial enrollment around the country, he said.

"The XpertTrial Platform is unique in its utilization of big data to address the challenges of clinical trial matching, integrating the most advanced technology into the highest quality options available for patients," Ather said. "Patients, particularly those with serious and rare diseases, want to learn about treatment options including the latest clinical studies but, historically, information has been decentralized and scarce. The XpertTrial Platform has been designed specifically to accelerate access to information, providing patients with the detailed information necessary to make informed decisions."
ALABAMA GENOMIC HEALTH INITIATIVE BEGINS RECRUITMENT

Recruitment for the Alabama Genomic Health Initiative (AGHI) is underway.

The AGHI is a collaboration between the University of Alabama at Birmingham and HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology in Huntsville. The AGHI launched last summer in Birmingham and the respective teams are now recruiting participants at the UAB Huntsville Regional Medical Campus.

The organization will recruit a diverse group of participants from every county in Alabama and provide free genomic analysis and interpretation to this group. In its first year, AGHI has recruited nearly 2,000 individuals. The goal is to increase the number of participants to more than 10,000 people over five years. The AGHI is one of the nation’s first statewide efforts to harness the power of genomic analysis to identify those who are at higher risks for genetic diseases.

The majority of participants will undergo a genotyping array test, assessing 650,000 identified genomic biomarkers. The test will look for the presence of variants in 59 specific genes, referred to as medically actionable by the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics. The genetic variants within these 59 genes are those that are known to contribute to disease and for which the potential for prevention or treatment exists.
UAH president plans to retire

Robert Altenkirch will remain in office until a successor is named

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

University of Alabama in Huntsville President Robert Altenkirch has announced plans to retire once a successor takes office. Altenkirch made the announcement in a memorandum released Monday. The retirement is expected to occur in the 2018-19 academic year, according to System Chancellor Ray Hayes, who earlier announced plans to step down at the end of July.

"When Bob Altenkirch came to UAH, there was absolutely no question he was — and continues to be — the right leader at the right time. He has led the transformation of the campus into a robust student-centered environment that pulses with activity around the clock, while taking research and scholarship to record levels," Hayes said in a released statement.

Altenkirch will continue serving as president until the search for his successor is completed, Hayes said. No timeline for the search was announced Monday.

Altenkirch's departure is not expected to impact the timeline for the search for Hayes' successor, system spokeswoman Kellee Reinhart said.

Board members praised Altenkirch's leadership since his appointment in 2011.

"When Dr. Bob Altenkirch was unanimously elected president of UAH seven years ago, we knew he was a proven leader with impeccable experience who would guide UAH to new levels of greatness. By every measure, he has surpassed our ambitious expectations," said Ron Gray, board president pro tempore, in a statement released by the system.

"In addition to his accomplishments on the campus, he has played an integral role in economic development and is a results-focused partner in the growth of our state and region," Gray said. "As Dr. Altenkirch announces his future retirement plans, we congratulate him on his outstanding service and extend our thanks to him and Beth for excellence at every level. We are particularly appreciative that Bob will remain as president at UAH until his successor is in place."
UAH President Robert Altenkirch announces retirement

By: Paul Gattis

The president of the University of Alabama in Huntsville, Robert Altenkirch, announced his retirement Monday in a memo to faculty, staff and students.

Altenkirch, 70, who is in his seventh year at the school, said in the memo he will remain in place into the 2018-2019 academic year until a successor is chosen.

Altenkirch has overseen enrollment growth, expanded academic programs and a campus renovation during his tenure at UAH.

Enrollment at UAH rose more than 19 percent during Altenkirch's time to a record 9,101 students as of the fall of 2017, according to the Alabama Commission on Higher Education.

Altenkirch said he has asked the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees to begin the process of searching for his replacement. That search will take place following the board's search for a new chancellor to replace the retiring Ray Hayes.

"It is an honor, a privilege, and a pleasure to serve as President of The University of Alabama in Huntsville, and I look forward to us continuing on our trajectory of progress this coming academic year," Altenkirch said in the memo.

Ron Gray of Huntsville, president pro tem of the UA System board, said that Altenkirch had exceeded expectations since he was hired away as president of New Jersey Institute of Technology in 2011.

"When Dr. Bob Altenkirch was unanimously elected President of UAH seven years ago, we knew he was a proven leader with impeccable experience who would guide UAH to new levels of greatness," Gray said in a statement. "By every measure, he has surpassed our ambitious expectations. In addition to his accomplishments on the campus, he has played an integral role in economic development and is a results-focused partner in the growth of our state and region.

"As Dr. Altenkirch announces his future retirement plans, we congratulate him on his outstanding service and extend our thanks to him and Beth for excellence at every level. We are particularly appreciative that Bob will remain as President at UAH until his successor is in place."

Trustee Finis St. John IV of Cullman helped spearhead the search that resulted in Altenkirch's hiring.

"I was privileged to chair the Search Advisory Committee in 2011 that brought Dr. Altenkirch to UAH," St. John said in a statement. "Bob's world-class experience in aerospace research, his administrative accomplishments at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, and his well-earned reputation as a student-focused president were the perfect match for UAH and the North Alabama research and technology community.

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"His tenure as president is producing record-setting results on all fronts, and his collaborative approach to building public-private partnerships has helped reshape the city of Huntsville and our state. It has been an honor to work with Bob and I deeply appreciate his service and his friendship."

During Altenkirch's tenure, the UAH campus has continued a transformation that has put the school on track toward eclipsing the 10,000-student mark within the next two years.

According to his UAH bio, research expenditures for fiscal year 2013 were the highest in school history. And for the most recent research and development expenditures published by the National Science Foundation in 2013, UAH ranked 14th in NASA-funded expenditures and 16th in expenditures from Department of Defense funding.

Altenkirch initiated the formation of UAH's Department of Space Science in 2013, Honors College in 2014, and College of Education in 2014.

In 2013 the Rise School of Huntsville, a non-profit pre-school for developmentally challenged and typical children was moved on campus, and in 2014 the Rise School of Huntsville became the UAH Rise School, an outreach and service unit of the College of Education.

As part of campus growth, the school is building a new 400-bed residence hall as well as the D.S. Davidson Invention to Innovation business incubator and a new sorority house -- projects expected to be completed no later than 2019.

The school has built a new administration building that consolidated student services into one facility as well as expanded Wilson Hall, home of the school's nursing college, and a new student union.

Altenkirch also brought back the UAH hockey team, which was canceled by interim president Malcolm Portera before Altenkirch was hired. And UAH added men's and women's lacrosse teams in 2016.

Altenkirch has three degrees in mechanical engineering, including a doctorate from Purdue University -- where Altenkirch also received his undergraduate degree.

Prior to his president at NJIT, Altenkirch was vice president for research and dean of the engineering college at Mississippi State University. He also worked as a department chair at the University of Kentucky and a dean at Washington State University.
Huntsville ranks 23rd on list of best place to get a job in America

By: Rodneya Ross

A new study says Huntsville is one of the best places to find a job in the country. That's according to Business Insider. Huntsville was 23rd on the list compiled using data from a website called Zippia who analyzed wages and unemployment rates in over 350 cities. Waaay 31 looked into why job growth is on the rise in Huntsville and how it's influencing students to stay in Huntsville after graduation.

Many students are participating in freshman orientation here at the University of Alabama Huntsville and while some are just beginning their journey, others are excited for the job market Huntsville has to offer after graduation.

"Being here at UAH right at the doorstep of cummings research park there are plenty of opportunities for students to get jobs once they're away from the university and internships while they are at the university," said Mark Reiter a rising junior at the University of Alabama Huntsville.

Reiter is one of a few students who said Huntsville's job market is appealing to young people. He said having companies such as Facebook and Mazda-Toyota opening new facilities and bring new jobs here is exciting. Jill Jensen from the chamber of commerce said big name companies moving to huntsville encourages others to join them.

"We have a lot of companies that are interested in the work that other companies are doing," said Jensen who is the Workforce Development Director for the Huntsville-Madison Chamber of Commerce.

Jensen said the highly educated and trained workforce also draws businesses to the area.

"We have great workforce pipelines. We have some incredible schools and young people. And we have a great business climate."

Jensen said in addition to new jobs in Science Technology Engineering and Math and manufacturing. The low cost of living the city offers draws young people in. Reiter who's from Illinois agreed and said that's enough to make him want to call Huntsville home.

"The cost of living is not terribly expensive so it's really economical to live here. And with the amount of jobs we have available and the companies that we have here I think it's a fantastic option and I would definitely stay here if I get a job offer," said Reiter.

Jensen said the chamber will soon be relaunching a website that will help people find jobs and allow companies to post jobs to help increase employment.

Three other Alabama cities made the top 50 list including Decatur which ranked number 33.
Researchers support project to detect particles from deep space on NASA balloon mission

By: Patrick Reardon

A team of researchers at The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) has been awarded NASA funding as part of a large, five-year-long U.S. collaboration to fly an ultra-long duration balloon mission with three innovative ultra-sensitive telescopes to sense cosmic rays and neutrinos coming from deep space. Planned for launch in 2022, the second-generation Extreme Universe Space Observatory on a Super Pressure Balloon (EUSO-SPB2) is a major step toward a planned mission to send a probe to space.

"UAH has been involved with this research for over 20 years, with the science initially led here by the late physics professor Yoshi Takahashi," says Dr. Patrick Reardon, who serves as the director of UAH's Center for Applied Optics (CAO) and as the principal investigator for the UAH effort. "Since then, a team from the CAO, including optical designer Ken Pitalo and several students, has been creating and testing some extraordinary optical designs."

The science driving this investigation is a search for the source of ultra-high energy particles from space that hit our Earth. One type of these particles is cosmic rays: sub-atomic nuclei traveling from every direction in space, accelerated by supernovas and other unknown cosmic phenomena. Similarly mysterious are neutrinos, the "ghost particles" that pass through us all the time, mostly undetected.

While there is much we don't know about neutrinos, the most pressing concern is where they come from. All that is known is that, based on studies at the Pierre Auger Observatory in Argentina, the most energetic cosmic rays that hit the Earth are coming from beyond our own galaxy. The most extreme cosmic rays and neutrinos offer the most clues to their origins and travels because they can resist the effects of magnetic fields in space that curve the paths of weaker particles. These are what this new NASA-funded balloon experiment will be hunting.

"This program will help us solve the great mystery of where in the universe these highly energetic particles are coming from, and how they could possibly be made," says Dr. Angela Olinto, the University of Chicago Albert A. Michelson Distinguished Service Professor in Astronomy and Astrophysics and principal investigator of the collaboration.

Because there are relatively few cosmic particles that collide with Earth, EUSO-SPB2 will not be sensing them directly. Instead, the balloon-borne experiment will be looking for the trails of ultraviolet and visible light (photons) that are generated in the particles' wake as they fly through the Earth's atmosphere. To increase the probability of getting data about the particles, it will be placed at an altitude of 100,000 feet, high enough to monitor a large volume of our atmosphere.

The challenge, however, is designing an optical system that takes into account both the limited number of photons being generated and the very high speed at which the images must be acquired. It must not only have far more light-gathering power than NASA's James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), but it must also fit on and be lifted by a balloon.

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"Though the JWST has a massive primary collecting mirror that is 6.4 meters, or 20 feet, in diameter, its field of view is only 0.3 by 0.15 degrees," says Dr. Reardon. "By contrast, while the EUSO-SPB2 uses optics with a collecting area that is only 1 meter in diameter, its field of view is 45 by 5 degrees." Multiplying the collecting area by the field of view, and the UAH system has about 100 times the throughput of JWST.

According to Dr. Reardon, this is exactly the kind of project for which the CAO has the optical engineering expertise. "First we have to turn the science needs into practical optical specifications," he says. "Then we design the optics, ensuring that they can be successfully fabricated and assembled." In some cases, those optics are produced on-site at UAH. After that, he continues, "we develop the alignment and testing instruments and procedures, and even assist in the deployment of the system." These are the capabilities the CAO brings to every project.

In addition to designing and ensuring that the optics are correctly assembled, the CAO is working with Dr. James Adams and Dr. Evgeny Kuznetsov from UAH's Center for Space Plasma and Aeronomic Research to support the power systems, detector development, and ground tests, all of which are critical to the success of the mission.

The football-field-sized balloon, which can travel for months at 20 miles into the atmosphere carrying the pioneering 30,000-pound observatory, will carry up to three of these telescopes – each one tuned to look for specific characteristics that help identify the cosmic particles. The mission will launch from New Zealand so that the balloon can catch a ride on the polar jet stream that circles the bottom part of the globe. The goal is for the balloon to make several trips around the Antarctic over the course of 100 or more days.

The flight will provide proof of concept for the planned Probe of Extreme Multi-Messenger Astrophysics (POEMMA), a pair of orbiting satellites with the same capabilities but with several orders of magnitude more sensitivity. UAH is part of a team of scientists and NASA engineers led by Dr. Olinto who are designing the POEMMA mission for consideration by the 2020 Astronomy and Astrophysics Survey, a scientific prioritization for the decade led by the National Academy of Sciences.
USA stadium: Officials try to 'deal with the monster'

By: Lawrence Specker

In the discussion over public funding for a proposed University of South Alabama stadium, this week's main development might have seemed anticlimactic. The emotion on display was anything but.

Perhaps for the first time, it fully illustrated just how carefully university, community and city leaders will have to tread in order to keep a potential win-win from turning into an embarrassing lose-lose.

In purely procedural terms, the outcome of Tuesday's discussions before the Mobile City Council was clear enough: The Council put off a vote for at least three weeks. That doesn't guarantee that a vote will happen July 31, but it does mean one won't happen until after District 2 Councilman Levon Manzie holds a July 23 forum for members of the Maysville community.

While the delay might well irk USA supporters hoping for a quick resolution, the time might actually prove valuable to their cause. It gives USA and city leaders a chance to re-frame a discussion that, to their great dismay, has shown signs of being perceived as a case of the Haves trying to take from the Have-Nots.

Among those decrying that perception, and trying to find a way past it, was District 2 Councilman Levon Manzie, who repeatedly pounded his desk for emphasis as he lamented the way the debate had evolved.

"I wish, and I'm going to say it until we agree to something, or disagree, I wish that this had been two separate discussions," he said. But linking USA stadium funding to the possible destruction of Ladd, he said, had left him in a "very precarious situation as to how do I move forward. Because my downtown merchants have one opinion. My citizens and stakeholders around Ladd Stadium have another opinion. And I'm hearing all of it. And I can't deny that I'm sensitive to what I'm hearing from the community."

At one point he asked for a show of hands: Who in the audience was worried about Ladd's future? Of those people, how many also wanted USA to achieve its own goal of an on-campus stadium?

"Every last one of them wants that," he said. "But we've tied this conversation up with Ladd, and it's causing all this of consternation in the community. That's exactly what has happened. And it's unfortunate that that's the road we took because we would not have raised the antennae of any of these individuals. They want South to have whatever South wants, and I do too. But when you tie Ladd into it, you've created a whole 'nother monster relative to this conversation. And I'm having to deal with the monster."

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The complication may have been difficult to avoid. Mayor Sandy Stimpson has asked the council to approve a letter of intent that says the city will give $500,000 a year to USA for 20 years, helping to pay off the debt that USA will incur in building the stadium. In return, a couple of years down the line, USA will give the city a lump sum of $2.5 million to help redevelop Ladd.

Small wonder that, given the vagueness of that redevelopment notion, some saw this as a plan to tear down Ladd with help from USA. On Wednesday, council members shared an information sheet from Stimpson's office, restating his case. The stadium will not be demolished, it says, but "the number of seats will be reduced." It says the $2.5 million will help create "a multi-purpose use complex which could include walking/exercise pathways, a practice field and other additions to enhance recreation. These options could expand the usage of Ladd Stadium for the community as well as middle and high school teams." A survey and community workshops will help gather input for the plan.

The sheet goes on to address the question of why the city shouldn't simply invest the proposed $10 million in Ladd. According to the mayor's office, over the same 20-year period Ladd will require $33 million to repair and maintain. "The USA investment will save the City millions of dollars in repair and maintenance costs and allow the community to have a more modern multi-purpose facility at Ladd Stadium," it says.

But Ladd's story, and its fate, can't entirely be boiled down to numbers. Since discussions began, some Ladd defenders have raised the possibility that a new Alabama law passed to protect Confederate memorials also could be used to protect the stadium from a teardown. Another theme that has emerged is that Ladd-Peebles Stadium truly is a point of pride for many who live close enough to hear the call of a game announcer or the roar of a crowd.

That pride was vividly evoked at Tuesday's council meeting by the Rev. Joseph Rembert. And it wasn't just what Rembert said, but how he said it, bringing a healthy dose of historical perspective, hope and humor along with a glint of hard dealing.

He noted that prior to integration, some black high schools had played games at Hartwell Field, and that it had been momentous when the players finally were allowed to play in Ladd. That remains a powerful memory, he said.

"I don't believe that any other statue, building or stadium depicts the historical vicissitudes of Mobile, Alabama [better] than Ladd Memorial Stadium, aka Ladd-Peebles Stadium," he said.

"Ladd Stadium also became the landmark in Mobile where black boys and white boys could play on the same football team against other black boys and white boys while black folk and white folk of all ages could sit in the stadium in places that were reserved for the schools rather than because of the players' skin," he said.
Rembert prompted laughter when he referred to one of the stadium’s more recent milestone moments.

"President Donald Trump would not have appointed his second nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court if he had not gotten his fledgling campaign jump-started at Ladd Stadium," Rembert said. "Trump came back to Ladd Stadium to thank all the voters who turned out for him, and be assured I was not one of them."

Yet Rembert also had a sharp edge, and he turned it toward USA.

"The President of the University of South Alabama has an annual salary plus benefits in the neighborhood of $500,000," he said. "The head football coach makes more than that. Their boosters have millions, maybe hundreds of millions. I beg this honorable council to think seriously about this matter. Citizens who let people park cars in their yards, those who work concessions and provide security, city workers who work early for little pay and benefits are God's children also. Be careful how you treat them."

It fell to Nick Lawkis, associate director of USA's office of governmental relations, to restate the university's position. He started by saying that the letter of intent proposed by Stimpson says nothing about the destruction of Ladd, and that it will be up to the city to decide what to do with the stadium.

He agreed strongly with Manzie's complaint that city support of USA and the future of Ladd-Peebles were two separate decisions that shouldn't have become so entangled. "That's absolutely correct," he said. "You're right on."

"South Alabama did not mingle these two together," Lawkis said. "What is in this letter, all we're saying is, whether it's this deal or in the future, when we start playing games at home, on campus, it will have an impact on the community. So we're saying, here's $2.5 million to help the community with whatever enhancements they would like to do with Ladd. If not, so be it, we don't have to. We don't have to do it. We're just saying, as a part of this deal, if you would like $2.5 million to help renovate or spruce it up, whatever you'd like to do, we're trying to contribute to leave the community in a better place than when we got there when we leave. ... We'd like to contribute a little bit to what we've called our home stadium for the last nine years. That's all."

As to Ladd's future, he told the council. "That's not our decision to make. That's yours. That's the community's."

USA officials, including President Tony Waldrop, have said they need public support to build the stadium now and have it ready for 2020. The project will cost upwards of $70 million, and any money from the city and county will be a vital part of paying off the debt.
Lawkis' "whether it's this deal or in the future" comment serves as a reminder: USA may need city support to build the stadium right now, but if that support doesn't come, it'll almost certainly build one in the future even without city help.

If it comes to that, Ladd-Peebles will lose a major tenant and likely won't receive a parting gift to help with its makeover. At least some of the marquee events played at Ladd -- the Senior Bowl, the Dollar General Bowl and the Gulf Coast Challenge -- will consider relocating to the newer venue. The city will face the same maintenance expenses for Ladd even as it sees less use.

District 1 Councilman Fred Richardson drew applause on Tuesday when he vowed that he would not vote for the demolition of Ladd. But he also took a show of hands "of the people who would be satisfied if we could save Ladd Stadium and repurpose it so that the people can use it." Seeing acceptance of that phrasing, he said, "that's what I'm talking about."

Where exactly the line lies between "demolition" and "repurposing" is very much an open question. The July 23 community meeting is a chance to see if it's a line that can be drawn to the various parties' general satisfaction.

The same meeting may also be stadium backers' last, best chance to convince some voters, and their representatives, that a vote for USA isn't a vote against Ladd-Peebles Stadium and the community around it.

"This road we've decided to go down, that was decided for us to go down, has complicated this conversation. It really has," Manzie said Tuesday. "We're going to get there, I believe, but the road we took to this point has been unnecessarily complicated."
Blue Cross scholarships steer doctors to rural Alabama

By: Lawrence Specker

Three USA medical students are the school's first to take part in a scholarship program intended to steer young doctors to the state's rural, underserved areas.

Officials with the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama gathered Wednesday to announce that the scholarship program, already in place at two other schools in the state, is expanding to USA.

Michael Marfice of Grand Bay, Perrin Windham of Daphne and Z Kyle Clark of Ozark, Ala., each will receive scholarships equivalent to two years of tuition, or about $30,000 per year; each has committed to serving three years as a primary care or behavioral health physician in an underserved part of the state.

According to information provided by Blue Cross, it will provide $1.2 million for the scholarships at USA over a five-year period. Company representatives said the program is already in place at the Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine in Dothan and the UAB School of Medicine, and that the overall commitment is about $7.8 million.

Tim Vines, President and CEO of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, said the company hopes the program will support 120 to 150 students over the course of five years. "This is a long-term investment for us," he said.

Marymont said that over 5 years, the program should benefit about 20 USA students.

Clark said that the program definitely has affected his plans. "Before I got this, I planned on being in Mobile, being a physician here," he said. Marfice said that growing up in Grand Bay made it easy for him to relate to the idea of working in a similarly small community. "It's not new to me, I can really identify with the culture," he said.

Windham said that the challenge of going to an underserved area, and possibly working at a rural hospital in an era when such institutions are under pressure, wasn't daunting. "I think it's really, just, I want to help as many people as I can," she said.

Dr. John Marymont, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the college of medicine at USA, said the program was a good fit for a school that already puts a big emphasis on serving the state's needs. Marymont said that out of 145 comparable schools, USA was in the 81st percentile in terms of graduates providing primary care, the 75th percentile for graduates working in-state, the 84th percentile for practicing in rural areas and the 99th percentile for graduated practicing in underserved areas.

Blue Cross described its motivation in part as "investing in the future of its Primary Care Physician Network."

"Expanding this initiative by partnering with the University of South Alabama is another opportunity to provide Alabamians access to quality healthcare," said Tim Vines, President and

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CEO, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. "Recent studies show having access to primary healthcare results in improved health outcomes and lower healthcare spending. Every Alabamian should have access to high quality primary care. This partnership is another step in addressing that need."

Blue Cross cited figures from the Alabama Rural Health Association showing that 54 of Alabama's 56 rural counties are classified at least partially as primary care shortage areas. The Rural Health Association also says there are 4.1 primary care physicians per 10,000 people in the state's rural counties, compared to 7.9 per 10,000 in urban areas.
High school junior shows big promise for UA

Ian Thompson

Huntsville’s Michaela Morard is definitely on a roll. Appropriate for a player who will undoubtedly be saying “Roll Tide” a lot when she arrives at the Capstone as a heralded University of Alabama freshman golfer in 2020. She made a verbal commitment to play for the Crimson Tide when she was 14.

In her home state in recent weeks she has won back-to-back state championships, along with qualifying for the 70th U.S. Girls Junior Championship.

First, she captured the 28th Women’s Stroke Play Championship at Canebrake Club in Athens in record-breaking fashion after going wire-to-wire to win her second Women’s Stroke Play. She shot an astounding three-round total of 21-under-par 195 to win by 11 shots after rounds of 63-66-66 to smash her own record for lowest 54-hole score in championship history, which she set in 2016 with a 215 total at TP Country Club in Cullman.

Hoover’s Mychael O’Berry, who will be a sophomore on the golf team at Auburn, finished second on 206, which would have won any previous year by some margin.

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GOLF

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Defending champion, and former UA golfer, Cammie (Gray) Bentley of Northport finished in fourth overall and was the low mid-amateur.

Morard kept things rolling by then capturing the 55th Girls State Junior Championship at Montgomery Country Club, but starting the final round it was a lot closer for the defending champion as she had to come from two shots back beginning the final day to win the Girls State Junior for the third time.

Her three-day total of 214 eventually left her seven clear of a tie for second place, with Ally Williams of Athens and first and second round leader Caroline Waldrop of Birmingham the runners-up.

And the day after the Girls State Junior concluded, Morard and O'Berry tied for medalist honors with scores of even-par 70 at Montgomery CC to book their places in the U.S. Girls Junior Championship.

The two alternate spots were decided in a playoff after Waldrop and Mary Mac Trammell of Mountain Brook, who will be a freshman on the golf team at UA this fall, tied for third place with rounds of two-over par 72. The sudden death playoff went one hole with Waldrop winning the place of first alternate. Trammell earned second alternate.

The 70th U.S. Girls Junior Championship will take place at Poppy Hills Golf Course in Pebble Beach, Calif., on July 16-21.

Morard is one of the top-ranked juniors in the country, currently eighth in the Golfweek/Sagarin Rankings.

Metro Amateur Championship

The Birmingham Golf Association hosted its annual Metro Amateur Championship June 30-July 1 at Pine Tree CC, with 36 teams taking part over the three age divisions.

The two-man championship was originally scheduled for its traditional April date, but inclement weather saw it postponed. Hosts Pine Tree graciously agreed to the new date and the course was in superb condition, as it had also been for the State Amateur Championship played in early June.

Wes Carter and John Darby, both of Birmingham, fired back-to-back rounds of 65 for a 14-under-par total of 130, which saw them crowned champions by one shot from the former Samford University golf team duo of Vic Kyatt and Andy McRae (67-64-131) in the Mid-Amateur division (for ages 25 and above).

Carter played his college golf for the University of Southern Mississippi, while Darby played for UAB.

Defending champions Clay Guerin and William Angel finished third on 10-under-par.

Ed Kinzer and Neill Hatcher, both Pine Tree members, came firing through the field with a second round 62, 10-under the card; good for a five-shot win in the Senior division (ages 50-59). Matched with their opening round 69, they ended up on 131, with Del Wood and Kevin Newton in second, based on the lower second round score, (68-68-136) and first round leaders Alan Seigel and Al Gibbs (67-69-136) in third.

The Super Senior division, for players 60 and older, was won by the team of Tom Jungkind and Mike Greer, who had won the Seniors division previously as a team. Jungkind and Greer, both Birmingham Golf Association Hall of Fame inductees, shot rounds of 66-68-134 to pip former UA golfer Rick Sirmon and Tom Worley (68-67-135) by a shot, with first round leaders Frank Vines, also in the BGA Hall of Fame and a former UA golfer, and John Stewart (63-73-136) in third.

Ian Thompson has been writing about golf in Alabama for over 25 years. His weekly “Mr. Golf” column concentrates on golfers, golf events and people associated with the sport of interest to the Tuscaloosa and Birmingham areas. Reach him with story ideas at thompsonesoff@gmail.com.
Former Alabama pitcher in Birmingham trying to earn his way to major leagues

By: Ben Jones

BIRMINGHAM - The statistics show that pitcher Matt Foster spent only one season at the University of Alabama. That was 2016, after spending two seasons at Gulf Coast State College and before spending the last two seasons playing minor league baseball.

But Foster has more of a connection to Alabama than one line of pitching stats. The right-hander grew up in Valley, Alabama. Auburn was closer to home, but he grew up following the Crimson Tide.

“Once I had enough sense in my head to choose the right one, I went with Alabama,” he said.

Now he’s back in his home state with the Birmingham Barons. Two years of playing minor league baseball all around the country led him back to Alabama. He began in rookie league ball in Arizona in 2016, then Montana. He spent 2017 mostly on the east coast in single-A ball, where he began this spring. He was called up to Birmingham on June 21.

“I was really excited,” Foster said. “I had been waiting all year to hopefully get moved up to Birmingham and finally did. I love it.”

It’s only been a few weeks, but Foster has been back to Tuscaloosa a few times after his call up. Tuscaloosa was good to him during his one season at Alabama: He led the bullpen with 40 innings pitched in 2016, posting a 2.92 ERA and a 5-3 record with two saves. He and lefty Tommy Burrows formed a one-two punch in the back of the bullpen to close down games.

Burrows is now in the Atlanta Braves organization. Foster is one of four Alabama baseball alums sitting with double-A teams. Kyle Overstreet, who played second base in Tuscaloosa, is now a catcher for the San Antonio Missions, the double-A team for the San Diego Padres. Infielder Mikey White is with the Midland Rockhounds, affiliated with the Oakland Athletics. Right-hander Spencer Turnbull is with the Detroit Tigers’ affiliate, the Erie Sea Wolves.

No Alabama baseball player has broken into the majors full-time since Jimmy Nelson arrived late in the 2013 season with the Brewers. Foster, 23, has as good a chance as any player to be the next.

“Hopefully we’ll break that streak here in a couple years,” he said. “It would be nice for one of us.”

He’s acquitted himself well so far in his first stint in Birmingham. He had a 2.70 ERA in six appearances before Wednesday and hadn’t allowed an earned run in four straight appearances. On Wednesday he gave up two earned runs and a hit against Mississippi.
He has 123 strikeouts and a 1.73 ERA in 93 2/3 career innings in the minors. Opponents are batting just .185 against him, and .226 in his short stint in Birmingham.

Foster said former Alabama pitching coach Dax Norris and volunteer assistant Nathan Kilcrease both helped him be prepared for a professional career.

“They all had a lot of knowledge about pitching beyond college,” he said. “I still use some of that stuff now.”

He had mostly been a starter when he arrived to Alabama but moved to the bullpen there. That’s where the White Sox have kept him.

Pitching in relief at Alabama helped him transition, but there was still a learning curve. He eventually added a changeup to the mid-90s fastball and slider that he mostly relied on earlier in his career.

“I went to the fall league and got hit around a little bit,” he said. “They’d been on me about throwing a changeup, and my stubborn self would never do it. I started doing it this year and it’s been really effective.”

His family gets the chance to see him play more often now that he’s close to home. Others have come to Birmingham too, including his high school coach.

Tuscaloosa remains nearby as well. Foster has trained there during the offseason in the last two years, and has met with Alabama’s new coaching staff. When he finds the time, he likes to get to Lake Nicol or get a meal at Jalapenos.

“I love it here,” he said. “I’ll be actually going back (to Tuscaloosa) this fall.”
Someone needs to step up on Alabama’s defense

Joseph Goodman  jgoodman@al.com

If Alabama didn’t have the best defense week-to-week in college football last season, it certainly had the best leaders.

The Crimson Tide had Minkah Fitzpatrick in the secondary.

It had Rashaan Evans at linebacker.
It had Da’Ron Payne on the defensive line.

They were all first-round picks, but, more importantly, they were all leaders of the highest order.

It has been a tough week for Alabama’s defense. The knee injury to linebacker Terrell Lewis this week is concerning, and the violence of linebacker VanDarius Cowan in a Tuscaloosa bar was disturbing. The loss of both players adds more question marks heading into fall camp.

Alabama can overcome those things, though, because this is July, and the Tide has plenty of time to train its legion of defensive talent for new assignments.

Lewis’ injury and the attrition of Cowan are causing flashbacks to the problems Alabama’s defense experienced last season, but they also should serve as a reminder of how the Tide overcame 2017’s dearth of linebackers. Alabama persevered with unwavering leadership.

Nick Saban is always going to have talent. Every defensive starter from Alabama’s 2016 season opener was drafted over the last two years, but there will be more. There always is.

What Alabama should be most worried about right now is leadership. Who’s going to replace Fitzpatrick’s focus this offseason? Which players are going to help balance out the inevitable regression in experience after three defensive leaders were drafted in the first round, and two key position coaches moved onto the NFL?

Is Anfernee Jennings ready to be the leader Alabama needs? Is Mack Wilson or Dylan Moses?

Raekwon Davis is Alabama’s best defender, but, more importantly, can he be the defensive leader? He wasn’t that type of player last year, although returning from a gunshot wound to dominate Florida State is impressive in its own way.

The thing that set Alabama apart last year was the collective intelligence of team leaders like Fitzpatrick, Evans and Payne. Still, there will always be players who make poor decisions in the summer.

Saban was right in kicking Cowan off the team for his bar fight. The surveillance video of Cowan’s punch left Alabama’s coach with no other choice. In the video, Cowan walks into a bar and appears to take a swing at someone for no reason. Only a few days later, Lewis tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his knee. Lewis was the type of teammate who could have developed into a team leader this season.

SEE GOODMAN, B4
GOODMAN
FROM B1

Those are the types of players who helped Alabama's defense through the lean times last season.
Fitzpatrick demanded a level of focus uncommon even for a program as highly structured as Saban's Alabama. Everything had to be perfect — offseason workouts, attitudes, practices ... even practice uniforms.
Fitzpatrick's leadership was mirrored by players like Evans at linebacker and Payne on the defensive line. The entire defensive unit followed their examples.

When injuries began piling up for Alabama, the resolve and mental toughness that Fitzpatrick imbued over the summer helped carry Alabama all the way to the Iron Bowl as the No. 1 team in the country. Auburn did the rest, helping the Crimson Tide reach the College Football Playoff by losing to Georgia in the SEC championship.

Alabama backdoored its way into the playoff, sure, but it put itself into position to take advantage of the system with tough road wins against Texas A&M and Mississippi State. With Texas A&M threatening in the fourth quarter, Fitzpatrick delivered an interception at the goal line. Against Mississippi State, with the score tied at 24 late in the fourth quarter, Alabama's defense went three-and-out after a missed field-goal attempt by Andy Pappanastos. That set the stage for Jalen Hurts and Calvin Ridley.

There's going to be another Mississippi State this season. Will it be in the season opener against Louisville? Will it be against Jimbo Fisher and Texas A&M, or on the road against LSU or Jeremy Pruitt's Tennessee? Who knows, but at some point Alabama will be pushed to its breaking point.

Who will be the defensive leaders to save Alabama this year? They emerge in the fourth quarters of close games, but they're made right now in the heat of July.

Joseph Goodman is a columnist for Alabama Media Group. He's on Twitter @joe_goodman_jr.
Top of the list

Preseason football magazines put Alabama at No. 1

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

Alabama is the preseason No. 1 again for most publications, but it isn’t unanimous, and it’s only a small gap from the Crimson Tide to the No. 2 team.

Three of four major preseason college football magazines rank Alabama as the No. 1 team entering the 2018 season. Lindy’s Sports ranks Clemson as the top team but has Alabama at No. 2. All three publications that rank Alabama No. 1 have the Tigers slotted second.

“I think the two teams are close,” said Phil Steele. “I do think Alabama is better, and Bama is the only team in the country that I feel is going to be a double-digit favorite in every single game this year. Right now in the Iron Bowl they’re only a nine-point favorite but if they go 11-0 and play as impressively as I think they will, they’ll probably end up being a double-digit favorite in that game.”

All four preseason magazines project Alabama to meet Clemson in the College Football Playoff National Championship Game in Santa Clara, California, on Jan. 7. All four publications also included Ohio State in their projected playoff and three included Georgia, while Phil Steele’s magazine had Washington as the fourth playoff participant.

Steele’s magazine is in its 24th year and is often considered the most comprehensive preseason publication. He said Alabama’s schedule projects to be weaker than Clemson, which is one reason why he placed the Crimson Tide at No. 1.

“Auburn, I think, has the talent to be able to line up with them,” Steele said. “When you look at Auburn’s defense, that is a very good

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FOOTBALL

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defensive line that I have ranked fifth-best in the country. The linebackers are solid, they have good receivers and a capable quarterback in (Jarrett) Stidham. It’s a rivalry game, which is huge. I know the LSU game is a rivalry game as well, but it’s the Iron Bowl for crying out loud. I think Auburn is going to give them their best test. LSU won’t be easy, but if I was looking for the one game I’d be most concerned with, it would be the Iron Bowl against Auburn.”

Running back Damien Harris, defensive end Raekwon Davis and offensive linemen Ross Pierschbacher and Jonah Williams were the most commonly mentioned Alabama players on pre-season All-America teams.

Expectations are also high for sophomore quarterback Tua Tagovailoa. Athlon Sports lists him as the top candidate for the Heisman Trophy and its second-team All-American quarterback. Lindy’s has him as the No. 5 Heisman candidate despite the fact Alabama’s quarterback battle has yet to play out this fall. Steele included Tagovailoa at No. 10 on his list of players who could win the Heisman, but was more cautious.

“As high as I am on Tua, I’m not ready to anoint him one of the best quarterbacks in the country until I see it on a consistent basis,” Steele said. “... I do think he’ll have a good year and I do think he’s the choice at quarterback. I think he gives Alabama a downfield pass threat. You’re not going to see Tua throw for 4,000 yards. That would be so anti-Nick Saban and so anti-Alabama. Sometimes you go with quarterbacks who are going to put up more yards on the season. That would be the reason I don’t have him as high. I saw somebody rank him as like the No. 2 quarterback in the country, and I’m not going that far. No way.”

Even after losing 12 NFL draft picks and the entire secondary, Alabama’s roster remains loaded. The running backs, offensive line, defensive line and linebackers were all listed among the best groups at their position by several publications. All that talent should keep the Crimson Tide in the conversation for another national championship.

“The one question mark I have with Alabama has to be on special teams,” Steele said. “The field goals in the title game were huge. They do have a true freshman punter coming in to replace JK Scott. New kicker as well with the grad transfer from Temple. Special teams is my biggest question mark on this team.”

Reach Ben Jones at ben@tidesports.com

WHERE THEY STACK UP

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Terrell Lewis’ torn ACL just latest in a string of maladies to hit Crimson Tide’s LB corps

Michael Casagrande  mcasagrande@al.com

Even from the Superdome press box above the clouds, something looked especially messed up with the way C.J. Mosley was tackled.

This was Jan. 9, 2012 — known as one of the finest defensive performances in Alabama history — but the image of Alabama’s star linebacker on the turf is the image burned in this memory. A dislocated hip resulted from a twisting tackle after a third-quarter interception in the Crimson Tide’s 21-0 steamrolling of LSU in the BCS championship game in New Orleans.

It was one of many frankly ghoulish injuries suffered by Alabama linebackers of the Nick Saban era. There’s no real pattern or dots to connect even after the trend continued this week with Terrell Lewis. His torn ACL would seem to sideline the junior for what was supposed to be his breakout season.

The trend is wild when you look back a few years. Don’t a Hightower was poised for a big sophomore season in 2009 when practically everything in his left knee exploded. One low block against Arkansas tore his ACL, MCL and meniscus.

It quickly ended his run playing next to Rolando McClain, and though Alabama still won a national title that fall, Hightower still wasn’t the same on that knee in 2010. That same season saw Courtney Upshaw play most of the season on a bad ankle that limited production until ruining Kirk Cousins’ Capital One Bowl with three sacks.

After that season, linebacker Alex Watkins tore his meniscus and ligaments in his knee in the spring. He fought back to play in 2011 when he broke his arm against Tennessee. Two weeks later, the senior was on the field playing LSU with a steel plate in his arm. A number of injuries from a hamstring and back kept middle linebacker Chris Jordan’s career from taking off in 2011. Mosley also missed time that fall with an elbow injury before going down in the national title game with the gruesome dislocated hip.

There were a few more minor injuries over the next few years. Reuben Foster missed time in each of his last three seasons with injuries ranging from stingers to concussions. Coachs worked overtime to improve the dangerous habits in the former top recruit’s tackling style to avoid more severe neck and head injuries.

For the most part, major injuries were avoided for a few years. Middle linebacker Trey DePriest broke his foot in 2013 spring practice, though it didn’t sideline him that fall. Denzell Devall had a few injuries in 2012, 2013 and missed spring practice in 2015 after foot surgery.

All of that seemed elementary compared with the wave of crunches and slings that washed over the program starting last fall. Even Saban admitted he had never seen anything like what happened starting in the opener against Florida State. Four key linebackers — Christian Miller, Anfernee Jennings, Rashaan Evans and Lewis — went down. Miller (biceps) and Lewis (elbow) appeared done for the year, and Evans had a groin injury that lingered well into the season. Jennings only missed a few weeks with a sprained ankle.

Then there’s Mack Wilson. A year earlier, he tweeted about having surgery on his meniscus before his first fall practice.

Then he broke his foot in the Nov. 5 win over LSU. That same night, Shaun Dion Hamilton’s Alabama career ended with a broken knee cap. His 2016 season also concluded prematurely with a torn ACL in the SEC title game win over Florida.

Wilson was back in time for fill-in starter Dylan Moses to suffer the same Jones fracture of the foot that knocked him out of both playoff games. Miller and Lewis had returned by then on the outside and Lewis had a crucial sack in overtime of the win over Georgia.

Also, Jennings tore ligaments in a serious knee injury in the closing moments of Alabama’s Sugar Bowl win over Clemson. It was bad enough to keep him out of spring practice, though he’s expected to return this fall.

None of these 2017 injuries kept Alabama from celebrating a national title in January. Hamilton’s late-season ACL tear in 2016 was a detriment in a championship-game loss to Clemson in which the defense was worn down, but it also couldn’t be considered a direct reason for the result.

Losing Lewis for this season would be a significant blow for a group of linebackers thinned. VanDarius Cowan’s dismissal from the team was announced only 24 hours before Lewis’ injury went public.

Injuries aren’t exclusive to the linebackers. It’s just been a particularly painful trend at the second level of the Crimson Tide in recent years.

This season’s puzzle just got complicated a few weeks before strapping on the pads.

Michael Casagrande is an Alabama beat writer for the Alabama Media Group. Follow him on Twitter @ByCasagrande or on Facebook.
Tide's Lewis tears ACL

Linebacker undergoes surgery, out indefinitely

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

Outside linebacker Terrell Lewis is out indefinitely after tearing his right ACL last week, the University of Alabama announced in a statement.

"Terrell Lewis suffered a torn right ACL last week while training," coach Nick Saban said in a statement. "He underwent successful surgery today, and a timeframe for his return is unknown at this time."

Lewis was a preseason All-America candidate and a former five-star recruit who was considered a potential early entrant in the 2019 NFL draft.

He missed 10 games as a sophomore after suffering an elbow injury in Alabama's season opener against Florida State. He returned for the final three games of the season and finished the year with 16 tackles, two tackles for loss and a sack. Lewis still has a redshirt available.

Alabama's outside linebackers still return redshirt junior Anfernee Jennings, redshirt senior Christian Miller, redshirt senior Jamey Mosley and sophomore Chris Allen. True freshmen Eyabi Anoma, Cameron Latu, Jordan Davis and Jarez Parks are also part of the group.

Alabama dismissed inside linebacker VanDarius Cowan on Monday. Cowan had played inside linebacker in spring practice but spent part of fall with the outside linebackers. Reach Ben Jones at ben@tidesports.com or 205-722-0196.
Cowan dismissed from football team

Alabama sophomore dismissed for a 'violation of team rules' after arrest

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

University of Alabama sophomore linebacker VanDarius Cowan has been dismissed from the football team for a violation of team rules, according to an announcement Monday from the UA athletics department.

"VanDarius has been dismissed from the team and is no longer a part of our football program due to a violation of team rules," Coach Nick Saban said in the statement Monday morning. "Each of us has a responsibility to represent The University of Alabama in a first-class way, and failure to meet those standards can't be tolerated. We wish VanDarius the very best in the future." Cowan, 19, from Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, was projected to be a contender for playing time in 2018.

The dismissal comes less than a week after Tuscaloosa Police charged Cowan with misdemeanor assault. The statement did not address the arrest.

The arrest was related to an incident at a Tuscaloosa bar last month.

Cowan was charged with third-degree assault, Tuscaloosa Police confirmed. He turned himself in Thursday and immediately posted $500 bond without having to go to jail, which isn't uncommon for misdemeanor charges through TPD.

According to the police report, Cowan is accused of punching Jesse Ray, 26, in the face at High Tide bar off the Strip early on the morning of June 23.

Ray told The Tuscaloosa News that he was entering the bar as Cowan was leaving and said he did nothing to provoke him.

He said he drove himself to the emergency room at DCH Regional Medical Center where he was treated for a gash on his lip that required seven stitches. He has a broken tooth and nerve damage, he said.

Cowan missed part of Alabama's spring practice while focusing on academics. He returned by the end of spring and participated in the A-Day game with the third string at inside linebacker. He played in seven games as a true freshman in 2017. He finished the season with two tackles, both of which came in Alabama's win against Mercer.
Bama’s Tagovailoa and Central Florida’s Milton are Polynesian pals we can learn from

Mike Bianchi  Orlando Sentinel

Wouldn’t it be great if all of the other quarreling, quibbling players and fans at Alabama and Central Florida were more like their Hawaiian-born quarterbacks — Tua Tagovailoa and McKenzie Milton?

Aloha Kakou.

"May there be love between us."

In Hawaii, it is custom to greet people with a kiss on the cheek. And so, when McKenzie and Tua talk — as they often do — there is no bickering back and forth about who deserves to call themselves national champions. There is only mutual admiration and respect among the boyhood buddies who now find themselves among the top quarterbacks in college football and Heisman Trophy contenders.

"Tua and I are good friends," McKenzie said the other day. "We’ll joke around about the national championship stuff, but it’s all in good fun. He’s good hearted and doesn’t take it personally. He’ll be the first one to give us praise about going unbeaten and he’ll say things like, ‘You guys were the only ones to go undefeated and beat the team that beat us.’ He’s such a humble guy. He doesn’t bash UCF like some of the other Alabama guys.”

The friendship between Tua and McKenzie goes back to grade school, when they were on the same Pop Warner team. Tua was in the fifth grade and McKenzie was in the sixth. Tua was the quarterback; McKenzie was his wide receiver and running back.

"Then Tua moved to a team closer to where he lived," McKenzie says. "My dad was our coach and we needed a quarterback, so that’s when I started playing QB." McKenzie was the hotshot youth league quarterback for the Waipio Panthers; Tua starred for the Hammerheads at Ewa Beach.

McKenzie went to high school in Millilani; Tua played at Saint Louis High School in nearby Honolulu. Both quarterbacks won state championships.

"Tua and I played against each other all throughout high school," McKenzie remembers. "We would go to the same local football camps. We’ve been close for a long time. We roomed together at the Elite 11 (quarterback competition) and at the high school all-star game."

Because Tua was a little bigger and considered to have superior arm strength, he became a marquee five-star recruit coming out of high school while Milton was a three-star.

"For me, I’ve always tried to compare myself to Tua and to pay attention to what he’s doing; to see if I’m right there with him or not far behind," Milton says. "He’s always been the standard for me coming from Hawaii because he was one of the top QBs in the nation in high school."

It seems only appropriate that UCF’s brand-new Heisman Trophy campaign for Milton pays tribute to his Hawaiian roots. The campaign has its own special Twitter hashtag (Hisman) and website (MiltonForHisman.KZ). Hisman is a clever reference to the "HI" postal code for Hawaii, while the KZ domain references Milton’s own KZ (short for McKenzie) nickname.

"It means a lot to have the support of our media relations staff," Milton says of the campaign. "At the same time, the focus is on the team. It’s about the team, it’s not just about me. There’s no individual success without team success."

How ironic that one of Milton’s chief competitors for the Heisman might well be Tagovailoa — his Polynesian pal.

"It’s been a lot of fun to see what he’s been able to do at Alabama and to do what he did in the national championship game," McKenzie says of Tua coming off the bench and rallying the Tide to dramatic last-second victory over Georgia. "He’s a good dude. He’s a special player." Aloha Kakou. "May there be love between us."
‘I DIDN’T SIGN UP FOR THAT’

15 years ago, one hit changed his life. Now this former Alabama football player is suing the NCAA.

By: Jesse Dougherty

They watched the same episode of “Sesame Street” four times. He fed his baby daughter lunch while pacing around the house. The midday sun ducked behind a rain cloud, dimming the living room into a sort of sepia tone, and Les Williams, feeling restless and a bit bored, pointed the remote at the television and put on football.

This was a regular activity on a regular afternoon in late April. Williams, a defensive end at Alabama in the early 2000s, never played in the NFL. But he and those of his generation who also fell short of a payday still have to deal with the consequences of hitting each other with their heads.

What’s left of Williams’s football career — constant headaches, memory loss, fits of depression, occasional rage — makes it hard for him to stay employed. He is instead a 37-year-old stay-at-home dad, taking care of 1-year-old Bailey and trying to sell self-invented products by phone while his wife, Arin, is at work. Most days, after watching Bailey’s favorite shows and playing with Bailey on the floor and rocking Bailey as she sucks formula out of a bottle, Williams circles back to the sport he loves to follow but hates for what he thinks it did to his brain.

He flipped on the University of Georgia’s annual spring game, which he recorded a week earlier and played several times since. He shook his head as a wide receiver lowered his helmet into a teammate’s. He winced, shutting his eyes for a second, as two players collided along the sideline. Then Nick Chubb and Sony Michel, two Georgia running backs soon headed for the NFL, popped onto the screen for a joint interview.

“Look at these two young guys,” Williams said. “They don’t know if there is anything wrong with their brains. They ain’t thinking that. They’re smiling, the ratings are great, everything is great. But what happens later? How are they going to turn out after all the hits they’ve taken?

“Nobody talks about what happens next.” So what happens next?

Williams was a four-year player at Alabama with an outside shot to make the NFL. He didn’t. He found a job. He quit. He started another job and quit that, too. He started having headaches. Constant headaches. He lashed out at random times and, for the first time in his life, it was hard to relate to bosses or co-workers or anyone, really. He was depressed. He married Arin and their family grew. He was out of work and, scared of his future, joined more than 100 former college players who are suing the NCAA.

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The individually filed class-action lawsuits are consolidated in front of one judge in federal court in Chicago. Williams and the other former players are suing the NCAA for failing to educate and protect them from the risk of long-term brain damage resulting from repeated hits to the head. They are seeking compensation and reforms in how the organization treats past, present and future football players who suffer head injuries.

These cases make up the first large group of concussion-related lawsuits against the NCAA. They come as the NCAA continues to be scrutinized for not compensating or protecting revenue-generating athletes, and also on the heels of it settling a lawsuit with the family of Greg Ploetz, a former University of Texas football player who claimed the NCAA was liable for his brain injuries and eventual death in 2015. Boston University researchers found chronic traumatic encephalopathy, the degenerative brain disease known as CTE, in Ploetz’s brain. CTE also was found recently in the brain of Tyler Hilinski, 21, the Washington State quarterback who committed suicide in January.

“The issue of CTE among former college football players only receives a small fraction of the attention and coverage NFL players receive, and a small fraction of what college players deserve,” said Chris Nowinski, the founder of the Concussion Legacy Foundation. “It doesn’t receive the spotlight for myriad reasons, including the fact that the individuals aren’t as famous.”

College football left Williams living in the in-between.

Like college players then and now, he was not paid to play. He was recruited by Alabama, Ohio State and Texas, among many other top programs, but is never recognized anymore. He is just old enough to have not been warned of the sport’s dangers, but young enough to see his possible future unfold on television and the Internet, with the stories of Aaron Hernandez and Junior Seau and Dave Duerson showing the fate he fears most.

“You mean to tell me that 20 years from now I could…” Williams said before pausing as his eyes filled with tears. “Like I could kill myself, or my wife, or my kids? I didn’t sign up for that.”

More than 15 years later, Williams still calls it the hit.

It was one play in a career full of colliding helmets. But if he tries to trace his headaches back to where they began, the hit rushes into his brain all over again, at the center of Bryant-Denny Stadium in 2002, his chiseled 20-year-old frame draped in a No. 48 Alabama jersey, his legs pumping him straight at Southern Mississippi’s punter.

“I hit that boy so hard,” Williams said, and he shook his head before reenacting the play in his living room while Bailey crawled at his feet. By that point in Williams’s football career, it was normal to launch himself at vulnerable opponents. That is what he was told to do, he says now,
as a Pop Warner player in Phoenix, a high school standout in Stone Mountain, Ga., and eventually a 6-foot-5, 216-pound defensive end at Alabama.

Williams grew up poor, eating bread and peanut butter for many dinners, so ramming himself against other teenagers felt like his best chance at a better future. So when that got him to Alabama, he never asked questions. He never complained to trainers. He did what he was told.

He remembers a summer workout drill early in his college career that ended with a helmet-to-helmet collision. An assistant coach told Williams he could hit harder. The next time the whistle blew, he sprinted at his teammate and flung his head into his face mask. Williams remembers losing vision in his left eye for about 30 seconds as that whole side of his body went numb. He did not tell coaches in fear of losing his spot on special teams or being labeled as "soft."

Williams says he did not hear the word "concussion" until he was finished playing football.

"That never came up," Williams said, adding that he and his teammates were not educated on the risks of long-term brain damage or safe-tackling techniques. "It was not something we knew about, it was not something we talked about."

CTE, which cannot be diagnosed in living patients, can be caused by blows to the head that result in concussions and by the accumulation of subconcussive hits over a longer period. Williams believes he suffered a concussion on the hit against Southern Mississippi in September 2002.

He was mad at his position coach over his playing time and wanted to take his anger out. Southern Mississippi punter Mark Haulman fumbled a snap before taking off toward the first-down marker. Williams tracked Haulman until they were all alone on the sideline, and smashed his helmet into the side of the Haulman’s head.

Haulman flew out of bounds. The hit later made the Top 10 plays on "SportsCenter." But Williams’s head rang as he jogged to the bench. Teammates smashed his helmet in celebration and fans showered him with cheers, yet the noise all blurred into a slow, monotone hum.

Something wasn’t right.

“I knew I made a mistake the way that I hit him,” Williams said. “From that day forward, my life really hasn’t been the same.”

They had to write down all the reasons they were here, sitting in a marriage counseling office in early 2016.

Les and Arin Williams married in May 2015 on a white-sand beach off Florida’s Atlantic coast. They went to the same high school in Georgia, Les a year ahead of Arin, but did not connect until a mutual friend introduced them about six years ago. Les worked as an insurance agent for
New York Life at the time. Arin conducted HIV research for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a job she still holds.

Their life felt perfect. Then it wasn’t.

Now Arin checked off the reasons they were in therapy less than a year after the wedding: their heated arguments, or Les’s sudden fits of anger, or Les’s inability to focus on their relationship. She glanced over at her husband’s sheet and saw five words: Suicidal thoughts in the past.

“He had not shared that with me,” said Arin, who said she was not speaking on behalf of her employer when interviewed for this story. “But I wasn’t really surprised after how I had seen him spiral into really dark places and be overcome with such sadness. It’s heartbreaking.”

A few months before that appointment, an Internet advertisement caught Arin’s attention. It was for a law firm in Fort Worth that was representing former college football players with medical issues that could be linked to CTE. The symptoms listed in the ad matched what Williams was dealing with, so Arin wrote the phone number down.

“You mean to tell me that 20 years from now I could … Like I could kill myself, or my wife, or my kids?”

Except Williams refused to reach out. In his mind, he did not need a lawyer or a doctor or a therapist to help him. He needed to find a job; he needed to stop being sad all the time; he needed to be a man.

But his issues had grown over the past several years and were now reaching the most important people in his life. The opportunity weighed on him until he was lying on their guest room floor one night, his face soaked in tears, his trembling voice repeating the same question while Arin sat close by: “What is wrong with me?”

Williams called the law firm the next day.

“The hard part is that these players have trouble linking their health issues to their careers,” said Vinny Circelli, the lawyer representing Williams in his case. “They were never told there could be a link, or a lot of them don’t want to believe it. They’re powerless, whether that’s by a lack of education or the football culture they played in.”

Circelli’s law firm is representing more than half of the former players suing the NCAA. The cases were also brought against a handful of individual conferences and colleges. (Williams is suing the Southeastern Conference in addition to the NCAA, but not Alabama because, Circelli said, he “loves his school” and does not find it responsible for his health issues.) Their lawyers plan to present evidence that the NCAA, which does not provide long-term health care for former athletes, had extensive knowledge of the long-term health risks associated with hits to the head that it did not relay to players. The plaintiffs are also suing the NCAA for breach of

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contract, insisting that it failed to care for players as promised in forms signed by athletes at the start of their careers.

Each individual case has the potential to be a class-action lawsuit if the class is approved by U.S. District Judge John Z. Lee, who is reviewing a handful of motions to dismiss filed by the NCAA’s lawyers that are expected to be decided in the coming weeks. That gives this concussion litigation the potential to reach thousands of former college football players. The proceedings are expected to pick up in the fall, a few months after the undisclosed Ploetz settlement, and as the NCAA faces questions of whether it should pay players who help generate millions of dollars in annual profit.

The NCAA did not respond to an interview request for this story. SEC officials declined to be interviewed through a spokesman, who said the conference does not comment on pending litigation. Alabama declined to comment through a spokeswoman.

“There was a good amount of concern from the NCAA with how the trial would have gone,” Michael McCann, a sports law professor at the University of New Hampshire, said of the Ploetz settlement. “These cases are coming and coming, with the class-action lawsuits potentially next, and it doesn’t seem like they are going to stop.”

“Does this continually get worse? Is there anything I can do about it? There isn’t. I just don’t want to burden my wife and kids. I just want to be me for as long as I can.” In the two years since contacting Circelli, Williams has educated himself on the consequences of head injuries. He and Arin watched the movie “Concussion,” and she cried while looking at her husband stare into his potential future. Williams closely followed the Aaron Hernandez case, from the former NFL tight end’s murder conviction to him committing suicide in jail at age 27. Last summer, Williams read about the study that found CTE in 110 of 111 former NFL players’ brains donated for study.

He wishes he could go back and be a basketball player or a track runner or anything not involving football. He will never let his two sons, now 9 and 5, play organized football. Concussions, he now believes, have turned him into a spectator of his own life.

“I’m 37, so what the hell is going to happen when I’m 67?” Williams said. “How about when I’m 70? Does this continually get worse? Is there anything I can do about it? There isn’t. I just don’t want to burden my wife and kids. I just want to be me for as long as I can.”

Williams shook three tablets of Motrin out of a white bottle, then a fourth, and then a fifth before popping the handful into his mouth and tossing his head back.

“They don’t work anymore,” he said in the kitchen on that same late-April afternoon. “I am so sick of taking these little orange pills.”
This is when he starts to get mad at his unemployment, at the headaches that come more frequently, at not knowing what happens next. He and Bailey, out of shows to watch and things to do, paced around the house for a while until they were ready to go outside.

Their daily walk through the neighborhood is Williams’s chance to relax. He relies on routine to combat depression and anger. He hums lullabies to Bailey. He points to his favorite houses while she blows spit bubbles onto her chin.

“That’s how I want my grass to look,” Williams said as he slowed in front of a three-car garage. “Arin supports our whole family, but when I start chipping in again that’s how our lawn is going to be.”

It was soon time to put Bailey down for a nap, get his youngest son from school and pick up dinner from Chipotle around the corner.

But first Williams had to sit down. He started to rub his bald head as soon as he and Bailey returned home. He winced as he folded his large frame onto the couch. He looked around the living room and drew a long breath.

“I feel another headache coming,” he said, and then he leaned back and closed his eyes.
The $10 million club

By: Mark Inabinett

Seventy-eight of coach Nick Saban's Alabama players have gone on to appear in NFL regular-season games since he began coaching the Crimson Tide in 2007.

Of those players, 18 have received at least $10 million in compensation from NFL teams since they joined the pros, and none of the 18 is a quarterback, the highest-paid position. Here are those players, with their total NFL pay so far (with the monetary figures from the sports-financial web site spotrac.com):

Marcell Dareus, defensive tackle: $68,874,946

The former Huffman High star was the third pick in the 2011 NFL Draft, and after two Pro Bowl invitations and one All-Pro season, Dareus signed a six-year contract extension with the Buffalo Bills (who traded him to the Jacksonville Jaguars last season) in 2016. The new deal totaled $96,574,118 and included a $25 million signing bonus and $60 million in guaranteed money.

Julio Jones, wide receiver: $63,209,579

The sixth pick in the 2011 NFL Draft by the Atlanta Falcons, Jones signed a five-year, $71,756,045 contract extension in 2015 that included a $12 million signing bonus and $47 million in guaranteed money. That left the former Foley High star as the NFL's highest-paid receiver when Calvin Johnson retired after the 2015 season. That's no longer the case, though, and the five-time Pro Bowler did not attend the Falcons' offseason program this year as he seeks changes in his contract.

Andre Smith, offensive tackle: $49,012,500

The sixth player picked in the 2009 NFL Draft, the former Huffman High School standout completed three contracts with the Cincinnati Bengals and a one-year deal with the Minnesota Vikings before picking up a signing bonus for the second year in a row in March. Smith's two-year deal with the Arizona Cardinals included a signing bonus of $2.585 million, which is reflected in his total earnings.

Kareem Jackson, defensive back: $39,906,250

Jackson is heading into the last season of his second contract with the Houston Texans, who selected him with the 20th choice in the 2010 NFL Draft. The four-year, $34 million deal included a $9 million signing bonus and a $6.5 million base salary (not included in his total earnings yet) for the 2018 season.

See next page
Mark Barron, linebacker: $36,529,749

The seventh player picked in the 2012 NFL Draft, the former St. Paul's standout hit the jackpot when he moved from safety to linebacker in 2015. His performance netted a five-year, $45 million contract with the Rams that included a $5 million signing bonus and $20 million in guaranteed money. Barron earned a $2 million bonus on March 16.

Dre Kirkpatrick, cornerback: $34,098,746

The former Gadsden City High School standout followed a route to the list shared by several players: After being selected in the first round, Kirkpatrick had his team pick up its fifth-year option on his contract, paying him almost as much for one season as it did in the previous four years combined. Kirkpatrick then signed a long-term deal to stay with the Cincinnati Bengals. The five-year, $52.5 million contract signed last year included a $3 million roster bonus paid on March 16.

Dont'a Hightower, linebacker: $27,890,370

Hightower's path to riches is virtually the same as Dre Kirkpatrick's. Both were first-round picks in 2012, and Hightower's fifth-year option salary of $7,751,000 in 2016 was virtually as much as he'd been paid by the New England Patriots in his first four seasons combined. Hightower also signed a long-term deal last year that included a $10 million signing bonus.

Rolando McClain, linebacker: $24,743,357

McClain signed a five-year, $40 million contract with the Oakland Raiders after being the eighth pick of the 2010 NFL Draft. He was out of Oakland after three seasons, though. After a year of retirement, the former Decatur High standout played two years with the Dallas Cowboys.

James Carpenter, guard: $22,135,720

The 25th player picked in 2011 NFL Draft, Carpenter got the second-contract pay boost in 2015. After playing out a four-year, $7,641,502 deal with the Seattle Seahawks, Carpenter signed a four-year, $19,100,000 contract with the New York Jets. He's due a base salary of $4.450 million for 2018 in the last season of the deal.

Mark Ingram, running back: $19,326,656

Ingram is entering the final season of his second contract with the New Orleans Saints. The 28th player picked in the 2011 NFL Draft has the 2018 season left on his deal, which calls for a $4 million base salary this year and paid a $500,000 roster bonus on March 16.

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Amari Cooper, wide receiver: $19,169,070

Cooper is entering the final season of his rookie contract, signed after the Oakland Raiders added him with the fourth pick in the 2015 NFL Draft. The Raiders have picked up their option for the 2019 season and are scheduled to pay Cooper $13.924 million next year.

Trent Richardson, running back: $18,055,062

Richardson didn't make it through his four-year, $20.4 million rookie contract after being the third player picked in the 2012 NFL Draft. But most of the hay was in the barn by the time he washed out after three seasons, and Richardson picked up $750,000 in 2015 even though he failed to make the Oakland Raiders' roster.

D.J. Fluker, offensive lineman: $14,741,800

Fluker would have been three spots higher on this list except the Los Angeles Chargers released him two days before his option salary of $8,821,000 for the 2017 season was to become guaranteed. Instead, he got $3 million -- $1.5 million signing bonus and $1.5 million base salary -- from the New York Giants last season. The former McGill-Toolen and Foley High School standout has signed with the Seattle Seahawks for 2018, which added a $300,000 signing bonus to his total in March.

Chance Warmack, guard: $13,919,204

The 10th player picked in the 2013 NFL Draft, Warmack started all 48 games that he played for the Tennessee Titans. But the Titans didn't pick up their fifth-year option on his contract for 2017, and Warmack ended up with the Philadelphia Eagles, who won the Super Bowl.

Dee Milliner, cornerback: $12,663,616

The former Stanhope Elmore star played in 21 of 48 games in the three seasons after the New York Jets selected him with the ninth pick in 2013 NFL Draft. In 2016, Milliner hadn't played in a game when the Jets released him off their injured list. Because his rookie contract was guaranteed, Milliner still received his salary for the 2016 season.

Wallace Gilberry, defensive end: $11,863,529

The former Baldwin County High School standout forged a nine-year career in the NFL after going undrafted from Nick Saban's first Alabama team. Gilberry announced his retirement in 2017.
Rashad Johnson, safety: $11,053,891

The former Sulligent High School standout joined the $10 million club in his final season. After spending seven years with the Arizona Cardinals, Johnson got closer to home with the Tennessee Titans in 2016 for $2 million.

Minkah Fitzpatrick, safety: $10,042,016

The 11th player picked in the 2018 NFL Draft, Fitzpatrick's four-year rookie contract is worth $16,447,773. But $10,042,016 was in the form of a signing bonus, and Fitzpatrick signed on June 1. Da'Ron Payne, Rashaan Evans and Calvin Ridley, the other 2018 first-round draft choices from Alabama, also signed four-year contracts worth more than $10 million in total value.
Changover rare in UA radio booth

Collegiate football players generally stay with a program for three or four years, perhaps five if they are redshirted for a year.

The University of Alabama has been fortunate to have coaches with longer tenures, notably Paul "Bear" Bryant, Gene Stallings and the current Hall of Fame coach, Nick Saban. But if you are looking for real long-term stability in the Crimson Tide organization, you look in the broadcast booth. That's why the summer decision from Phil Savage, who will leave his color analyst role with UA in order to devote

See HURT, C3
himself full time as the general manager of the Phoenix franchise in a fledgling football league, is news. The radio crew just doesn’t change that often.

Since 1969, when Alabama went to the lineup of John Forney on play-by-play and Doug Layton on color commentary (Jerry Duncan became the sideline reporter with that memorable crew in 1971), Alabama has had just three play-by-play “Voices of the Crimson Tide” — Forney, Paul Kennedy and Eli Gold — and three full-time color analysts — Layton, who held the post for 28 years, the inimitable Ken “Snake” Stabler, who spent 10 years in the booth, and Savage, who took over in 2009. Alabama used 11 different color commentators on a weekly rotation basis in 2008 while searching for Stabler’s replacement, relying on former players from Tyler Watts to Bob Baumhower to Antonio Langham in that transitional season.

“Phil didn’t work with us that season, but he auditioned at the 2009 A-Day game and got the job,” Gold said in a telephone interview Saturday.

Gold said he would not be involved in choosing Savage’s successor as his broadcast partner.

“That’s how it should be,” Gold said. “That decision will be made by Greg Byrne (the UA athletics director), Jim Carabin (the general manager of the Crimson Tide Sports Network) and Coach Saban,” Gold said.

“I look forward to working with whoever they select,” Gold said. “It will be a quick turn-around and I am sure we will be smoother on our 100th broadcast than our first one. But that’s just the nature of the broadcast. You develop a working relationship. I’ve been fortunate to work with Doug, Kenny and Phil. They were all different but there was a chemistry there with all of them.”

There will be no shortage of candidates for the assignment. Gold would not speculate on any names, although various lists have been offered in speculation. Most include the names of several former Alabama players who have radio or television experience (one, former Crimson Tide quarterback Greg McElroy, has said he plans to continue spending his Saturdays working with ESPN and the SEC Network.)

It might be worth noting that neither Layton, a lifelong radio man, nor Savage, who played for Sewanee, were former UA players. Several ex-players are familiar names with the requisite experience, although mentioning names might come across as an unintended endorsement.

There has been no indication that Alabama might use the same week-to-week rotation that it used in 2008, although it isn’t impossible.

Whichever candidate emerges, though, there is a chance that he or she will occupy the chair for a long time and possibly find their own place in Crimson Tide lore.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Ex-UA assistant named general manager of Alliance Birmingham

By: The Associated Press

Former Alabama assistant coach Joe Pendry was announced as general manager of Alliance Birmingham on Monday.

Alliance Birmingham is a team in The Alliance of American Football, a professional league founded this year set to begin playing in February 2019. Pendry was offensive line coach at Alabama from 2007-10, then moved into an off-field role until he retired earlier this summer.

“This is an amazing opportunity to build something special here in Birmingham, Alabama, and the work is already underway,” Pendry said in a news release. “Football is king in Alabama and we know when it comes time for our first snap, we’ll have a loyal and energetic fan base behind us. We are committed to putting a product on the field that they will be proud to support.”

Former NFL assistant coach Tim Lewis had previously been announced as head coach of Alliance Birmingham. The team also announced that Trey Brown, former director of college scouting and player personnel executive for the Philadelphia Eagles, as executive vice president of football operations.

Pendry spent almost four decades in coaching before moving into his off-field role with Alabama. He was a member of the coaching staff for Alabama’s 2009 national championship.

“We have placed an emphasis on bringing in front office staff with the experience needed to identify top talent and build a highly competitive team, and that’s reflected in Alliance Birmingham,” head of football operations J.K. McKay said in the release. “Joe has spent over 40 years on college and NFL sidelines working closely with players and knows what it takes to build a strong team and compete at a high level. With Joe Pendry, Trey Brown and Tim Lewis at the helm, we look forward to seeing what Alliance Birmingham can achieve on and off the field.”
Let student borrowers declare bankruptcy

Bloomberg Opinion

For decades, the U.S. system of higher education has operated on a unique premise: To make college affordable for a broad swathe of Americans, student debt must be an almost inviolable obligation.

Now authorities are starting to question that assumption. It's about time.

Capitalist societies have long taken a forgiving approach to people who can't pay their debts. The rationale is that allowing them to seek relief through bankruptcy makes everyone better off: Creditors get what they can, the individual gets a second chance, and society benefits from a legal system that encourages people to take risks.

Student debt is a rare exception. In the 1970s, spurred by stories of college graduates reneging on federal loans, Congress granted it special status. Unlike other obligations, such as credit-card balances, it can't be discharged in bankruptcy unless it imposes an "undue hardship." Courts narrowed that escape route further, in some cases demanding that borrowers demonstrate a "certainty of hopelessness" — an almost impossible standard to meet. As a result, debtors almost never seek relief.

Those precedents, though, were set at a time when student debt wasn't the big deal it is today. As federal aid, which once covered as much as 77 percent of a public-university degree, has failed to keep pace with expenses, educational debt has surpassed auto and credit-card debt to become U.S. households' second-largest obligation after mortgages. Those who can't pay are relegated to a modern-day form of debtors' prison. Interest keeps accruing, so balances can balloon many times over. Even borrowers fortunate enough to qualify for federal income-based repayment plans, which cancel remaining debts after 20 to 25 years, face a tax bill for the forgiveness. The nearly 5 million people who have defaulted suffer a ruined credit record, which can affect everything from their job prospects to their chances at homeownership. Inevitably, the economy suffers.

Across the country, judges are increasingly ruling in favor of discharging student debt, writing opinions aimed at changing the interpretation of "undue hardship."

To provide more clarity, it would be better if Congress passed a law repealing the anomalous status of student debt. Judges are right to do what they can through legal precedent. The Department of Education could help as well, by heeding the advice of legal experts and easing its historically aggressive approach to opposing discharges.

The U.S. needs a better way to make higher education broadly accessible — in the first instance, by developing a simpler, broader and more sustainable income-based system for recovering costs. For now, though, the existing debts loom large.

This is an editorial by Bloomberg Opinion. It does not necessarily reflect the views of this newspaper.
US to Stop Encouraging Race as Factor in School Admissions

By: Erica L. Green, Matt Apuzzo, and Katie Benner

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration said Tuesday that it would not encourage schools to use race as a factor in the admissions process, rescinding Obama-era guidance meant to promote diversity among students.

The shift gives schools and colleges the federal government's blessing to leave race out of admissions and enrollment decisions and underscores the contentious politics that for decades have surrounded affirmation action policies, which have repeatedly been challenged before the Supreme Court.

The Obama administration memos encouraging schools to take race into account were among 24 policy documents revoked by the Justice Department for being "unnecessary, outdated, inconsistent with existing law, or otherwise improper." Attorney General Jeff Sessions called the changes an effort to restore the "rule of law," though civil rights groups decried the move and some universities said they intended to continue their diversity efforts as before.

The action comes amid a high-profile court fight over Harvard University admissions that has attracted the government's attention, as well as Supreme Court turnover expected to produce a more critical eye toward schools' race-conscious admissions policies.

The court's most recent significant ruling on the subject endorsed colleges' use of race among many factors in the admission process. But the opinion's author, Justice Anthony Kennedy, announced his retirement last week, giving President Donald Trump a chance to replace him with a judge who may be more reliably skeptical of admissions programs that take race and ethnicity into account.

The new policy dramatically departs from the stance of the Obama administration, which on multiple occasions said schools could consider race in admissions decisions and should do so to foster diversity. In one 2011 policy document, for instance, the administration said courts had recognized schools' "compelling interest" in ensuring racially diverse populations on campuses.

"Institutions are not required to implement race-neutral approaches if, in their judgment, the approaches would be unworkable," the document said. "In some cases, race-neutral approaches will be unworkable because they will be ineffective to achieve the diversity the institution seeks."

That guidance has now been rescinded, as have about a half-dozen similar documents, including some that sought to explain court rulings affirming the use of race as a factor in admissions decisions.

"As the Supreme Court has recognized," one of the documents states, "diversity has benefits for all students, and today's students must be prepared to succeed in a diverse society and an increasingly global workforce."

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The Trump administration's announcement is more in line with Bush-era policy that discouraged affirmative action and instead encouraged the use of race-neutral alternatives, like percentage plans and economic diversity programs.

Though such guidance doesn't have the force of law, schools could presumably use it to defend themselves against lawsuits over admission policies.

The Trump administration's Justice Department had already signaled concern about the use of race in admissions decisions.

The department, for instance, sided this year with Asian-American plaintiffs who contend in a lawsuit against Harvard that the school unlawfully limits how many Asian students are admitted.

Students for Fair Admissions, the group suing Harvard, is led by Ed Blum, a legal strategist who also helped white student Abigail Fisher sue the University of Texas for alleged discrimination in a case that reached the Supreme Court. Blum said Tuesday the organization "welcomes any governmental actions that will eliminate racial classifications and preferences in college admissions." Harvard, meanwhile, said it would continue considering race as an admissions factor to create a "diverse campus community where students from all walks of life have the opportunity to learn with and from each other."

Civil rights groups criticized the Trump administration's announcement, saying it went against decades of court precedent permitting colleges to take race into account.

"We condemn the Department of Education's politically motivated attack on affirmative action and deliberate attempt to discourage colleges and universities from pursuing racial diversity at our nation's colleges and universities," Kristen Clarke, president and executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, said in a statement.

Lily Eskelsen García, president of the National Education Association, said "affirmative action has proven to be one of the most effective ways to create diverse and inclusive classrooms." She said the announcement underscored the stakes surrounding the upcoming Supreme Court appointment.

The high court has been generally accepting of considering race in admissions decisions to achieve diversity. In a 2016 opinion written by Kennedy, the court granted affirmative action policies a victory by permitting race to be among the factors considered in the college admission process.

The ruling bitterly disappointed conservatives who thought Kennedy would be part of a Supreme Court majority to outlaw affirmative action in education. Justice Antonin Scalia died after the court heard arguments in the case but before the decision was handed down.

The new affirmative action guidance may add to an already contentious fight over the next justice. With Trump expected to announce his nominee next week, the issue should be a central part of any confirmation process, said Howard University law school dean Danielle Holley-Walker.
She called the new guidance "highly unfortunate and counterproductive" and said the decision is another indication that the Justice Department under Sessions is likely to be aggressive toward schools that do continue to factor in race in admissions decisions.

"People have been talking about precedent in regard to Roe. v. Wade" — the landmark 1973 ruling affirming a woman's right to abortion — "but it's important to remember that affirmative action has been a precedent for the past 40 years," she said. "This is a clear attack on precedent. Any Supreme Court nominee needs to be asked if they support precedent related to affirmative action."