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SERVING OVER 358,000 MEMBERS

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## 2019 – Our Big Chance to Improve

BY DAVID G. BRONNER

**W**OW! As Americans, we have a boatload of both international and domestic problems that need resolution in D.C. Hopefully, our U.S. senators and representatives will work together as the world needs sensible solutions. Besides electing our political leaders to Washington, there is very little we can do to help.

**ON THE OTHER HAND**, Alabama citizens have an extraordinary opportunity to make our state better in the future. We have a new governor and lieutenant governor, along with two solid and knowledgeable leaders in the Speaker of the House and Pro-Tem of the Senate, plus numerous new senate and house members who gave their voters the promise of an improved Alabama.

**IT IS TIME** for Alabama to just stop talking about problems, and instead move to solve these problems. Believe it or not, Governor Wallace stressed out over his

prison and mental health agencies in the 1970s, but his solution was to take funds from the teachers' pension program. He failed. Besides these two "forever problems," we have even more problems. Leaders cannot stick their head in the sand or in the clouds and hope someone else will have the fortitude to solve them. Our leaders must act in 2019, or maybe 2020 – as it is very difficult to get major legislation passed in the last two years of the quadrennium.

**BESIDES** prisons and mental health (think of our county jails as serving as mental health rehab centers), our state troopers have among the lowest funding for staff and equipment in the country! This is unnecessary and makes you and your family dangerously at risk. Some years ago we had reasonably good roads and bridges – no more. Roads and bridges are just like your home; with very limited maintenance and improvements, your

house simply falls apart. The same is said for our roadways and bridges. We have recruited great companies to Alabama, but we hinder their expansions because of inadequate roads to handle plant and job growth. Obviously, I could go on about youth services, conservation, health department, as well as our judicial branch of government. Hopefully, you get the picture.

**BUT...** I would truly be amiss not to mention the huge challenges of making a difference in public education. The needs are huge for both k-12 and higher education, and sadly those needs have been ignored for decades. Education of our children – as parents and citizens – must be our most important goal. We must improve the pay for teachers and provide the necessary funds to educate our state's most important asset: our children. ●

## Alabama's Prison Homicide Rate Highest in America

BY CHRISTOPHER HARRESS | AL.COM

**A**labama's prisons have the highest homicide rate in the country, according to a report released by a prison advocacy group. Over the last two years, there have been 19 homicides within Alabama's prison system, according to the Equal Justice Initiative, the Montgomery-based nonprofit organization that provides legal representation to indigent defendants and prisoners.

That is 600 percent greater than the national average of other prison systems between 2001 and 2014, according to the most

recently available statistics. "There is a direct correlation between the level of prison violence and the shortage of correctional staff in an overpopulated prison system with limited resources for rehabilitating offenders," said Alabama Department of Corrections' spokesperson Bob Horton. "The proliferation of drugs and criminal activity inside prisons also contribute to an increase in violent incidents." He added: "The Alabama Department of Corrections recognizes the seriousness of the problem and is taking steps to reverse this trend." [...] ●

# Dangerous Shortage of State Troopers Creating Unsafe Alabama Highways

SOURCE: BEASLEYALLEN.COM

Traffic accidents and resulting fatalities have surged across Alabama in the last four years alongside a “dangerously low” level of state troopers. In August, Alabama State Trooper Sgt. Steve Jarrett told Birmingham’s WBRC that there were 352 state troopers patrolling all of Alabama. By November, that number had plummeted even further to 250.

The Alabama State Troopers Association (ASTA) told the *Montgomery Advertiser* that recent studies suggest a state the size of Alabama needs 1,000 state troopers to effectively patrol the highways and keep motorists safe. Currently, there is just one state trooper every 214 square miles in Alabama.

ASTA data shows that funding for Alabama’s state troopers has declined by nearly 25 percent in the last four years. At the same time, auto accidents have increased by 18 percent and fatalities have

shot up by 28 percent.

With the number of personnel in decline, state troopers have to work increasingly larger territories and longer work days – as many as 12 to 16 hours per day in some circumstances, such as when severe weather blows through a state.

The aging fleet of patrol vehicles is also another enormous problem Alabama state troopers face. With longer shifts and larger patrol areas, wear and tear has taken a toll on the cars, many of which are a decade old and have more than a quarter million miles.

The predicament is not just deadly for Alabamians and other motorists passing through the state, it’s also taking its toll on the troopers. Senator Cam Ward of Alabaster told WBRC in August: *It’s a big stress on troopers. They have a very dangerous job. They are trying to cover more territory than what was intended for their*

*jobs. They are stressed to a breaking point.*

ASTA President Davis Steward told the *Advertiser* that ASTA Executive Director Neil Tew has called on Alabama’s government officials to increase funding to bring patrols up to needed levels. But if Governor Kay Ivey’s proposed investment of \$3.2 million – enough to fund a new class of 30 additional state troopers – is any indication, it’s unlikely Alabama will reach the appropriate level of funding for the state troopers anytime soon.

I am hopeful that Governor Ivey will increase the budget request and help to make Alabama highways safer. I believe that the governor will do this and she should have the support of legislative leaders in both House and Senate. Safety on our state’s highways and saving lives should be a top priority in 2019. ●

## Alabama Trivia

BY STEVE FLOWERS, *INSIDE THE STATEHOUSE*

Alabama is a magnificent state. We possess abundant natural resources such as waterways, rivers, flora and fauna, and mineral deposits. Water is one of Alabama’s most precious natural resources, and almost 10 percent of the freshwater resources of the continental U.S. flows through or originates in Alabama during its journey to the sea. A sixth of the state’s surface is covered by lakes, ponds, rivers, and creeks. We have plentiful rainfall, much higher than the nation’s average. The average annual rainfall in North Alabama is 50 inches. The average is 65 in South Alabama and along the coast.

Some of you may wonder why Alabama is called the “Heart of Dixie.” We are the Heart of Dixie because of banknotes issued by the Citizens Bank of Louisiana before the Civil War. They bore the French word “dix” meaning ten, and thus the South became known as Dixieland. With Alabama serving as the first Capital of the Confederacy, it was thus the Heart of Dixieland.

The early French influence in Alabama

is still felt in Mobile, which is much older than the rest of the state. Mobile was the first permanent European settlement in the state, founded by the French even earlier than New Orleans, and more than 100 years before Alabama became a state in 1819. Mobile was settled by the French, but the rest of our European ancestors came primarily from five states: Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee. Ninety percent of the pre-Civil War white population of the state originated in one of these five states. Of the first 16 governors, 15 were born in one of those five states and of the 100 delegates at the Secession Convention in 1861, only 17 were native-born Alabamians, while 72 were born in one of the above five states.

When Alabama became a state in 1819, it accounted for 1.3 percent of the nation’s population. There was rapid growth during the next few decades as cotton and slavery dominated the antebellum economy and culture. By 1840, Alabama’s proportion of U.S. population was 3.5 percent. However, Alabama’s proportion of the U.S. population has

been in steady decline since the end of the Civil War. Today we account for only about 1.6 percent of the country’s people. My belief is that the trend will reverse in the next few years as we continue to grow with automobile and high-tech industries, especially in the Huntsville area.

Alabama has been castigated as a backwards state and less opportune for women leaders. However, I would suggest that with the beginning of this new quadrennium we may be leading the nation and more so-called progressive states with women leadership. We have just elected a female governor, Kay Ivey, and Katie Britt has been chosen to lead the Business Council of Alabama. ●

### WANT TO HELP?



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Tired of that worn-out dealer tag on the front of your car? Would you like to help the RSA and our Alabama Tourist Department advertise “Alabama’s Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail” on your front bumper? If so, call to request a tag at 334.517.7000 or 877.517.0020, or write: Tag, P.O. Box 302150, Montgomery, AL 36130-2150

# New Spa at Grand National Marriott

SOURCE: TIMOTHY NOORDERMEER | OPELIKA-AUBURN NEWS

“It is the most beautiful thing that has come to Opelika,” spa director Natalee Headley said. “This spa alone is the most incredible space in the Southeast. The textures, color, design, treatments, every element is incredible.” Whirlpools, infrared saunas, showers, manicure and pedicure stations, a salon, and fitness center reside on three floors within the Marriott Resort.

Taylor Fields, the corporate spa director for the Robert Trent Jones Resort Collection, ensures the entire community will be pleased. “The facility is absolutely amazing,” Fields said. “How we train our staff is certainly top notch. We use Forbes 5-star standards to train our therapist and associates they’ll come in contact with, so not only do they have a beautiful facility, they also have a great staff we’ve invested a lot of training into.”

The spa will be inducted into the RTJ Spa Trail among five other Alabama hotels in Point Clear, Mobile, Montgomery, Hoover, Florence, and Opelika. Every stop along the spa trail promises a special experience. “I think it is very much

a grand project being a 20,000-square-foot, three-story wellness facility here in Opelika, Alabama,” Fields said. “We have something unique here in the state of



Alabama. Obviously, we have the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, but we have a spa trail as well. We encourage guests to travel amongst the trail of spas to utilize the services and experience the wellness we offer.”

Vice President of Opelika Tourism Bureau Robyn Bridges believes the new addition to the resort will be greatly beneficial to the Auburn-Opelika community.

“It will benefit everyone in the community who would like to use it as a local, but also our visitor market,” Bridges said. “This is just another jewel in the crown of the Marriott. They keep adding more and more, so it’s getting bigger and more attractive to groups every year from all over the place. It’s no longer a hotel with a golf course. It’s a real resort.”

With the new amenities, guest appeal will extend to leisure, corporate and educational functions, according to Bridges. “It was awe and wonder,” she said of her initial reaction to the new facility. “It was gorgeous and every time I travel – which is a considerable amount – I personally like to use the spas available to me and have a massage when I’m on the road, and this is just as beautiful as any I have ever seen.”

The new amenities have ushered in more diverse crowds without an interest in golf, according to Bill Lang, public relations director for the RTJ Golf Trail and Resort Collection. The Grand National will have the only Marriott Resort in the state of Alabama. ●

## Alabama Success Stories

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF FORENSIC SCIENCES

MAKING ALABAMA A SAFER PLACE, EACH AND EVERY DAY

In today’s world of glorified forensic science programs and reality television, viewers often aren’t exposed to the stark reality many crime labs face around this country – a struggle for adequate funding, a rising demand for their services, and a continuing effort to help identify new and emerging public health threats while staying abreast of cutting edge technology. Here in Alabama, it is important to recognize that the work of the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences (ADFS) touches every community, every town, and every city in Alabama. As the state’s only internationally accredited provider of forensic laboratory services, ADFS is responsible for conducting forensic testing in a variety of scientific areas and providing the highest quality forensic test results to each and every stakeholder in Alabama’s justice system.

Whether conducting autopsies on a suspicious death, testing suspected heroin and fentanyl recovered from an

undercover drug buy, or doing DNA testing on a cold case that may be decades old, the work conducted by the staff of the ADFS is both exciting and vital to Alabama’s communities remaining safe.

Each and every day, ADFS receives forensic evidence from over 450 different law enforcement agencies throughout Alabama. Testing performed at ADFS laboratories and medical facilities ranges from conducting autopsies in an effort to determine cause and manner of death, to performing state of the art forensic laboratory testing in the specialized areas of Firearms and Toolmarks, Drug Chemistry, Toxicology, and DNA.

Crippled with budget cuts and laboratory closures due to the economic downturn from a decade ago, ADFS saw case backlogs rise, as the crime rate rose and demand for forensic testing from law enforcement across Alabama continued to increase.

Thankfully, the story doesn’t end

there. In 2018, ADFS turned a momentous corner – backlogs are down, turnaround times on forensic reports to law enforcement and the Courts are improving, and productivity is at an all-time high. How? “By evaluating and streamlining our lab processes, implementing robotics, and maintaining a focus on becoming more cost effective and efficient, all without sacrificing the quality of the work the citizens depend on us to perform. In short, we embraced the concept of an efficient government, and adopted several private enterprise activities into our government setting,” said ADFS Director, Angelo Della Manna.

And in 2018, the results are unmistakable. Over the last year, ADFS completed testing on over 39,000 drug chemistry cases, the highest productivity in over a decade. And ADFS accomplished that feat with 18% less chemists and a General Fund and total appropriation below what

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4





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##### A Renaissance Hotel—Mobile—\$119

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- March 10-13, 21-28, 31 • April 2-4, 7-24, 28-30

##### **NEW** The Battle House—RSA Spa Package—\$207

- February 1, 4-8, 11-13, 18-20, 25-26
- March 11-13, 21-22, 28
- April 2-4, 8-12, 15-19, 22-24, 29-30

#### The Renaissance Riverview Plaza—Mobile—\$109

- February 2-12, 18-19, 27 • March 10-12, 24-26, 31
- April 1, 10-11, 14-18, 20-30

#### Marriott Grand—\$127 plus a 15% resort fee

- February 1-6, 8-13, 17-18, 24-27
- March 3, 6-7, 13-14, 17-20 • April 1, 7, 10, 28-30

#### Marriott Grand—RSA Golf Package—\$199 plus a 15% resort fee —Promotional code—R2A

Includes: Deluxe Room, One Round of Golf for Two People.  
Call for Tee Times after booking package

- February 1-6, 8-13, 17-18, 24-27
- March 3, 6-7, 13-14, 17-20 • April 1, 7, 10, 28-30

##### **NEW** Marriott Grand—RSA Spa Package—\$331 plus a 15% resort fee

- February 1-6, 8-13, 17-18, 24-27
- March 3, 6-7, 13-14, 17-20 • April 1, 7, 10, 28-30

#### Marriott Shoals—Florence—\$109

- February 1, 3-5, 10-11, 17-18, 21, 24, 28
- March 3, 10, 17, 24, 28, 31 • April 7, 14, 21, 28

##### **NEW** Marriott Shoals—RSA Spa Package—\$210

- February 3, 10, 24 • 3, 10, 17, 24, 31
- April 7, 14, 21, 28

#### Renaissance Ross Bridge—Hoover—\$119

- February 2-10, 14, 17-24, 26-27
- March 3-5, 11-31 • April 1-3, 5-22, 28-30

##### **NEW** Ross Bridge—RSA Spa Package—\$223

- February 3-7, 10, 17-21, 24, 26-27
- March 3-5, 11-14, 17-21, 24-28, 31
- April 1-3, 7-11, 14-18, 21-22, 28-30

#### Auburn/Opelika Marriott—\$109

- February 3-5, 10-21, 27-28
- March 1-2, 5-6, 9-19, 29-30 • April 1-10, 14-27, 30

##### **NEW** Auburn/Opelika Marriott—RSA Spa Package—\$201

- February 3-5, 10-21, 27-28
- March 1-2, 5-6, 9-19, 29-30 • April 1-10, 14-27, 30

#### Prattville Marriott—\$89

- February 3-4, 10-11, 17-18, 21-24, 28
- March 10, 24, 31 • April 7, 14-15, 21, 28

#### Renaissance Montgomery—\$119

- February N/A • March N/A • April 21-22, 28
- RSA Spa Package—\$199—Promotional code—R2A  
• February N/A • March N/A • April N/A

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## Alabama Success Stories

CONTINUED FROM PAGE THREE

ADFS was provided 10 years ago. Turnaround times for autopsy reports across all three (3) morgue facilities are now less than 90 days for the first time in years, thereby providing law enforcement and the District Attorney's test results in a timely manner so investigations can continue to move forward.

If you would like to learn more about the important work the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences does to keep our communities safe, please visit their website at [www.adfs.alabama.gov](http://www.adfs.alabama.gov).

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

## ERS Board of Control Oath of Office



Vice Chair Jackie Graham delivers the Oath of Office to David Harer, Steve Walkley, and Norris Green.

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