



The ADVISOR

TEACHERS, EMPLOYEES, and JUDICIAL



Vol. XL — No. 9

SERVING OVER 338,000 MEMBERS

March 2015

Fore: Marriott's Top Golf Hotels In North America Located On Alabama's RTJ Golf Trail

2014 guest satisfaction surveys at Marriott and Renaissance hotels in North America rated four of the top five sites on Alabama's Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail.

Renaissance Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa was named the number one Marriott or Renaissance hotel in North America for golf satisfaction. The Auburn/Opelika Marriott Hotel and Conference Center at Grand National finished second for golf. The Marriott in Prattville at Capitol Hill finished fourth and the Grand Hotel Marriott Resort in Pt. Clear finished fifth for golf experience. These rankings are determined by an outside research firm hired by Marriott International for its 448 full-service Marriott and Renaissance Hotels in North America.

"Having four of the top five Marriott or Renaissance Hotels

in North America is remarkable and the result of a great team of hard workers," said John Cannon, president of Alabama's Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail. "We want our hotel

guests and others to have a great experience when playing our courses," said Cannon. "From making reservations to greeting guests to making sure bunkers and greens are pristine, our team goes above and beyond to make our visitors happy. That hard work has paid off for both the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail and its Resort Collection, which contains both Marriott and Renaissance Hotels."

The vision of Dr. David G. Bronner, CEO of the Retirement Systems of Alabama, the RTJ Golf Trail was created to bring visitors and investors to Alabama while making the state a better place to live. "Twenty three years ago before the RTJ Golf Trail opened people would have laughed that Marriott's top golf experiences were found in Alabama," said Cannon. "Now it is a proven fact, based on independent surveys conducted for Marriott International."

The entire Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail has 26 courses at 11 sites across Alabama. The Resort Collection has eight hotels and resorts. These golf courses and hotels are owned by the Retirement Systems of Alabama. For more information, visit www.rtgolf.com. ●

Top 10 Marriott and Renaissance Hotels for Golf Satisfaction

1. Renaissance Birmingham Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa – Hoover, Ala. *
2. Auburn Marriott Opelika Hotel & Conference Center at Grand National – Opelika, Ala. *
3. Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa – Pointe Vedra Beach, Fla.
4. Montgomery Marriott Prattville Hotel & Conference Center at Capitol Hill – Prattville, Ala. *
5. Grand Hotel Marriott Resort, Golf Club & Spa – Pt. Clear, Ala. *
6. Los Suenos Marriott Ocean & Golf Resort – Herradura, Costa Rica
7. The Vinoy Renaissance St. Petersburg Resort & Golf Club – St. Petersburg, Fla.
8. Ann Arbor Marriott Ypsilanti at Eagle Crest – Ypsilanti, Mich.
9. Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort, Golf Club & Spa – Marco Island, Fla.
10. Renaissance Indian Wells Resort & Spa – Indian Wells/Palm Springs, Cal.

* These golf locations are part of the Resort Collection on Alabama's Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail.



Renaissance Birmingham Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa



Auburn Marriott Opelika Hotel & Conference Center at Grand National



Montgomery Marriott Prattville Hotel & Conference Center at Capitol Hill



Grand Hotel Marriott Resort, Golf Club & Spa

Hard Choices Ahead

BY DAVID G. BRONNER

The Legislature will begin a new session on March 3 and along with Governor Bentley will spend the next three months working to solve Alabama's numerous financial problems. These financial problems are hardly new. In the early 1970s, Governor Wallace attempted a financial raid on the – at that time – very financially weak RSA in order to fund mental health and prisons. RSA members, thanks be to God, did not allow that to happen.

Like every new governor and Legislature, each thought they could improve state government better than those who came before them, and in numerous instances improvements were made. Today, we face even more of a problem. Educational funding after our near "Depression of 2008-09" was cut more than anywhere in America. The state has no choice but to face the totally inadequate funding of prisons, Medicaid, public safety, judicial and other state agencies if we expect these agencies to provide the level of services any state needs to function properly.

Everyone understands the great disdain Alabamians have for increased taxes, but Alabamians need to understand that we are among the lowest taxed citizens in America – which is great. But without a minimum level of reasonable taxes, Alabama cannot move forward in this very competitive world. Responsible citizens should support the Legislature's and Governor's efforts to find a solution to this funding crisis, even if that means higher taxes. Alabama made unbelievable strides starting in the 1990s. We must continue the outstanding efforts of those leaders with a determination to make Alabama a better place for ourselves and our children. ●

WANT TO HELP? A FREE CAR TAG

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

Thinking of Taxing Our Pensions?

Dear Governor Bentley,

If the state of Alabama increases taxes, I am strongly against eliminating the exemption for retirement income from defined benefit pension plans. Eliminating this deduction would make defined contribution plan retirement income tax-favored compared to defined benefit plan retirement income without a compelling reason for different tax treatment. It could also greatly increase the complexity of filing an Alabama tax return for retirees with defined benefit plan retirement income.

I believe there is some confusion about the different tax treatment for the two types of retirement income. Under current law in the state of Alabama, both types of retirement income receive tax-favored treatment. However, the timing of the tax benefit is not the same. Defined contribution plan tax benefits are provided when the employee makes deposits to the plan via payroll withholding (i.e., during working years), consistent with federal tax law. Defined benefit tax benefits are provided when the employee receives retirement income, inconsistent with federal tax law.

The Alabama state income tax difference for the two types of retirement plan can be observed on a state employee's W-2 wage statement by higher Alabama wages compared to federal wages. For example, assume the following:

Gross wages - \$100,000

Defined benefit plan withholding and plan contribution - \$7,500

Defined contribution plan withholding and plan contribution - \$3,000

The W-2 will report federal wages of \$89,500 (\$100,000 - \$7,500 - \$3,000) and state wages of \$97,000 (\$100,000 - \$3,000).

In many states, federal and states wages are the same because many states follow federal rules for both types of retirement plans. I do not know the history of the Alabama inconsistency, but providing a tax benefit once for both kinds of plans is equitable. Taking away the tax benefit only for defined benefit plan retirement income is not equitable.

If Alabama goes forward with the possible tax law change, the complexity of filing a return will increase for a retiree receiving defined benefit plan income because the two components of the retirement income would have to be measured for the state of Alabama: 1. Non-taxable recovery of capital (for all the defined benefit plan withholding/contributions during working years that did not receive tax-favored treatment) and 2. Taxable earnings. These calculations would be mandatory because otherwise employees' contributions would be subject to double taxation. Measuring these two components is similar to a situation where the person deposits \$1,000 in a savings account and later withdraws all the money in the account and receives \$1,100. There is \$1,000 non-taxable return of capital and \$100 of earnings.

To apply the same logic for defined benefit retirement income, a person would need to know the sum of defined benefit plan withholding/contributions during working years. Then a formula is applied based on life expectancy tables to determine taxable and non-taxable portions of retirement income. If a person lives fewer or more years than the life expectancy, additional calculations are required. Perhaps the states retirement system is equipped to handle this additional recordkeeping burden, but it is indeed increased complexity. Other issues arise as well, such as current retirees who are changed from one system to another.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. I teach income tax courses at Auburn University. The opinions expressed in this letter are my own.

Sincerely,
Kim Key
Auburn University

Downtown Mobile's historic Battle House nabs global recognition as a 'Top 500' hotel for 2015

Mobile's own Battle House Renaissance Hotel & Spa has been named one of the "Top 500 Hotels in the World" for 2015 by Travel + Leisure magazine.

Margo Gilbert, general manager of the North Royal Street gem in downtown Mobile, called the accolade an honor for "the Battle House, the local area and the entire state of Alabama."

"That says a great deal about our staff, our hotel, our ownership and our commitment to our guests. To have one of the top hotels in the world be located in the middle of downtown Mobile speaks volumes to the exciting transformation the city is going through," Gilbert said. "The more I study the results, the more humbling this honor is."

Indeed, the Battle House's overall score of 88.17 ranked higher than:

- 🌿 Beverly Wilshire
- 🌿 Ritz-Carlton Fort Lauderdale
- 🌿 Disney's Polynesian Resort
- 🌿 JW Marriott Marquis Miami
- 🌿 InterContinental Buckhead Atlanta
- 🌿 Ritz-Carlton Lodge Reynolds Plantation
- 🌿 Ko'a Kea Hotel & Resort in Hawaii
- 🌿 Four Seasons St. Louis
- 🌿 ARIA in Las Vegas
- 🌿 Ritz-Carlton New York Battery Park
- 🌿 St. Regis Houston
- 🌿 Four Seasons Resort Dallas

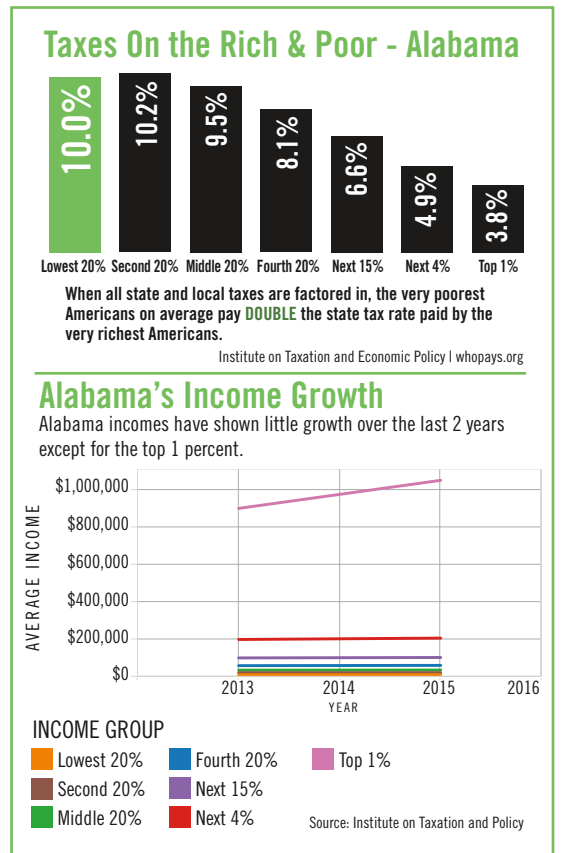
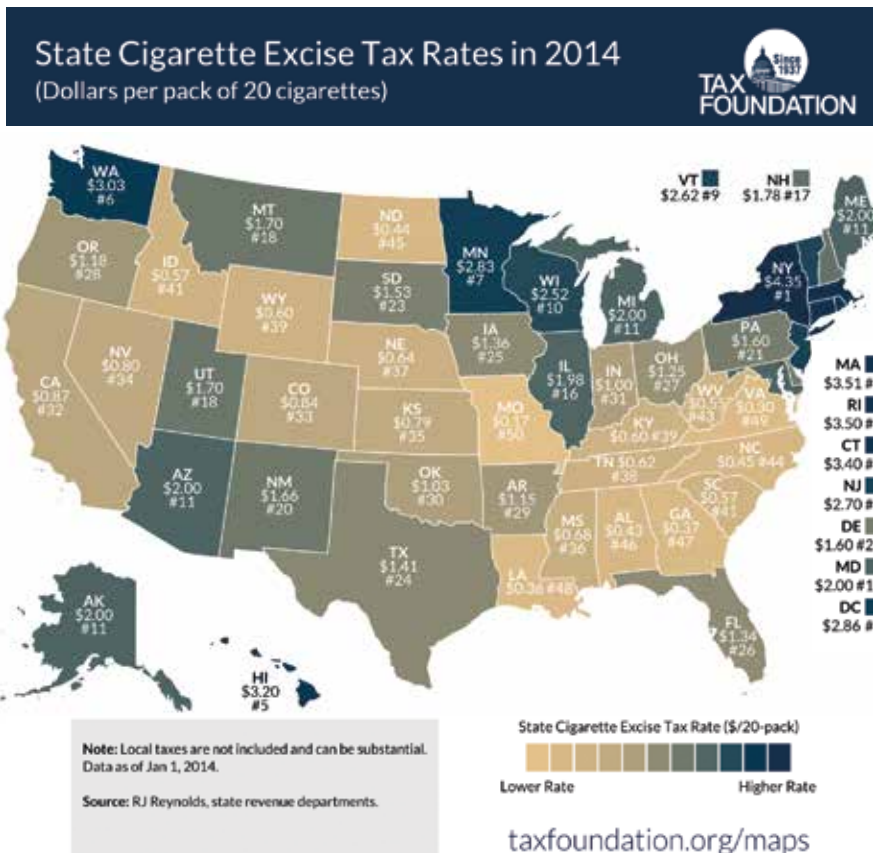
In its nod, the internationally-renowned travel publication calls the Battle House a "beaux-arts landmark in the city's historic downtown," blending "old-world grandeur with modern amenities, including a new 10,000-square-foot spa."

The magazine also encourages patrons to "order the seared salmon salad under the Trellis Room's restored stained-glass cathedral ceiling" as its insider tip.

The Mobile landmark, which first opened its doors in 1852, was last named to the Travel + Leisure list in 2009, following a massive renovation. It is the only Alabama hotel on the 2015 list. ●



Battle House Renaissance Hotel & Spa



Start Planning Your Spring Getaways at RSA's Outstanding Hotels, Spas, and RTJ Golf

RETIREMENT SYSTEMS OF ALABAMA
201 SOUTH UNION STREET
P.O. BOX 302150
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36130-2150

PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MONTGOMERY, AL
PERMIT NO. 402



Member Hotel
Discounts Webpage

ENJOY YOUR SPRING
A Special Deal
FOR RSA MEMBERS

**The Battle House,
A Renaissance Hotel—Mobile—\$109**
• March 1, 8, 10-11, 15-18, 22-24, 29-31
• April 1-9, 12-30 • May 3-17, 21-31

The Renaissance Riverview Plaza—Mobile—\$99
• March 1-4, 6, 10, 15-18, 22-24, 29-31
• April 1-14, 19-23, 27-30 • May 3, 7-9, 15-17, 21-31

Marriott Grand—\$109 plus a 15% resort fee
• March 1-5, 15-19 • April 1-2, 19-20, 26-30
• May 3-7, 10-14, 17, 21, 25-27, 31

Marriott Grand—RSA Golf Package—\$179
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
• March 1-5, 15-19 • April 1-2, 19-20, 26-30
• May 3-7, 10-14, 17, 21, 25-27, 31

**Marriott Shoals—Florence—\$99;
Breakfast Package \$124**
• March 1-26, 29-30
• April 4-5, 9-11, 13-15, 22-23, 26-27
• May 2-13, 17-26, 29-31

Renaissance Ross Bridge—Hoover—\$109
• March 1-4, 6-8, 11-16, 19, 26-31
• April 1-7, 10-16, 19-20, 23, 26-27, 29
• May 2-12, 14-17, 20, 24-31

Opelika Marriott—\$99
• March 4-5, 8-9, 15-16, 18-25, 27-31
• April 1-7, 12-14, 19-23, 28-29
• May 3-4, 19-21, 24-31

Prattville Marriott—\$89
• March 1, 9, 13-16, 20-22, 27-31
• April 2-6, 9, 18-19, 21, 26-28, 30
• May 3-4, 9-11, 14, 17-19, 24-25, 27-31

Renaissance Montgomery—\$109
• March 1, 4-5, 9, 18-22, 24, 26-30
• April 3-5, 19-20, 26-30
• May 1, 3-5, 8-10, 12-13, 16-17, 19-28, 30-31
RSA Spa Package—\$189—Promotional code—R2A
• March 4-5, 18-21, 24, 26-28 • April 3-4, 28-30
• May 1, 5, 8-9, 12-13, 16, 19-23, 26-28, 30

Specific room requests may require additional charge.
Rates available the 1st of the month and
are not applicable to groups.

800-228-9290 Ask for RSA rate. **Promotional
Code: R2A** on www.rsa-al.gov
Book Online and Save RSA \$4.

ERS Board Seeks Candidates for Upcoming Election

Candidates are being sought for the **Active State Position No. 2**, **Active Local Position No. 2**, and **Retired State Position** of the ERS Board of Control. The active positions are four-year terms beginning October 1, 2015, and are held by David Bollie and Ben Powell, respectively. The Retired State position is a three-year term beginning October 1, 2015, currently held by Jimmy Rowell. The election will take place this May.

The nominee for the Active State Position No. 2, must be an active vested member of the ERS by virtue of employment with a state agency. The nominee for Active Local Position No. 2, must be an active member of the ERS by virtue of employment with a local agency (city, county, town, public or quasi-public agency). The nominee for the Retired State position must be a retired state employee currently on the ERS retirement payroll.

Nomination packets are available at www.rsa-al.gov or by contacting the Election Coordinator at 334.517.7192 or 877.517.0020. The completed packet must be returned to the ERS office by 4:00 p.m., April 15, 2015. ●

TRS Runoff Election Results

In the Runoff Election for the TRS Board of Control, congratulations go to Dr. Donald Large Jr. who has been elected to the Higher Education Position, No. 2, and will begin a three-year term on July 1, 2015. ●



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Legislative Counsel
Neah L. Mitchell

Member Services
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PEEHIP
Donna M. Joyner

RSA-1
Rhonda H. Peters

Teachers' Retirement
Christopher P. Townes

The Retirement Systems of Alabama
201 South Union Street
P.O. Box 302150
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Phone: 334.517.7000
877.517.0020

RSA Website: www.rsa-al.gov