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SERVING OVER 390,000 MEMBERS

August 2024

## The Legacy of Leadership

BY DAVID G. BRONNER

If there are no serious problems, weak or average leadership will work in maintaining the status quo. It makes no difference if you are a governor, businessman, superintendent, or department head. Yet, in times of serious crisis, leadership is mandatory for a positive solution; hiding from or ignoring a known problem is not leadership.

The current Alabama Legislature and governor have made outstanding progress in addressing both very old as well as new problems in the last six years. In the past, newly elected governors and legislatures were “flat broke,” looking at old problems that were ignored by the previous leaders. This year will decide if our current leadership legacy will be extraordinary in our state’s history or merely like the last fifty years.

Remember that state leaders tend to do very little in the last year of administration before an election. I encourage our current state leaders and the public to rise above the past. In my opinion, a financial crisis is coming. Unfortunately, the only real solution is gambling, and yet, the only hold up to solving the problem is the Alabama Senate. Hopefully, a handful of the 15 senators who voted no will reconsider their opposition to gambling. ●

## The Village Idiot

BY DAVID G. BRONNER

Decades ago, the dean of the UA School of Law asked me to teach a basic business course to law students. Dean Christopher was concerned that the law students held degrees in different fields with little or no background in accounting or finance, which is essential in business. The same concept holds true for our political leaders. There are numerous differences between how governments and businesses operate, but a simple fact is that neither can survive by drastically cutting revenue and, at the same time, drastically increasing spending or expenses without causing major repercussions.

Alabama received billions from the federal government due to COVID, BUT that will end in 2026 for all states. Alabama also cut some unfair taxes, like on groceries by one cent (which is almost meaningless), yet cost a billion plus in government revenues over the next 10 years. Unfortunately, the Legislature did not replace that revenue, although they set up some savings accounts with one-time funds. Again, Alabamians like to forget that we are second to last in taxes paid, with only Alaskans paying less.

One source of revenue to replace the tax cuts could be gaming. There have been no meaningful COLAs for RSA retirees in 18 years! There is no affordable healthcare coverage for nearly 200,000 Alabamians, many of whom are employed in low-paying positions. Rural hospitals are dropping like flies! Even great new programs like “Working for Alabama” by Governor Ivey require additional funding for childcare and housing to make an impact. We must also remember that every state agency, from ALEA (State Police) to Mental Health, has been grossly

underfunded for decades.

Alabama likes to attack a problem when it becomes a crisis instead of trying to solve a problem we know is coming in the future. Personally, I would strongly prefer more reasonable taxes than gambling, but Alabama has demonstrated and voted against that solution time and time again.

As I have previously stated, the Alabama House passed the full gaming package, while the Alabama Senate came within “one” vote of allowing Alabamians to vote on this issue. Governor Ivey should call a special session, but only if the public gets interested in the 15 Senators who voted NO and assures her of their support for the entire package. I have known some of the 15 Senators for decades, and some have legitimate reasons for not supporting gaming solutions – BUT THEY OWE

ALABAMA A MEANINGFUL SOLUTION NOW, AND NOT WHEN THE TRAIN RUNS US OVER!

Once again, after six years on the job in 1979, I asked Governor Wallace to call a special session, and he did. The result was that the huge financial problems that faced the Judicial Retirement Fund were corrected, and the fund is here today.

I may not be correct. Maybe the good Lord will create more oil for us, like what happened to Governor James when we were flat broke. If I am incorrect about 2026/2027, feel free to write on my headstone, “The Village Idiot!” But waiting for a known crisis that is coming and doing nothing except hoping we avoid the crisis is a lack of leadership by all of us. ●



# Gambling Is Like Dry Counties

BY TIM WHITT – GUEST OPINION, AL.COM

I was born in a dry county in Alabama. Dry counties went extinct because the tide of history was against them. And regardless of how you feel about gambling, Alabama's odd position as the only non-Mormon state in the continental United States without either a lottery and/or full casino gaming cannot last forever. And it shouldn't. I understand the arguments of gambling prohibitionists. I don't gamble myself. I don't think it is the best way to raise state revenue. It tends to prey on the poorest in society. There is a large social cost. All of that is moot. Gambling is here. It is all around us and it is IN ALABAMA, even though – in 2024 – elected officials will tell you that they are “against legalizing gambling in Alabama.” It has been legal for over 50 years. Ever since the first dog track opened in Mobile. And the laws allowing racetracks in Alabama eventually made Native American gaming both legal and unstoppable in Alabama.

...And there is more bleeding of our state's wealth across state lines. Every state around Alabama now has a lottery creating hundreds of millions in revenue. And every one of those states fervently hopes that Alabama does not get one. Which – if we are paying attention in Alabama – should settle any argument about whether we should have one. Because those other states get our money. Lots of it. They – Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, and

now Tennessee.

Gambling prohibitionists usually dig their final line of defense on the societal ills associated with gambling. And those evils are real. However, those ills – like gambling itself – are already here in Alabama. That's why examining alcohol issues in dry counties can be enlightening for Alabama and its future. Alabama is a kind of “semi-dry state” for gambling.

Gambling opponents maintain that by keeping casinos in Mississippi, on tribal land, and by eschewing a lottery, Alabama will have fewer problem gamblers and less “binge gambling.” The theory is that by making the vice harder to obtain (although obviously only somewhat harder to obtain) you will reduce the negative impacts to the community. But that is NOT what has proven true – over decades of experience – in dry counties with alcohol. A study conducted here in Alabama found that binge drinking was higher on average in dry counties than in wet counties. And in an even more shocking study, a five-year Texas study found that the alcohol related traffic fatalities in its dry counties were at a rate of 6.8 per 10,000 people – but only 1.9 per 10,000 people in their wet counties.

*Tim Whitt has worked in governmental relations in Alabama and across the country for the last three decades. ●*

## New Pool Expansion at Ross Bridge

Exciting things are happening at our Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail resorts! The Renaissance Birmingham Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa recently completed a major expansion of the resort's pool amenity and updated the existing facilities. A new adult pool, deck area, bar, and restrooms have been added. The resort created three new fire pits, seven cabanas, and a band shell for live music. Another great addition is a scenic trail that allows access to the cabanas and upper deck. This renovation increases the pool area's occupancy by 110 guests. ●







## Alabama Success Stories

Academy of Craft Training

[academyofcrafttraining.org](http://academyofcrafttraining.org)

The Academy of Craft Training (ACT) was started in 2016 as a partnership between Alabama's public K-12 education system and the construction industry. Its mission is to recruit, educate, and guide high school students for educational and employment opportunities in the construction industry. As of the end of the 2024 school year, 72 Alabama public schools have participated in the program, with 750 students accepted annually across the three campuses.

experience, students gain the skills and confidence they need to succeed. Students earn credits toward their high school diplomas and secure their futures in construction with experience and job placement opportunities upon graduation.

Each ACT location held a signing ceremony in May where the seniors accepted full-time positions with Associated Builders & Contractors (ABC) of Alabama contractors. The graduating students accepting offers at the end of



*Inaugural Graduates from ACT North Alabama*

Approximately 30% of students who graduate from high school do not attend college and have neither academic nor job skills. ACT's goal is to help these students get the education and skills they need to be entry-level, skilled workers in the construction industry. ACT provides students in the Mobile, Birmingham, and Decatur areas with real-world, hands-on training by industry leaders and job opportunities in commercial construction.

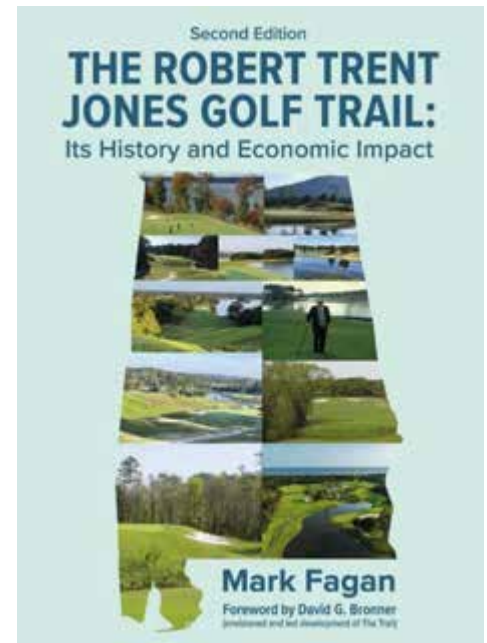
With ACT, these high school students learn valuable trades directly from industry professionals, creating the next generation of skilled trade workers. With personalized mentorship from industry experts and safe, hands-on

the 2024 program included 81 from Birmingham, 41 from Mobile, and 20 in the inaugural class in North Alabama (Decatur). To date, 450 internships have been awarded to program graduates.

This is what ACT is all about – employment and careers!

ACT continues to get better every year, providing young men and women with trade training and helping provide employment with top-tier construction companies!

*This is a series of articles about Alabama Success Stories. Please let us know if you have a similar success story you would like to share with the RSA membership. You may contact us at [communication.correspondences@rsa-al.gov](mailto:communication.correspondences@rsa-al.gov). ●*



This new book of 395 pages is the comprehensive account on how this one-of-a-kind, state-wide investment was structured and has evolved. It preserves the history of this massive development for historians, economic developers, politicians, journalists, golfers, and the public. To purchase this book, visit <https://store.bookbaby.com/book/the-robert-trent-jones-golf-trail>.

## Sign Up Today for Member Online Services

Member Online Services (MOS) is available to all active and retired members of the Retirement Systems of Alabama (RSA). MOS gives you secure access to view various aspects of your account, including an account summary, service information, beneficiary information, and correspondence with the RSA. Multi-factor authentication is utilized to keep your information safe and secure. Sign up today at <https://mso.rsa-al.gov/>!

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- August 1-10, 21-31 • September 1-10, 13-29
- October 5-17, 20-24, 30-31

### The Battle House RSA Spa Package \$244

- August 5-7, 21, 26-28
- September 2-4, 9-10, 16-18, 23-25
- October 7-9, 14-16, 21-23, 30

### Riverview Plaza \$119

- August 4-10, 15-24, 30-31
- September 1-4, 6-8, 20-23, 27-30
- October 8-10, 13-17, 20-22, 30-31

### Grand Hotel \$137 (plus a 15% resort fee)

- August 4-7, 11-13, 20-22, 25-28
- September 2-3, 8-10, 15-17, 22-24, 30
- October 6-8, 20-21, 30-31

### Grand Hotel RSA Golf Package \$209 (plus a 15% resort fee)

- August 4-7, 11-13, 20-22, 25-28
- September 2-3, 8-10, 15-17, 22-24, 30
- October 6-8, 20-21, 30-31

### Grand Hotel RSA Spa Package \$285 (plus a 15% resort fee)

- August 4-7, 11-13, 20-22, 25-28
- September 2-3, 8-10, 15-17, 22-24, 30
- October 6-8, 20-21, 30-31

### Marriott Shoals \$119

- August 1, 4, 11-12, 18-19, 25-26
- September 2-3, 8-9, 22-23, 26, 29-30
- October 16-17, 20-21, 27-28, 30-31

### Marriott Shoals RSA Spa Package \$229

- August 1, 11, 18, 25 • September 8, 15, 22, 26, 29
- October 16-17, 20-21, 27-28, 30-31

### Renaissance Ross Bridge \$129

- August 1, 4-6, 11-12, 14-15, 18, 21, 25, 28-29
- September 2-5, 8, 15, 22
- October 6, 13, 16-17, 23-24, 27-28

### Renaissance Ross Bridge RSA Spa Package \$260

- August 4-6, 11-12, 18, 28 • September 3-4, 8, 15, 22
- October 6, 13, 27-28

### Auburn/Opelika Marriott Resort \$119 (plus a 10% resort fee) Web reservation will show \$144, including \$25 resort fee. Guest will only be charged RSA rate at checkout.

- August 5-7, 8-9, 14, 17-18
- September 18-19, 20-21, 27-28 • October 1-2, 6-9

### Auburn/Opelika Marriott Resort RSA Spa Package \$234 (plus a 10% resort fee)

- August 3, 7-8, 10
- September 18-19, 21, 25-26, 28-29
- October 16-17, 20-21, 27-28, 30-31

### Prattville Marriott \$109

- August 11, 14-15, 29-31
- September 1-2, 15, 24-25, 29-30
- October 6, 20-21, 27-29

### Renaissance Montgomery \$129

- August 4-12, 18-19, 22, 24, 28-30
- September 1-3, 11-12, 14-16, 22, 28-30
- October 1-2, 7, 11-14, 17-18, 27

### Renaissance Montgomery RSA Spa Package \$244

- August 6-10, 22, 24, 28-30
- September 3, 11-12, 14, 28
- October 1-2, 11-12, 17-18

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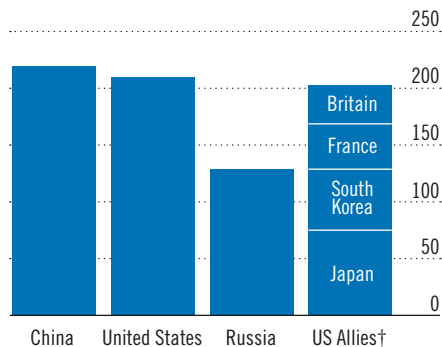
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## ERS Board Election Results

The Employees' Retirement System (ERS) Election Committee has certified the regular election results for the Retired State Employee Position. Congratulations to Norris Green on his reelection for the ERS Board of Control position. He will begin his four-year term on October 1, 2024. ●

## Naval Fleet Size\*, 2023



Source: IISS

\*Includes aircraft-carriers, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, and submarines †With major fleets

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