



THE VOICE OF ALABAMA

ALABAMA CITIZENS FOR
CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

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Thursday hearings set for six proposed revisions

By Nancy Ekberg
Communications Chair
ACCR Inc.

This Thursday, January 30, the Senate Constitution, Campaign Finance, Ethics and Elections Committee, chaired by Sen. Bryan Taylor, will consider six of the revisions recommended by the Constitution Revision Commission. The Committee includes Sens. Phil Williams, Billy Beasley, Dick Brewbaker, Paul Bussman, Tammy Irons, Shadrack McGill, Arthur Orr and Trip Pittman. The meeting will be held in **room 316** of the **State House** at **8:30 a.m.** All bills will be public hearings.

If you can attend, please do! Many parts of these bills are good and deserve our support. Whether or not you can attend, you may wish to contact the members of the CE committee (contact info next page) and let them know what you think about the legislation.

We had hoped that the Legislative Department bill would include Home Rule, but so far it does not. That may be a fight for another day. Since this is an election year, we expect that the legislators will not deal with anything controversial.

Here are the bills:

SB258. Legislative department, constitutional provisions, Article IV Constitution of Alabama of 1901, repealed certain pro-

visions of Article X moved to Articles XVII and XVIII, new Article IV added. This is sponsored by Senator Cam Ward.

SB259. Executive Department, Article V and amendments related thereto of the Constitution of Alabama of 1901, technical non-substantive changes and substantive changes, repeal and readopt Article V. This is sponsored by Senator Bryan Taylor.

SB261. Separation of powers, Article III and Amendment 582 of the Constitution of Alabama of 1901, combined into one section in modernized language but no substantive change, Article III and Amendment 582 repealed and Article III added. This is sponsored by Senator Jerry Fielding.

SB274. Local constitutional amendments, adoption procedure by Legislature revised, three negative votes in Senate and nine in House to require local amendment to be voted on statewide, Amendments 425 and 555, Constitution of Alabama of 1901, repealed, constitutional amendment. This is sponsored by Senators Linda Coleman, Vivian Figures, Billy Beasley, Priscilla Dunn and Bobby Singleton.

SB276. Article X, Homestead exemptions, repealed and readopted as a new

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Article X to the Constitution of Alabama of 1901, constitutional amendment. This is sponsored by Senators Bryan Taylor and Pro Tem Del Marsh.

SB253. Impeachment, Article 7, Constitution of Alabama of 1901, repealed and readopted, constitutional amendment. This is sponsored by Pro Tem Del Marsh.

Complete information on each bill can be found by visiting www.legislature.state.al.us. Click onto *Legislation, Code and Constitution* and you will have what is known as ALISON, Alabama Information Services Online. Click on *BILLS* and enter the name of the bill and then highlight it and click on *VIEW*. Information about the Commission's entire work is available at www.ali.state.al.us.

CE committee contact info

At publication time, reform community analysis continued on the six senate bills. ACCR reps will attend the Thursday meeting. Meanwhile, should you read the bills and wish to express an opinion, here is contact information for the Senate CE Committee members:

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HAMMERED!

Federal appeals court rules Alabama property tax system is not discriminatory, rejects lawsuit filed by poor schoolchildren

By Brian Lawson
al.com

January 10, 2014

HUNTSVILLE, Alabama -- The 11th Circuit Court of Appeals has found that Alabama's property tax system - which taxes timber and agriculture land well below market value - was not based on a racially discriminatory intent.

The ruling came in a long-running lawsuit brought by a group of Alabama schoolchildren and their parents that argued the state's tax system was established based on a desire to limit funding for integrated public schools did not provide enough money for public education.

The case known as *Lynch vs. Alabama* featured a four-week trial in Huntsville in the spring of 2011. The



lawsuit was filed on behalf of a group of schoolchildren and their families in Lawrence and Sumter counties.

The trial featured 33 witnesses and more than 1,000 exhibits, with three veteran civil rights lawyers representing poor families in Lawrence and Sumter counties [taking] on the State of Alabama's team, led by a former state Supreme Court chief justice, Drayton Nabers.

The appeals court ruling echoed the ruling in October 2011 by U.S. District Judge Lynwood Smith, who wrote an 854-page opinion which found that, although Alabama has a troubling history of racial discrimination, the current property tax system was passed in the 1970s due to concerns about potentially large spikes in property taxes, not desegregation.

The 11th Circuit panel, which heard the plaintiffs' appeal of Smith's decision in December 2012, said

Smith was correct in his analysis of whether the laws were enacted with racial intent.

Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange hailed the opinion.

"Today's ruling in *Lynch v. Alabama* again confirms the State's consistent position that Alabama's property tax structure does not violate the United States Constitution, and equally as important, that the citizens of Alabama have a right to structure their own tax system," Strange said. "The Office of Attorney General remains

committed to defending and vindicating this important right whenever necessary."

The appeals court said it also shared Smith's concerns Alabama's history and its effect on schools.

"In deciding this difficult appeal, we are cognizant of Alabama's deep and troubled history of racial discrimination, and given the evidence at trial,



we share in the district court's concern regarding Alabama's public education system.

"Courts, however, are not always able to provide relief, no matter how noble the cause."

The appeals court ruled that the request to overturn the property tax system's millage caps would not necessarily raise new revenue since Lawrence and Sumter county voters have rejected efforts to increase millage rates for school funding.

The court did find that elimination of Alabama's so-called current-use system that taxes timberland and agricultural property at rates well below market value would increase tax revenue. But the court found that because the law was enacted for financial reasons, not discrimination, the lawsuit did not meet the burden necessary to have the law repealed.

The plaintiffs are represented by attorneys James Blacksher, Larry Menefee and Edward Still.

Blacksher was disappointed with the ruling but said the courts have consistently found Alabama's tax laws are rooted in the racist 1901 Alabama Constitution.

"We lost. The court of appeals essentially ruled against all of the plaintiffs' claims, the millage caps and the lid (on taxes) bills," Blacksher said. "But it also is the fourth court to agree, all these provisions are steeped in historical racial discrimination and are products of Alabama's racial history. The courts

are just saying there's nothing we can do about for various technical and legal reasons.

"So the question then is, who can do something about it? The people of Alabama are going to have to demand a fix, but that will be difficult. The constitution revision committee's mandate from the legislature explicitly excluded that committee's ability to consider tax provisions."



AFTER THE COMMISSION . . .

Reform efforts do little to change Alabama constitution

By Tim Lockette
The Anniston Star

December 1, 2013

MONTGOMERY — When Alabama's Constitutional Revision Commission ended its last meeting in September, there were uncomfortable smiles all around.

Since 2011, a panel of political all-stars — including a former governor, the state's first openly gay lawmaker and a heroine of the civil rights movement — had pored over every detail of the state's 376,000-word constitution, with a plan to rewrite it.

But when the panel adjourned two years later, in a moot court room at the Cumberland School of Law, not much had changed.

The commission had proposed changes that would take segregationist passages out of the Constitution, but the new wording was similar to an amendment voters had already rejected. There was no clear proposal to give Alabama's counties control over their own affairs. And without that local control, known as home rule, the flood of proposed amendments to the 1901 constitution seemed unlikely to end.

"On the surface, home rule seems non-controversial," former Gov. Albert Brewer, who chaired the commission, said at the time. "But when you get deeper, you see that there's a lot of opposition."

But two months later, some advocates of constitutional change are say-

ing there's more to the commission's work than meets the eye. Small tweaks to the document — if they pass muster with the Legislature and the voters — could permanently change the way Alabama's government runs.

"I think in 10 years, we'll be able to look back and say, OK, we changed the process," said Sonny Brasfield, director of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama, which advocated home rule.

Failed reforms

Voters see the cracks in the state's constitution every couple of years — when they go to the ballot box and confront a long list of amendments, sometimes a dozen in a single election.

The Alabama Constitution of 1901 doesn't grant much power to the state's 67 counties. As a result, most major changes to county-level policy have to go through the state Legislature, either as law or as amendments.

Historian Wayne Flynt, an advocate of constitutional change, said the constitution's framers wanted it that way.

"It's because the coalition that ran Alabama from the end of Reconstruction consisted of Big Mules and planters," said Flynt, an emeritus professor of history at Auburn University. "The most fundamental thing they had in common was social control of the workforce."

The all-white constitutional conven-

tion made no secret of its desire to deny black Alabamians the vote. But the Big Mules — wealthy industrialists of the day — also wanted to shut down the late-1890s Populist movement, which threatened to politically unite poor people, black and white, Flynt said. The framers were determined not to grant any power to northern Alabama counties where that movement was strong, Flynt said.

"The final nail in the coffin was denying home rule," he said.

More than a century later, Alabamians are still amending the constitution for matters as processing of absentee ballots in Calhoun County, or the creation of a historic district in an unincorporated part of Baldwin County. In 2013, the Legislature passed five laws to allow individual counties to give badges to retiring police officers, according to figures from the Association of County Commissions. With nearly 900 amendments, Alabama's constitution is now as thick, and some would say as obsolete, as an urban phone book.

The state's history is strewn with attempts to reform the document. Gov. Thomas Kilby of Anniston called for a rewrite back in the 1920s. More than 20 years later, Gov. Jim Folsom called the Legislature into special session in hopes lawmakers would call a constitutional convention, an effort that failed. There were reform efforts in the 1970s, the 1980s and at the start of the 21st century. Throughout that time, only one piece of the document, the judicial article, got rewritten.

The main roadblock, Flynt said, was the fact that all those proposals had

Commission final report on-line

To view the full final report by the Alabama Constitutional Revision Commission, see the following link:

<http://www.ali.state.al.us/documents/FinalCRCReport.pdf>

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...THINK BIG, ALABAMA

Small gain band-aids not enough to win big game

By Bob Jones
ACCR Foundation Chair

Lenora Pate
ACCR Inc. Chair

In Alabama we take our football very seriously. We think big and talk big about it. Unbelievably, we don't have the No. 1 college team this year, and the reason is fascinating; a talented quarterback from Hueytown High playing for an underappreciated team from Tallahassee beats an unexpected miracle team from Auburn who unbelievably beat the favored No. 1 team from Tuscaloosa! Talk about football in your own back yard! We fans are still shaking our heads at all this, talking loftily about next year, and making plans.

Our football back yard is remarkably rich. Stop and think back to one critical back yard moment, a transformative night in Tuscaloosa in September, 1970. Football and race peacefully collided in full view. As one author proclaimed, when USC defeated Alabama that night, the play on the field emancipated the whole South. It was a big, big idea to invite USC to play Alabama in Tuscaloosa. It was big transformative thinking.

Another big idea was triggered that night. It resided in the collective minds of people in high places, people who play in the constitutional back yard. They already knew that our rock-solid 1901 state constitution moral foundation was crumbling; now, after that game, that

foundation was no longer publicly defensible. Those people knew that the central idea embedded in our 1901 document was born out a racial supremacy mindset. They saw that idea run headlong into a compelling reality on that football field in September 1970. Football had trumped race. A key race-based mindset had begun to change.

The next big thought is harder to pinpoint on the calendar. Years before and surely days after that game, someone in authority connected the dots and realized something needed to be done to publicly address our state constitution's moral flaw, racism. With changing attitudes about football and race, our constitution was now injured if not fatally flawed, and they must have wondered, could it be fixed? Within a few years there was an attempt to rewrite the entire document but without a convention as required by law; only one Article, Judiciary, was processed and approved. The 1901 legacy remained in place.

Granted, its legal framework survives, but its 1901 moral foundation is gone – it exploded right in front of our eyes in Tuscaloosa that warm September night, an explosion that echoed again in another football game on national TV in January, 2014, from Pasadena, when that quarterback from Hueytown High threw that pass.

Change comes slowly in our constitutional back yard; it isn't entertainment and it isn't played on TV.

Constitutional Commissions, Resolutions, and Studies have come and gone. So, most things constitutional are left to languish for the coming generations. We all have inherited that shared legacy of unfinished constitutional business.

We are in the midst of some quiet change in our constitutional back yard. A half-dozen or so little changes to some of 1901's Articles are underway. Indications are that no spectacular passes or kick returns are looming; these look to be, at best, legal band-aids, with a promise of more to come. We have to wait a few more months to find out the game score. Ironically, some people in the constitutional back yard are still arguing over the removal of racist language from our state constitution!

More legal band-aids on 1901 simply cannot win the big game. Big change must inevitably come. If you want to know how to embrace big change, look to football for a hint. To paraphrase a famous football coach or two, "Play to win the game, or don't play."

Think big, Alabama.

Open Secret on-line

Open Secret, the award-winning video short depicting transcript proceedings from the 1901 constitutional convention, is now on-line:

<http://vimeo.com/79564204>



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to go through the Legislature.

"Every legislator knows that anything of substance that affects a county goes through him," Flynt said. Why, Flynt asks, would they give up that power?

New effort

In 2011, things looked like they might be different. A new political party was in power in Montgomery for the first time in more than a century. Organizations as diverse as the anti-poverty group Alabama Appleseed and the conservative Alabama Policy Institute had endorsed some form of home rule — though there was still plenty of debate on what that home rule should look like.

The organization with perhaps the biggest direct stake — the Association of County Commissions — asked for a relatively limited form of local control. Under their proposal, counties would be able to run most of their own affairs while the Legislature isn't in session, but their actions would be subject to veto by lawmakers.

The only seeming skeptic at the table was the Alabama Farmers Federation, or ALFA. Its members — rural landowners — were among the biggest opponents of giving county governments more power. Still, ALFA says it was just watching the proceedings.

A modest proposal

The commission first discussed home rule early 2013, but commissioners put off a vote on the issue for months while addressing other parts of the Constitution. When they came back around to the home rule issue in September, hopes for local control

had shrunk considerably.

Commission members didn't vote on a specific home-rule proposal, instead voting to send a message to the Legislature urging them to give "particular, specific powers" to counties to manage their own offices. But those powers shouldn't include land regulation, salaries of elected officials, zoning, eminent domain or taxes.

Nancy Ekberg, vice chairwoman of Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform, said the proposal was clearly a compromise between ALFA and the Association of County Commissions. Brasfield, of ACCA, wouldn't comment on whether ALFA played a role. ALFA maintains that, then and now, it was just watching to see what happens.

"We're just monitoring the legislation as it goes forth," said Mary Johnson, a spokeswoman for ALFA.

Attempts to reach former Gov. Albert Brewer, who headed the commission, for comment last month were unsuccessful.

Flynt said the commission's home-rule proposal, which depends on the Legislature to draft its own wording on local control, is likely to change nothing.

"It's like asking a prostitute to write a purity pledge for teenagers," he said.

That's not how ACCA's Brasfield sees it. He said the group always knew home rule would be hard to sell, politically. He claims the counties came away with some changes that, if passed, would have a noticeable effect on how the state functions.

The light of day

At present, local laws have to be advertised in newspapers before they're passed — and they have to be passed exactly as advertised, without a single change. If lawmakers can't agree on the law as advertised,

they usually have to wait a year and reintroduce the bill in a new session.

The result, Brasfield said, is that lawmakers and local officials work out the wording of bills in relative secrecy and try to pass them through the Legislature as quietly as they can.

"The Legislature passes these bills without knowing what the content is," he said.

The commission proposed a change to the advertising rule, which would give lawmakers the chance to tweak the wording of a local bill after it's advertised. Brasfield said that would allow real debate on those bills, because legislators would be able to negotiate the particulars without killing the entire bill.

"We hope this will expose this process to the light of day," he said.

Another significant tweak, Brasfield said, is the commission's proposal to make it harder to put a local measure on a statewide ballot.

At present, if the Legislature unanimously votes for an amendment affecting a single county — say, a tax increase to pay for schools — that amendment goes to voters in that county for approval. But if a single lawmaker objects, the matter will go on the ballot for a statewide vote.

Under the commission's proposal, it would take 10 House members or three senators to bump an amendment to a statewide vote.

It sounds like a small change, but Brasfield believes Alabamians would see less-crowded ballots shortly after the change passes.

If it passes, that is.

'We're in this system'

Modest as the commission's proposed changes are, they're nothing if they don't get through the House and Senate — and then get the approval of the voters as an amendment.

So far, voters have proven willing



to go along with constitutional reform as long as it doesn't change anything substantial. The commission's first two amendments — rewrites to rules on banking and corporations — passed muster with voters in 2012. But those amendments only cleaned up antiquated wording about railroads and telegraphs.

At the same time, voters for a second time rejected an amendment that would have removed wording that requires the state to set up separate "white" and "colored" schools. Long rejected by federal courts, the racist passages in the constitution were as obsolete as telegraph regulations. But voters couldn't agree about whether to also remove a passage that denies a "right to education." The Constitutional Revision Commission has approved its own version of the amendment, but was unable to sidestep the controversy, approving a proposal that would deny a right to education — the same issue that killed the 2012 amendment.

Ekberg, of the constitutional reform group, said the commission's relatively modest changes to home rule and local laws were still worth campaigning for.

"I have a very positive attitude," she said. "I feel that there are some changes here that are major innovations for the constitution."

Ekberg said she was speaking only for herself — and that many other members of her organization want a full constitutional convention that would truly rewrite the document from scratch.

Flynt doesn't hold out much hope for that. A growing number of business leaders, he said, are beginning to understand that the state's governing document is holding Alabama back economically. But lawmakers, he said, aren't likely to make major changes until the state's sluggish system creates a disaster.

"We're going to be in this system until the economy collapses," he said.

Five Commissioners dissent, stand up for public ed right

As widely reported, the Constitution Revision Commission completed its work last fall. Commissioners proposed revising articles including: Declaration of Rights, Education, Legislature Department, Executive Department, Distribution of Powers, Representation, Impeachments, Miscellaneous. They submitted their proposals for legislative action in the annual session that began January 14.

As reported, chair Gov. Albert Brewer and President Pro Tem Del Marsh (via proxy Ryan Cantrell) were among seven Commissioners voting against an amendment added to the generally approved words proposed by two Education article subcommittees of the Commission; the other five submitted a dissenting opinion to Gov. Brewer asking that it be included in the commission's report. Gov. Brewer chose NOT to include the dissenting opinion as part of the report because it had not been part of the official meetings. Instead, the Alabama Law Institute says the dissenting opinion was provided to each legislator by personal letter accompanying the Commission report. Here are the words of the Dissenting Report:

Alabama Constitution Revision Commission Members

James R. Pratt, III, Carolyn McKinstry, Phillip Brown, Rep. Patricia Todd and Senator Quinton Ross

January 14, 2014

Accompanying the report of the Constitution Revision Commission report you are receiving, is this dissenting report from five of us who disagree with the final version of the Education Article that the Commission approved. We are: Commissioners Jim Pratt, Carolyn McKinstry, Phillip Brown, Rep. Patricia Todd and Senator Quinton Ross.

We, respectfully submit this dissenting report to you, concerning Section 256 of the Education Article. We offer the following rationale for including a dissenting report.

The Education Article subcommittee, chaired by Commissioner Vicki Drummond, recommended the following language for Section 256 of the Education Article to the Constitution Revision Commission:

The Legislature shall establish, organize and maintain a system of public schools throughout the state for the benefit of children thereof.

After lengthy discussion at the next Commission meeting and following several suggestions by various Commissioners concerning qualifying language and a concern that something that needed to be added to address higher education, Governor Brewer, as Chair of the Commission, asked Commissioners to indicate whether they were in agreement that the State of Alabama should provide a system of public education for the children of the state. All Commissioners present indicated their support for that proposition. Hence, the matter of qualifying language was referred to a second committee, chaired by Commissioner Pratt. The second committee included Commissioner Drummond,

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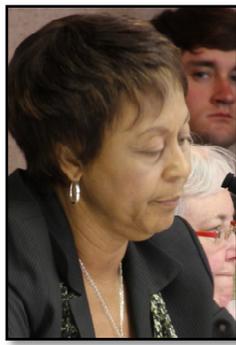


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Phillip Brown



Carolyn McKinstry



James R. Pratt, III



Sen. Quinton Ross



Rep. Patricia Todd

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some of the members of her committee, as well as additional members of the Commission who were asked to join the effort to evaluate the language suggested by the Drummond committee.

After a great deal of consideration and discussion, the Pratt Committee concluded the language offered by the Drummond Committee was the best proposal and recommended it to the Commission. That language was adopted by the Commission, however, an amendment was offered by Commissioner Matt Lembke, which added the language:

Provided that nothing in this section shall create any judicially enforceable right or obligation.

The amendment passed by a very narrow margin.

We, the members of the Commission offering this dissenting opinion, believe the amendment offered by Commissioner Lembke undermines the work of two separate committees who both reached the same conclusion. We also believe the Lembke amendment undermines the basic proposition supported by all members of the Commission, that is, a right to a public education. By foreclosing judicial enforcement of the right, the proposed amendment violates the doctrine of separation of powers. The Commissioner offering the amendment stated it was necessary because of his belief that Legislature could be better trusted to do their constitutional duty providing the public education; however, in our system of democracy, all three branches of government are co-equal and deserve the same presumption that they will abide by the Constitution. Hence, the amendment disrupts the basic checks and balances of our democracy.

Further, there are practical and political considerations. No other state has a constitution in which the education article is restrained from enactment such as the wording in the amendment. No other article in the Alabama Constitution contains wording that restricts the article from being judicially enforced.

Those who have stated publically or privately their belief the amendment is necessary in order for the revision of Section 256 to pass the Legislature, are ignoring that in 2012 voters rejected Amendment 4 which revised the Education Article, because the opposition felt it removed the right to an education. The added amendment would lead to opposition by the same groups that defeated the amendment in 2012. Hence, with the amendment added to the language recommended by two separate Commission committees, it is likely to lead to no change in Section 256 which would leave the State of Alabama as one of the few states not requiring the State to provide a public education to the children of this state and with racist language that will continue to embarrass the state for years to come. Such a result undermines the work of the Commission in proposing a non-discriminatory constitution for this state.

Hence we ask that a dissenting report be included supporting the conclusion reached by the Drummond and Pratt Committees to include the rationale stated herein.

Poll says Alabama wants right to public education

A Capital Survey Research Center poll of likely voters taken in July and August showed overwhelming Alabama support for the right to public education with public funding.

Analyst Gerald Johnson reports that “a significant majority across all demographics”—age, church, gender, income, party, race, region and residence—supports public education as a right. In nearly all categories, respondent support registered above 70 percent. In only two did it fall below 70 percent: age 35-45 (69 percent) and Republicans (67 percent).

Strongest support was among ages 18-24 and 65-plus, non-church attenders, females, incomes under \$25,000, Democrats, blacks/African-Americans, southern counties, and small cities 5,000-25,000.



Fix your state!

By **Bob Davis**
The Anniston Star

December 1, 2013

Ten years ago today, I started working at *The Anniston Star*. I was following the advice of Bailey Thomson, an excellent editorial writer/educator and fellow son of the small west Alabama city of Aliceville.

Bailey, who died 10 years ago this weekend and who is featured on the cover of today's Insight section, made a blunt case when I asked him if I should uproot my family from Texas and move to Alabama. Come home and fix your state, was his counsel.

Fix your state.
Fix your state!
Fix your state?

Ten years on, I better understand what Bailey meant. No one person, whether it's a politician, a tireless advocate or a journalist, can fix a state like Alabama. If any journalist could come close, it was Thomson, whose writings about Alabama's backward system of government were stellar.

Over the last five years of the 20th century, Thomson produced an amazing body of work. His series published in the *Mobile Press-Register* were recognized as some of the best opinion journalism of the time. I'm particularly fond of *Dixie's Broken Heart*, which never fails to inspire while at the same time breaking my own heart at the squandered potential of so many Alabamians.

Nothing better describes the disheartening manner in which this state governs itself than this passage written by Thomson in 1998:

"Alabama has mostly elected men

who lifted their fingers to test the wind rather than thrusting out their chins to lead.

"It's hardly a surprise, then, that many public schools teeter on failure. Children of working families lack decent health care. Colleges resist rational governance. Ugly sprawl devours our countryside. The shameful list goes on. And still we do not learn. Too often, our political choices remain a lesser of two evils, rather than competing visions of greatness."

If the practice of journalism alone were going to fix Alabama, Thomson's passionate writing on the topic should have done the trick.

It's going to take a movement of people, rich and poor, black and white, Republican and Democrat, deciding to work together.

Our common-sense coalition would get to the heart of Thomson's writings about reforming the state: Alabama can do better. And we can do better by picking the best of the available options.

The wiser course, the saner course, the more efficient course is ever before us. It's just that, more times than not, we've taken the wrong path. We are suckers for the politician who excels at pointing fingers. It's THEIR fault. Those fancy-pants people outside of our beloved state, who mock us, ridicule us, laugh at us. A state confident in itself would never fall for these distractions.

While other states, even those where most voters oppose President Obama, are expanding Medicaid to working Americans without health insurance, Alabama is considering a bill to ensure that teachers can say "Merry Christmas."

Yes, taking the right path might ask

more from Alabamians who've grown comfortable.

Yes, it might enrage this constituency or that one.

Let's be clear about the common-sense coalition. We can't — and won't — agree on everything. Better to boil it down to a few things. A good short list would include:

- Improving the quality of our high school graduates and controlling the costs of higher ed. Smart policies will very likely unsettle the Alabama Education Association, local school board members and superintendents. The goal is results.

- Reforming the great obstacle to efficient, 21st-century governing — the state Legislature, which because of the state Constitution has its fingers in the affairs of purely local matters better handled by cities and counties. The 140 legislators are in effect the world's largest county commission, meddling into affairs that should be none of their business.

- Bolstering our court system, making sure we have enough police officers on the streets, facilities to examine evidence, courthouse staff for swift and efficient justice and a prison system that rehabilitates.

- Taking better care of those at the bottom of the economic ladder and smartly breaking the cycle of poverty.

Thomson's wish for "competing visions of greatness" in the 1998 race for governor seems as distant now as it did 15 years ago.

In my 10 years here, *The Star's* editorial page has urged, begged and pleaded with Montgomery to reform our state Constitution. The timid efforts discussed thus far have generally been underwhelming.

When is the time when we fix our state?

Bob Davis is associate publisher/editor of The Anniston Star.



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We welcome submissions of articles, announcements,
opinions, photographs, and suggestions related to Alabama
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Odessa Woolfolk

ACCR, Inc., is a 501(c)4 non-partisan advocacy organization. We grew out of a rally in Tuscaloosa on April 7, 2000, as part of a grassroots movement for civic renewal and constitutional revision.

We are devoted to the idea that people deserve the best government they can design. We want a state constitution that unites, rather than divides, our people. We want to create a civic atmosphere in which politics can function for the benefit of all citizens, rather than for a few powerful interests.

The Constitutional Reform Movement begins with the citizen, who holds the highest office in our democracy.

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