

Growing Alabama

BY DAVID G. BRONNER

Regardless of the current factious political environment, the Gallup poll shows 75% of Americans think immigration is good for our country. This sentiment cuts across partisan lines, with 85% of Democrats and 65% of Republicans viewing immigration as a good thing for the future of America.

America was built on immigration. If one looks at the world today, countries like Italy, Japan, and others either stagnate or slowly die without a growing population. That is why America cannot continue its greatness without legal immigrants.

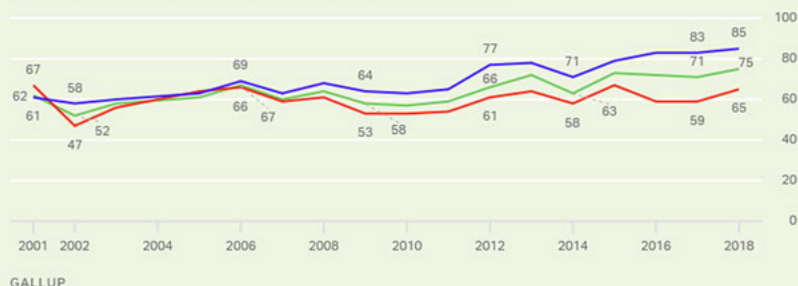
After World War II, Huntsville and Alabama were given a shot at a new life with immigrants from Germany. The growth of the auto industry from Europe and Asia have made all the difference in the lives of thousands of Alabamians. This change and growth are the pillars of our future prosperity. ●

Americans View Immigration as a Good Thing

On the whole, do you think immigration is a good thing or a bad thing for this country today?

% Good thing

■ All adults ■ Republicans/Republican leaners ■ Democrats/Democratic leaners



Alabama Success Stories

Alabama Black Belt Adventures Celebrates Long, Successful Relationship with Raycom Media

SOURCE: PAM SWANNER, DIRECTOR ALBBAA

For almost a decade, the Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association (ALBBAA) has worked to share the good news about outdoor tourism – the most profitable and attractive industry in a historically economically challenged region of our state. ALBBAA was formed in 2009 to promote outdoor recreation like hunting and fishing, as well as its rich history and many culinary experiences. The mission: to bring tourists into the Black Belt from all over the country – and world – to visit, spend money, and enjoy the many opportunities this region has to offer. A rising tide lifts all ships. Our

constant partner in this effort has been Raycom Media under the leadership of Dr. David G. Bronner. Raycom has provided more than \$8 million in advertising through its network of television stations in 65 markets and more than 100 CNHI newspapers across the nation.

Thanks to television advertisements aired on stations in 20 states – plus display ads in many local newspapers – Alabama's Black Belt businesses have received thousands of inquiries about hunting, fishing, and other outdoor adventure services. That interest piqued by Raycom and CNHI has paid off in tourism dollars.

According to the Outdoor Industry Association's 2017 report, outdoor recreation accounted for 14 billion in consumer spending in Alabama. Of that, at least \$4.87 billion was spent in Black Belt counties. Our state reaped the benefits of outdoor recreation spending in the collection of \$857 million in state and local tax revenue. Outdoor recreation generates 135,000 direct jobs in Alabama and \$3.9 billion in wages and salaries.

Alabama's Black Belt region, as defined by ALBBAA, is made up of 23 counties that span the south-central section of

the state from Mississippi to Georgia. The region makes up parts of four of Alabama's seven congressional districts. As of the 2010 census, just over 500,000 residents – of a total Alabama population of 4.78 million – live in the Black Belt. The Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association promotes these counties as part of the Black Belt: Barbour, Bullock, Butler, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Crenshaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lee, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Monroe, Montgomery, Perry, Pickens, Pike, Russell, Sumter, Tuscaloosa, and Wilcox.

For decades, Alabama's Black Belt has lagged economically because of many factors, including a small population base and often struggling public school systems. For the most part, Black Belt counties have not attracted many large industries or they have abandoned the region during times of national economic distress. The partnership between ALBBAA and Raycom has been successful, in part, because the leaders of both organizations recognized the promise of outdoor tourism for boosting the economy of the Black Belt. Chilly winter mornings with bird dogs flushing quail and warm spring days on a riverbank in the Black Belt inspired Thomas A. Harris to start the Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association. With few traditional industries in the area,

Harris decided promoting outdoor adventures in his home region could "be" an industry. Discussions with Dr. Bronner, whose expertise with recreational tourism was already well known because of the wildly successful Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail spanning the state, resulted in support from Raycom and CNHI.

The Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association uses a multifaceted approach to draw tourists to the area. The organization's website (alabamablackbeltadventures.org) offers a one-stop source for hunters, anglers, and other outdoor adventure-seekers looking for places to fulfill their dreams of a weekend in a deer stand with big bucks on the prowl or a week working to draw a big gobbler into range. We also visit outdoor trade shows throughout the country promoting the region and making friends from Houston to the Carolinas and all points in between, including the recent Buckmasters Expo in Montgomery.

Our website currently promotes 54 lodges and outfitters in the Black Belt. The site also provides information and links to public land available for hunting and fishing. Golfers can find information on the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail courses in the Black Belt. Civic-minded vacationers can plan their tour of historic Civil Rights sites and find fun activities to do

outdoors all across the state.

We also share the Black Belt's stories with professional outdoor writers, travel bloggers, and television producers on a national level who visit to experience the great hunting, fishing, and heritage sites for themselves. Alabama writers and producers are also involved in telling the story. We have worked with journalists from outlets all over the state and country publishing items that are sure to spark interest in visiting the Black Belt.

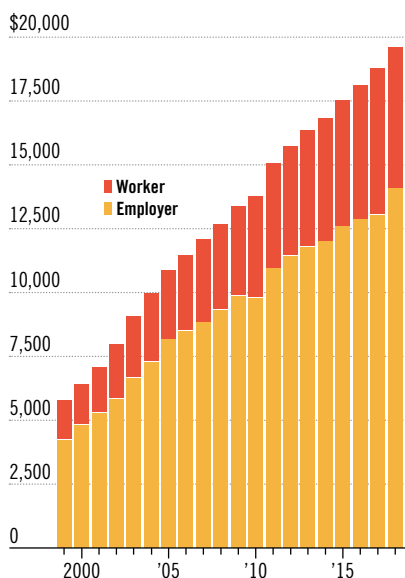
In 2019, the Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association celebrates its 10th anniversary. Thanks to the advice and cooperation of many friends, such as Dr. Bronner, our association has made sure that this region of our state is not a secret unknown to the thousands of outdoorsmen and women who now enjoy spending their time – and money – in the Black Belt. The Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association has succeeded in giving a shot in the arm to our economy.

This is the second in 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. ●

Health Insurance Costs

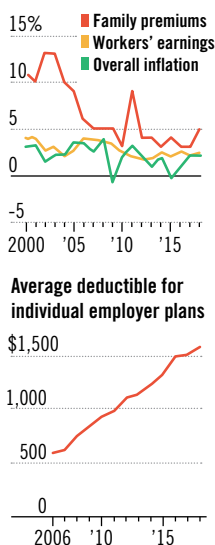
The rising cost of employer-provided health coverage outpaced inflation, even though workers are paying more out of their pockets for care through deductibles.

Average annual worker and employer contributions to premiums for family health coverage



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation

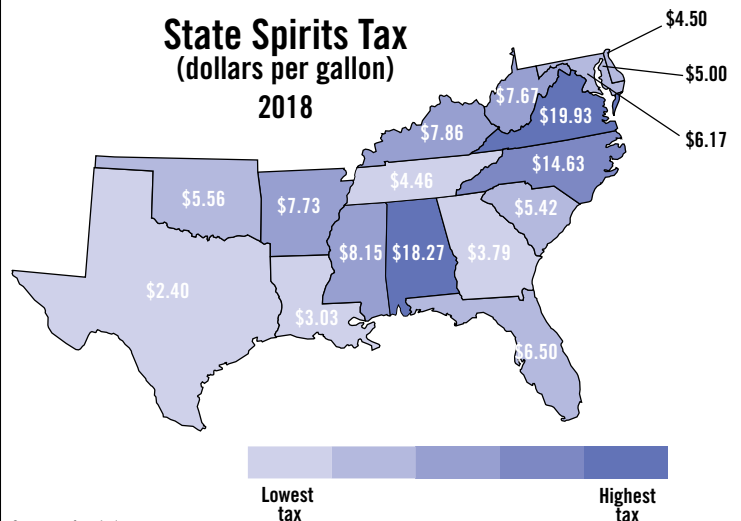
Percentage change from previous year



Note: Only includes plans with deductibles

Southern Spirits

State Spirits Tax (dollars per gallon) 2018



Source: taxfoundation.org



TRS Chair Luke Hallmark gives the Oath of Office to Dickie Brown, Charlene McCoy, Kelly Butler, Russell Twilley, and Kellie Shomaker.



ERS Vice Chair Jackie Graham gives the Oath of Office to Acting Director of Finance Kelly Butler.

2018 ERS Board Special Election Results

The ERS Election Committee met on July 19 and certified the election results. Congratulations to David J. Harer on his election to the Active Local Employee Position No. 1. Mr. Harer began his four-year term on October 1, 2018. ●

TRS/PEEHIP Board of Control Election

Five positions on the TRS/PEEHIP Board of Control are currently up for election: Teacher Position No. 2, Support Personnel Position No. 1, Postsecondary Position, Higher Education Position No. 1, and Retired Position No. 1. These positions are currently held by Ricky Whaley, Susan Lockridge, Susan Williams Brown, Joseph Van Matre, and Peggy Mobley, respectfully. Read all the candidates' bios on the RSA website at www.rsa-al.gov.

Members will receive ballots after **October 15, 2018**. To be counted, ballots must be returned to Election-America, by **4:00 p.m., November 21, 2018**. Members will be able to vote by returning the ballot in a prepaid postcard or by voting online or by telephone. Instructions will be included with the ballot.

Elected members to the TRS/PEEHIP Board will only be elected by members from the same category of the retirement system. To be eligible to vote for the:

- **Teacher Position No. 2**, you must be an active member currently contributing to the TRS who actively instructs students in grades K-12.
- **Postsecondary Position**, you must be an active member currently contributing to the TRS and working

in an institution of postsecondary education that is part of the Alabama Community College System, for the Department of Postsecondary Education, or for a designated skills or training center.

- **Higher Education Position No. 1**, you must be an active member currently contributing to the TRS and working in a public four-year institution of higher education or for the Commission on Higher Education.
- **Retired Position No. 1**, you must be a former active member of the TRS and on the TRS retirement payroll.
- **Support Personnel Position No. 1**, you must be an active member currently contributing to the TRS and working as a maid, custodian, bus driver, lunchroom worker, cafeteria worker, secretary, clerk, clerical assistant, maintenance worker, or other non-certificated employee working an average of 20-hours-a-week. All active members who are not otherwise eligible to vote for another position (in this or any other election) shall be eligible to vote for the Support Personnel Position.

By submitting your vote, you are confirming that you are eligible to vote for

the position based upon your classification. If your classification is incorrect, please contact the Election Coordinator at 334.517.7192 or 877.517.0020. ●

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

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

RETIREMENT SYSTEMS OF ALABAMA
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Member Hotel
Discounts Webpage

ENJOY YOUR FALL/WINTER A Special Deal FOR RSA MEMBERS

The Battle House,

A Renaissance Hotel—Mobile—\$119

- November 4-7, 11-29 • December 4-13, 16-17, 23-30
- January 5-9, 11-19, 27-31

The Renaissance Riverview Plaza—Mobile—\$109

- November 4-6, 11-13, 20-29 • December 7-17, 23-30
- January 5-10, 13-18, 27-29

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

- November 4-5, 9-12, 18-20, 25-30
- December 1-13, 16-20 • January 1-13, 19-24, 27-31

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

- November 4-5, 9-12, 18-20, 25-30
- December 1-13, 16-20 • January 1-13, 19-24, 27-31

Marriott Shoals—Florence—\$109

- November 16-26 • December 2, 9, 16-27
- January 1-6, 13, 20-21, 27

Renaissance Ross Bridge—Hoover—\$119

- November 2-5, 7-8, 11-22, 25-30
- December 1-31 • January 1-21, 24-31

Opelika Marriott—\$109

- November 1, 4-8, 11-15, 18-30
- December 5-13, 16-31
- January 1, 6-14, 20-21, 27, 31

Prattville Marriott—\$89

- November 4, 9-12, 18-25
- December 2-3, 5, 8-9, 12, 15-31
- January 1-6, 10, 13, 17, 20-21, 27, 31

Renaissance Montgomery—\$119

- November 3, 18-19, 24-25
- December 16-18, 23-27 • January 1-6, 20-21

RSA Spa Package—\$199—Promotional code—R2A

- November 3, 24 • December 18, 26-27
- January 2-5

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

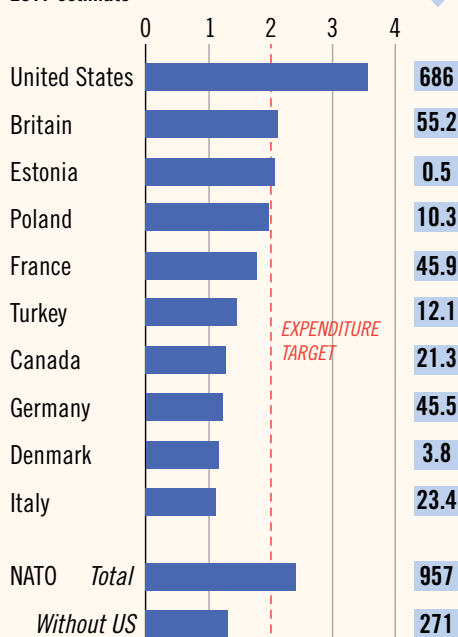
800-228-9290 Ask for RSA rate. **Promotional
Code: R2A** on www.rsa-al.gov
Book Online and Save RSA \$4.

NATO

Nato is beginning to re-arm. Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea is leading NATO to increase defense spending. In 2014, only three NATO countries met the defense spending 2% of GDP target. Now, eight members are on-track to meet the benchmark. By 2024, most NATO members are expected to reach the 2% goal. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg anticipates that European allies and Canada will spend an incremental \$266 billion on defense through 2024. ●

Pay or Pray

Defense spending, % of GDP
2017 estimate



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