



Vol. XLVI—No. 8

SERVING OVER 370,000 MEMBERS

February 2021

The University of Alabama Healthcare Study

SOURCE: EDPOLICY.UA.EDU

*Robert Bentley's choice **not** to take the ACA Funding is easily the single worst decision made by an Alabama governor since George Wallace's infamous "stand in the schoolhouse door."*

CONCLUSION OF UA HEALTH STUDY

A large number of Alabama residents are presently experiencing declining healthcare outcomes. This is a matter of concern to informed Alabama policymakers. In addition to focusing state resources to control the pandemic, Governor Kay Ivey's efforts to improve healthcare outcomes in Alabama include, but are not limited to, expanding behavioral health services for children and youth, reducing infant mortality and opioid overdoses, and requiring state licensing at more child care centers. In its 2021 agenda, the Alabama League of Municipalities advocates expansion of telehealth medicine tied to increased access to broad band (the subject of a future Black Belt 2020 issue brief). These are just a few of the private and public initiatives that are underway to improve quality of life in Alabama.

Sadly, in retrospect, it appears that the choice made by former Governor Robert Bentley to not expand Medicaid in 2014 has cost the state billions **as well as** produced negative healthcare outcomes for rural Black Belt counties. Today, leaders in Congress are working to reinstitute the same federal financial incentives for ACA participation that were initially in place in 2014 to encourage more states to participate.

The Education Policy Center endorses such efforts, as data show positive health outcomes for citizens, economic growth, and reduced hospital closures. Should such legislation pass, it may be possible to improve healthcare outcomes across Alabama—the Black Belt included—and put the system in better long-term footing. ●

Sad for N.C.—Happy for the RSA

BY DAVID G. BRONNER

Do RSA members remember my article from last month? Probably not, due to the absurd happenings in our country's capital, but you should, as it encouraged active and retired RSA members to join various organizations in Montgomery to help preserve your retirement and healthcare benefits far into the future.

Here is what North Carolina (N.C.) leaders have done to their future public employees. According to Dawn Vaughan of *The News & Observer*, "As of January 1, 2021, new N.C. **state employees and teachers**, who started their jobs on that date, or after, will **NOT** receive health benefits after they retire decades later and will only receive health benefits while working."

The N.C. State Treasurer says he is merely carrying out the law. He says it will save nothing now, but will in 30 years, and that it does not affect their pension benefits. So when do they start looking at active and retiree pension benefits in N.C.?

If that does not get your attention, New Mexico is also considering benefit reductions for teachers. The Reason Foundation blames investments and its growth in unfunded liabilities, **BUT**, over the past 20 years, the pension fund has been shorted over \$1.4 billion in payments from their state legislature.

I would say, are you kidding me! Cutting off healthcare benefits will wipe out most, if not all, of the pension benefit for an average employee. As I stated in the January *Advisor*, you might want to consider being as active as possible in guarding your health and pension benefits.

On a much happier note, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, Arkansas' largest newspaper, had a very long editorial by Rex Nelson, entitled "The 2021 Wish List," for its state to consider. The last paragraph states,

"I would like to see the state's two largest retirement systems—the Arkansas Public Employees Retirement System and the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System—do something along the lines of what the Retirement Systems of Alabama did when it created the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail. That trail put Alabama on the map for a lot of high-income people across the country."

For Arkansas, I would suggest a series of world-class trout resorts along the White, Little Red, and Spring Rivers that are heavily marketed to sportsmen in all 50 states and even some foreign countries." ●



The ERS Board and Local Representation

BY NEAH SCOTT, RSA LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL

The 2021 Legislative Session has begun. The *Advisor* has, for months, pointed out the need to improve retirement benefits for education employees in this upcoming session. Another important issue to be addressed is increasing representation for **local** government members on the Employees' Retirement System Board of Control.

The local governments that participate in the ERS (868 total cities, counties, boards, commissions, and authorities) have more assets, active members, and retirees than state agencies. Despite this, local government actives and retirees have only three of thirteen positions on the

ERS Board.

Two groups that represent local government and their employees and retirees (the Association of County Commissions of Alabama and the Alabama Retired State Employees' Association) have worked to bring legislation that would add much-needed board seats for local government members.

The legislation would add two elected board positions for local government members, a county employee and an at-large local government employee/retiree. The bill would also convert two elected positions for local government employees to one elected position for city

employees and one elected position for local board employees.

This legislation would increase the representation for local government actives and retirees from three to five board positions and would better reflect the current make-up of the ERS, while providing fair representation for local government members of the ERS. ●

Annual Report Available

Call 334.517.7000 or 877.517.0020, or write: Annual Report, P.O. Box 302150, Montgomery, AL 36130-2150

Top Honor for RSA's Battle House Hotel

SOURCE: AL.COM

Historic Hotels of America names The Battle House Renaissance Mobile Hotel & Spa as the "Best Historic Hotel" in the United States. Known as "Mobile's Living Room," The Battle House in downtown Mobile has welcomed international guests since opening in 1852. This designation by Historic Hotels of America is great news not only for The Battle House but also for the city of Mobile, said Mayor Sandy Stimpson.

The Battle House is among the group's 2020 Awards of Excellence recipients. It took honors as the Best Historic Hotel in the midsize category of 201-400 guest rooms. The Battle House and Jekyll Island Club Resort in Jekyll Island, Ga., which won for best social media presence, were the only winners in the Southeast.

"This is a great honor for the city of Mobile and the state of Alabama," said



Margo Gilbert, General Manager of The Battle House. "Our hotel blends the best in historic architecture and exceptional service provided by the best hospitality experts you will find anywhere," said Gilbert.

The Battle House's history goes back to 1852 and in its heyday the hotel was known as "Mobile's Living Room." By the end of the 20th century, it had fallen into decline and was boarded up. Around 2000, the Retirement Systems of Alabama pitched a plan to buy the hotel and make it part of a complex including a spa and an adjacent office tower. That deal was sealed in 2002, clearing the way for a full restoration of the hotel and the construction of Alabama's tallest building, the RSA Battle House Tower. The Battle House reopened in May 2007. ●

Deadline to Improve Tier II Benefits

The deadline for local governments in the ERS to elect to provide Tier I benefits to Tier II employees is fast approaching. Under Act 2019-132, local governments have until May 8, 2021, to adopt a resolution to provide Tier I benefits to their Tier II employees.

As of January 2021, 402 of the 868 local governments have submitted resolutions to the ERS. The remaining 466 local governments must act now if they wish to improve retirement benefits for their employees. ●

WANT TO HELP?



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Alabama Success Story

Nursing Students and Faculty Answer the Call to Serve in UAB's Hospital

BY HOLLY GAINER, UAB PUBLIC RELATIONS SPECIALIST

UAB Hospital is currently short on nursing staff due to the spread of COVID-19 and the intensive care the disease requires for each patient. So, when Dr. Maria Shirey, Ph.D., professor and associate Dean for Clinical and Global Partnerships in the School of Nursing, and Dr. Summer Powers, DNP, an Acute Care Nurse Practitioner and an assistant professor at the UAB School of Nursing, emailed faculty and students to inform them of the need and to identify interest in supporting the effort, the immediate response was not a surprise.

"It wasn't, 'Yes, I will serve.' It was, 'When can I start? I'm ready to go into the hospital today.' Our students are eager for the opportunity to be able to do what they are being trained to do," Dr. Powers said. "I feed off of the students' energy. They have been really passionate about helping in some way, and now they feel like there is something they can do to help in this pandemic." Dr. Shirey adds the faculty had the same "can do" response.

More than 120 undergraduate, graduate, and faculty members of the School of Nursing at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) are working at UAB Hospital to support the hospital's staff. The faculty and students are joining the frontline healthcare workers who have been caring for COVID-19 patients since the start of the pandemic. The goal is not to replace the nurses in the hospital but to support them.

"I am so proud of the School of Nursing's overwhelming faculty response...

[and] the call for help at UAB Hospital," said Dr. Shirey. "This response is a reflection of our commitment to the tripartite mission of teaching, research, and practice, and to our unique partnership between our school and UAB Hospital to address the healthcare needs of Alabamians."

Dr. Doreen C. Harper, Dean of the School of Nursing, explains, "Teams of highly-qualified faculty and students will be providing care on units and working collaboratively with UAB Hospital staff

equipment and how to safely put patients in the prone position. The nurses and undergraduate students will serve as patient care technicians and will help with vaccine distribution. Faculty and graduate students, who are all licensed and trained registered nurses, will serve on patient care teams and provide bedside care in the hospital. "It is personal to me now," said Dr. Powers. "I've been working alongside these nurses for a long time during all of this. They have been doing this for months. They are exhausted. It



to deliver safe, quality care to all patients. Historically, nurses have always answered the call — during World War II, other pandemics, and the like — and again we are answering the call to meet the patient care needs of our community."

Faculty and students received training in December to refresh the skills needed to care for a patient with COVID-19, including learning how to safely put on and take off personal protective

means a lot to me to be able to go and help our colleagues in this way. We aren't rescuing them in any way, but we are supporting them."

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. ●

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The Battle House,

A Renaissance Hotel \$119

- February 1-4, 7-10, 17-21, 28
- March 1, 7, 11-12, 17-18, 20-31
- April 1-8, 11-13, 18-21, 25-29

The Battle House RSA Spa Package \$207

- February 2-4, 9-10, 17-18 • March 1, 22-23
- April 5-7, 12-13, 19-21, 26-28

Riverview Plaza \$109

- February 1-4, 7, 9-11, 17-19
- March 1, 7-10, 17-18, 26-31
- April 4-8, 11-12, 17, 25-29

Grand Hotel \$127 plus a 15% resort fee

- February 1-10, 17, 21-28
- March 1-4, 7-11, 14-15, 21-23, 28-31
- April 1, 2-7, 11, 14, 18-22, 25-28

Grand Hotel RSA Golf Package \$199 plus a 15% resort fee

- February 1-10, 17, 21-28
- March 1-4, 7-11, 14-15, 21-23, 28-31
- April 1, 2-7, 11, 14, 18-22, 25-28

Grand Hotel RSA Spa Package \$259 plus a 15% resort fee

- February 3-6, 10, 17, 24-27 • March 3-4, 10-11, 31
- April 4, 7, 14, 21-22, 28

Marriott Shoals \$109

- February 7, 21, 28 • March 7, 14, 28
- April 4, 11, 18, 25

Marriott Shoals RSA Spa Package \$210

- February 7, 21, 28 • March 7, 14, 28
- April 4, 11, 18, 25

Renaissance Ross Bridge \$119

- February 1-28 • March 1-4, 7-9, 12-31
- April 1-8, 11-22, 25-29

Renaissance Ross Bridge RSA Spa Package \$223

- February 1-3, 7-10, 16-17, 21-24, 28
- March 1-3, 7-9, 14-17, 21-24, 28-31
- April 4-7, 11-14, 18-21, 25-28

Auburn/Opelika Marriott Resort \$109

- February 1-10, 14-17, 21-25, 28
- March 1-3, 7-10, 17-18, 21-22, 28-31
- April 1, 4-8, 11-15, 18-22

Auburn/Opelika Marriott Resort RSA Spa Package \$201

- February 3-7, 10, 14, 17, 21, 24-25, 28
- March 3, 7, 10, 17-18, 21, 28, 31
- April 1, 4, 7-8, 11, 14-15, 18, 21-22

Prattville Marriott \$89

- February 4-8, 11, 15-18, 20-22, 25, 28
- March 9-16, 21, 28-30
- April 1, 4-5, 11-13, 15, 27-30

Renaissance Montgomery \$119

- February 7-11, 18-28
- March 1-4, 7-8, 14, 22-25, 28-31
- April 1, 3-4, 11, 25-26

Renaissance Montgomery RSA Spa Package \$223

- February 9-11, 18-20, 23-25, 27
- March 2-4, 23-25, 30-31 • April 1, 3

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are not applicable to groups.*

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Companies Are Cutting 401(k) Contributions


BY MAURIE BACKMAN, THE MOTLEY FOOL

Millions of individuals have been hurt by the coronavirus pandemic – namely, those who have lost their jobs since the outbreak began. But companies are feeling the pain, too, and are cutting corners to try to conserve resources.

One area they are cutting is 401(k) contributions. A good 8% of employers have reduced their 401(k) contributions in recent months, reports the Plan Sponsor Council of America, and more are considering joining their ranks.

All told, an estimated 46,000 plans have seen their employer contributions cut. For some, that meant losing an employer match altogether. For another, it meant a reduction. Not surprisingly, small businesses were most likely to reduce their contributions. But either way, losing out on 401(k) dollars puts employees in a bad spot, and if those reduced contributions continue into 2021, savers will need to work even harder to compensate.

[Editor's note: This is why the RSA would NOT support the PEW recommendations for the RSA to move from our retirement program to 401(k) programs.]



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