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THE BUZZARD NEWS

BOLD NEWS. LOCAL ROOTS. ALABAMA PROUD.

INAUGURAL EDITION

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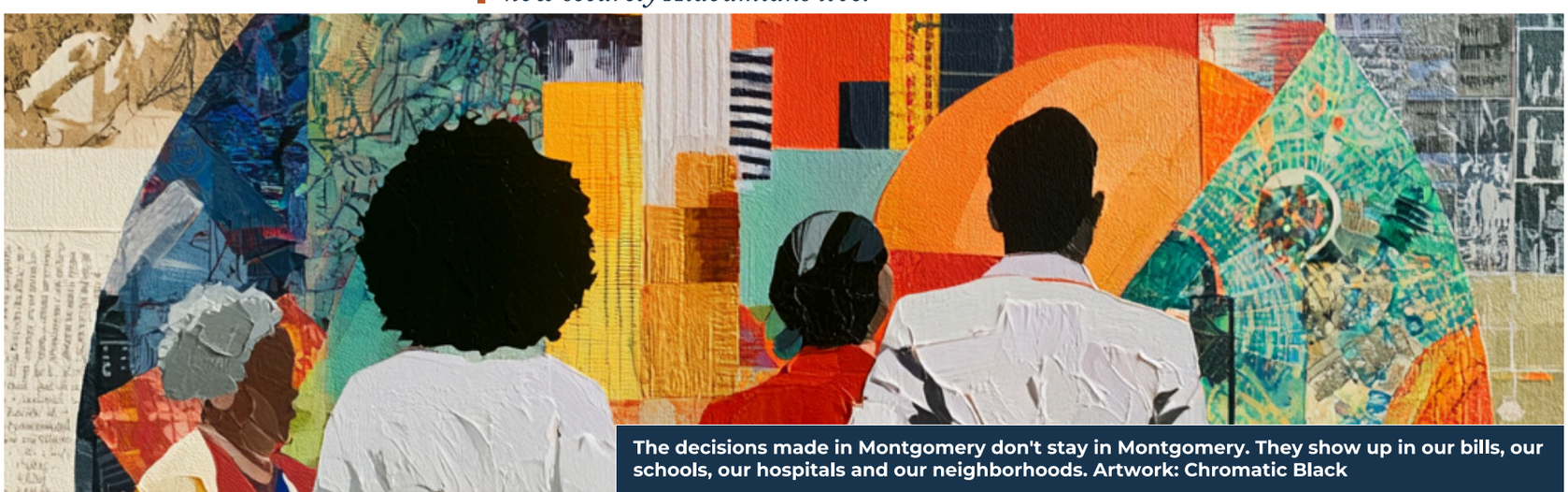
2026 ELECTION

ELECTION DESK · SPECIAL EDITION
TUESDAY · OCTOBER 27, 2026

WHAT ALABAMA'S NEXT GOVERNOR COULD MEAN FOR YOUR LIFE

From hospital care and public schools to electric bills and wages, the decisions made in Montgomery can determine how securely Alabamians live.

BY NATHAN P. HUNTER AND ARI M. ROCKER



The decisions made in Montgomery don't stay in Montgomery. They show up in our bills, our schools, our hospitals and our neighborhoods. Artwork: Chromatic Black

In 2015, Alabama announced plans to close or sharply reduce services at 31 driver's license offices, many in rural counties where residents already traveled considerable distances to conduct essential business.

THE POWER BEHIND THE OFFICE

For someone with reliable transportation, flexible working hours and money for gasoline, the changes might have amounted to an inconvenience. For an hourly worker in the Black Belt, a trip to the nearest available office could mean losing a day's wages to obtain identification needed to drive, open a bank account or vote. The U.S. Department of Transportation investigated. In December 2016, it concluded that Alabama's distribution of driver's license services disproportionately underserved Black residents in the Black Belt, violating federal civil rights requirements. The state agreed to expand access and change its practices. The reductions occurred during the administration of Gov. Robert Bentley, amid budget cuts affecting state agencies. They offered a lesson in how political decisions reach ordinary people.

FULL ANALYSIS CONTINUES
ON PAGE 4 →

ELECTION DAY

NOV 3

Alabama voters will choose a successor to Gov. Kay Ivey.

ELECTION SPECIAL

Republican Tommy Tuberville, Democrat Doug Jones and independent write-in candidate Ronald Burnette Jr. are seeking the office.

GOVERNOR'S RACE · POWER · PUBLIC SERVICES · ACCOUNTABILITY

ABOUT THE BUZZARD · PAGE 02

Independent Black journalism rooted in Alabama and accountable to its communities.

THE PEOPLE. THE PURPOSE. THE PAPER.



POLITICAL CARTOON: CHROMATIC BLACK

"The Buzzard supports public policies that improve people's material conditions, expand democratic participation, protect civil rights, and make institutions accountable to the communities they serve. We oppose changes that concentrate power, weaken public oversight, or offer symbolic political victories without addressing demonstrable public needs."

ABENI BLOODWORTH · EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

WHY THE BUZZARD

The buzzard is the South's cleanup crew.

It circles what others overlook. It finds what is decaying. It clears what has been left unattended before the rot spreads.

The buzzard does not create the decay. It reveals where the decay already exists.

That distinction matters. People often resent the creature that shows them something is wrong more than they resent the conditions that made it wrong.

Journalism knows something about that. The Black press certainly does.

For generations, Black newspapers have documented realities that institutions preferred not to acknowledge. They recorded births, deaths, businesses, movements, elections, violence, celebrations, organizing, injustice, achievement, ordinary life and extraordinary courage.

They kept receipts. They kept memory. They kept watch.

The Buzzard belongs to that tradition.

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ARTICLE 01 · ACCOUNTABILITY

LIAR, LIAR.
THE PAPER TRAIL LIT THE FIRE.

Senator Katie Britt's public support and private requests for tariff relief.

BY PARALEE BROUGHTON



THE PAPER TRAIL

A collage about scrutiny, consequence and what power leaves behind.

ARTWORK: CHROMATIC BLACK

Senator Katie Britt, let me walk this in slowly to you without a walking cane. I do not have to light your pants on fire. Your own paper trail already struck the match.

After the Supreme Court rejected Trump's use of emergency powers for the tariffs, you publicly praised President Trump's tariffs as though they were America's economic salvation.

On February 20, 2026, on X, you said, "What the media won't tell you is that President Trump's tariffs work, and that's why even the Biden Administration left them in place."

According to The Wall Street Journal's reporting, your legislative director had emailed the United States Trade Representative in April 2025, seeking help for "specific Alabama manufacturers" affected by those tariffs.

That is not principled leadership. That is political double-dealing: cheer for the fire while the cameras are rolling, then quietly search for an extinguisher when the flames reach Alabama businesses.

Tariffs are collected from American importers. Companies either absorb those additional costs or pass some of them along through higher prices.

New York Federal Reserve researchers found that nearly 90 percent of the economic burden from the 2025 tariffs fell on American businesses and consumers.

Translation: China does not simply receive the bill. The cost lands at American loading docks, travels through American businesses, and frequently arrives at the checkout counter with American families.

This is why people must learn to distinguish political propaganda from economic truth. Propaganda repeats, "Tariffs work." Truth asks, "For whom, at what cost, and why was your office requesting an escape hatch if they were working so beautifully?"

"Liar, liar, pants on fire" may be a nursery rhyme, but this contradiction is adult-sized: public praise versus private pleas for relief. Simply put, same tariffs but two different stories.

Senator Britt, your pants are not burning because somebody called you a name. They are burning because the facts caught fire.

Sources: The Wall Street Journal, September 14, 2026; New York Fed, "Who Is Paying for the 2025 U.S. Tariffs?", February 12, 2026.

END

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POWER, HEALTH CARE AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

What the governor can do—and where that authority has limits.

BY NATHAN P. HUNTER AND ARI M. ROCKER



ARTWORK: CHROMATIC BLACK

An appropriation determines whether an office stays open. A staffing decision determines how long residents wait for assistance. A policy that appears to apply equally to everyone can impose vastly different burdens on people depending on where they live, what they earn and whether they have transportation. The differences are substantial. But understanding what the election means requires looking beyond campaign promises to the powers the next governor will actually possess.

THE POWER BEHIND THE OFFICE

Alabama's governor does more than propose legislation and sign bills. The governor helps set spending priorities, directs much of the executive branch, appoints agency leaders, can call special legislative sessions and can sign or veto legislation. The office also exercises influence through appointments to boards and commissions whose decisions seldom receive the attention given to elections. The people selected to run Medicaid, corrections, transportation, mental health services, economic development and emergency management determine how state policy works in practice.

Agency leaders' decisions about staffing, communication, processing and oversight can change residents' access to services. A governor cannot act without limits. The Legislature controls appropriations and passes laws. Courts can invalidate unlawful policies. Federal rules constrain many state programs. Independently elected officials exercise authority the governor does not possess.

TWELVE WAYS A GOVERNOR'S DECISIONS CAN SHAPE DAILY LIFE

1. WHETHER AN ILLNESS BECOMES A FINANCIAL CRISIS

For an uninsured Alabama worker, an unfamiliar pain or troubling symptom can present a choice: seek medical attention and risk a bill the household cannot afford, or postpone treatment and hope the condition improves. Alabama remains among the states that have not expanded Medicaid eligibility under the Affordable Care Act. Ivey and other state leaders have resisted expansion, citing concerns about long-term costs. Supporters contend that expansion would extend coverage to uninsured working adults, reduce the uncompensated care burdening hospitals and bring additional federal funding into the state. Jones supports expansion and has made it a central campaign proposal. Tuberville opposes it, arguing that Alabama cannot afford the additional expense. He has instead pointed to federal rural health funding and improvements to existing services.

The relevant measure is whether residents can see a doctor before an illness becomes an emergency—and whether the hospitals they depend on remain open.

2. WHETHER A CHILD'S SCHOOL HAS THE RESOURCES TO SUCCEED

In 2024, Ivey signed the CHOOSE Act, which established education savings accounts that qualifying families can use for approved educational expenses, including private school tuition and home education. For the 2026-27 academic year, the administration reported that more than 34,000 students had received approval for accounts totaling more than $174 million. Supporters argue that the program gives parents greater control over their children's education and offers alternatives to schools that may not

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CARTOON: CHROMATIC BLACK

2026 ELECTION SPECIAL EDITION

SCHOOLS, JOBS AND THE COST OF LIVING

The test is whether public decisions make everyday life more secure.

BY NATHAN P. HUNTER AND ARI M. ROCKER



ARTWORK: CHROMATIC BLACK

meet their needs. But the availability of choices differs considerably across Alabama.

A family in Birmingham may have several schools within commuting distance. In a rural county, there may be only one practical option. Even when public assistance is available, transportation costs, tuition exceeding the state benefit, admissions requirements and access to special education services can determine whether a family can use it. Tuberville supports expanding school choice.

Jones has proposed phasing out the private-school portion of the CHOOSE Act while allowing children already receiving assistance to continue through graduation. He has said he would preserve assistance for homeschooling and redirect other resources toward public education. Changing the program would require action by the Legislature. The dispute concerns more than parental preference. It raises a fundamental question about the state's responsibility to children whose families cannot leave their neighborhood schools.

Will those schools have qualified teachers, effective reading instruction, adequate facilities and services for students with disabilities? For most children, the consequences of education policy appear not in a campaign advertisement but in a classroom, every morning.

3. WHETHER A FULL-TIME JOB PROVIDES ECONOMIC SECURITY

New factories can bring jobs, expand the tax base and create opportunities in communities that have struggled to attract investment. But the announcement of a factory does not establish whether its employees will earn enough to afford housing, child care, transportation and medical expenses.

In 2024, Ivey signed legislation restricting economic incentives for employers that voluntarily recognize unions through signed authorization cards rather than secret-ballot elections. Covered employers can be required to repay incentives if they violate the law. Supporters said the measure protected workers' right to a private vote. Opponents argued that it discouraged voluntary union recognition and strengthened employers' position in organizing disputes. Jones proposes higher wages, a state earned income tax credit, workforce training and reforms intended to remove barriers to employment.

Tuberville emphasizes tax reductions, deregulation and the recruitment of manufacturing jobs. How much will workers earn? Will they receive benefits? Can they organize? What will communities receive in exchange for the public money used to attract employers? Economic development is not necessarily economic security. The distinction matters most to people whose wages leave little room for an unexpected expense.

4. WHETHER TAX RELIEF ACTUALLY LEAVES FAMILIES BETTER OFF

Alabama's state grocery tax, reduced from 4 percent to 3 percent in 2023 and to 2 percent in 2025, remains an issue in the governor's race. Both Jones and Tuberville support eliminating the remaining state tax. Jones also proposes a state earned income tax credit and additional targeted relief. Tuberville advocates broader tax reductions.

Eliminating a tax may make groceries cheaper. But if lost revenue leads to deteriorating schools, roads or public services, the

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CARE, ELECTRICITY AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Essential services matter most when families need them.

BY NATHAN P. HUNTER AND ARI M. ROCKER

financial benefit may be partly offset elsewhere. Both candidates should explain how their proposed reductions would affect state revenue and spending.

5. WHETHER PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE MAKES DAILY LIFE EASIER OR HARDER

A damaged road can mean more than an unpleasant commute. It can mean a blown tire, an expensive repair, a missed shift or a delayed medical appointment. In 2019, Ivey signed the Rebuild Alabama Act, increasing the state's gasoline tax by 10 cents per gallon in stages to support transportation improvements. The policy demonstrated an unavoidable governing trade-off: Infrastructure requires investment, but raising money for that investment creates costs of its own.

The next governor will influence transportation through budget proposals, appointments and negotiations with lawmakers.

Residents should be able to see a connection between what they pay and the improvements they receive—and whether transportation dollars follow public need or political influence.

6. WHETHER PARENTS CAN AFFORD TO WORK

A parent may receive a promising job offer and still be unable to accept it. The shift may begin before child care opens. Reliable care may be unavailable nearby. Or the cost may consume so much of the paycheck that employment offers little financial benefit. In 2024, Ivey signed the bipartisan Working for Alabama package, which included tax credits intended to expand child care and workforce housing.

The governor can influence the supply and affordability of care through budget priorities, agency administration, employer incentives and partnerships with local organizations. But the existence of a tax credit does not guarantee that a parent can find a suitable child care provider within a reasonable distance of home or work. The question is whether the state's policies produce care that families can actually use.

7. WHETHER ELECTRICITY BECOMES MORE AFFORDABLE

Air conditioning during extreme summer heat can be a matter of health. So can refrigeration for food and medication, or power for medical equipment. Alabama's Public Service Commission regulates Alabama Power and other utilities. Its decisions affect what customers pay and the conditions under which utilities operate. In 2026, lawmakers approved a substantial restructuring of the commission, expanding it from three members to seven and moving toward representation based on congressional districts.

The legislation also established a freeze on retail electric rate increases through 2028 and created a cabinet-level secretary of energy, who will be appointed by the incoming governor. The secretary will have broad authority to direct commission activities, establish meeting agendas and oversee administrative functions. Under the new law, formal rate hearings are restricted until 2029. Ivey has already appointed four additional commissioners whose terms begin in January 2027.

Supporters of the restructuring say it will broaden representation and strengthen oversight. Critics contend that the changes do too little to require rigorous scrutiny of utility costs. A temporary rate freeze also does not resolve whether electricity will become affordable over the longer term. The public has an interest in knowing who can examine a utility's finances, challenge its expenses and demand an explanation when customers' costs rise.

8. WHETHER GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

On Alabama's Gulf Coast, hurricanes are recurring threats to homes, employment, transportation and health. The governor has important emergency powers, including

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HOUSING, RIGHTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Public power reaches homes, prisons, health care and civil rights.

BY NATHAN P. HUNTER AND ARI M. ROCKER

declaring states of emergency, activating response plans and mobilizing state resources, including the National Guard. Can people without cars evacuate? Are shelters accessible to residents with disabilities? Can people dependent on electrically powered medical equipment obtain assistance? Do warnings reach isolated neighborhoods in time? The governor's appointments, budget priorities and oversight of emergency agencies can influence how well those preparations serve the public.

The measure is not how quickly officials announce an emergency. It is how effectively government protects people who cannot easily protect themselves.

9. WHETHER RESIDENTS CAN AFFORD TO REMAIN IN THEIR HOMES

It may begin with rising rent, unaffordable insurance premiums, repeated storm damage or deterioration that a household cannot afford to repair. Alabama's Strengthen Alabama Homes program provides grants to qualifying homeowners for improvements intended to reduce wind damage. State leaders have also supported tax incentives intended to encourage housing development. These programs can provide meaningful assistance.

But their benefits do not necessarily reach renters, households in substandard housing or homeowners unable to meet program requirements. The governor cannot independently control housing prices. The office can, however, influence infrastructure investment, housing incentives, economic development and the state's support for local governments.

For families, housing security means more than obtaining a mortgage or paying rent. It means being able to remain near work, schools, relatives and the institutions that make community life possible.

10. WHETHER ALABAMA'S PRISONS BECOME SAFER

Alabama's prison system has faced longstanding concerns involving violence, inadequate staffing, health care and unconstitutional conditions. In 2021, Ivey and state lawmakers approved a roughly $1.3 billion prison construction and renovation plan that included $400 million in federal pandemic relief funding. Supporters said deteriorating facilities needed replacement. Critics questioned both the use of pandemic funds and whether construction would address the conditions that had drawn federal scrutiny. A governor appoints corrections leadership and plays a major role in shaping prison policy, funding and administration.

New facilities may address serious infrastructure deficiencies. They cannot, by themselves, guarantee adequate staffing, medical treatment, safety or rehabilitation. Jones has called for greater independent oversight and prison reforms. Tuberville has emphasized stronger law enforcement and public safety.

11. WHETHER THE STATE RESTRICTS REPRODUCTIVE DECISIONS

In May 2019, Ivey signed the Human Life Protection Act, one of the nation's most restrictive abortion laws. The measure was initially blocked under federal constitutional protections. After the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in 2022, Alabama's restrictions became enforceable.

Supporters regard the law as protecting unborn life. Opponents argue that it deprives women of reproductive autonomy and can endanger patients when access to necessary care is delayed or uncertain. A person with money, transportation and flexible employment may be able to pursue options that are unavailable to someone without those resources. Governors do not make reproductive policy alone. Legislatures enact laws, and courts determine their legal boundaries.

But governors can sign or veto legislation, influence health administration and establish the priorities of the agencies responsible for implementing state policy.

12. WHETHER GOVERNMENT MUST ANSWER TO THE PEOPLE IT SERVES

In 2023, Ivey issued an executive order intended to improve public

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THE RECORDS BEHIND THE PROMISES

Compare the candidates' records, then ask how their promises will work.

BY NATHAN P. HUNTER AND ARI M. ROCKER



ARTWORK: CHROMATIC BLACK

access to executive-branch records. Lawmakers enacted additional public records reforms in 2024. Government can disclose a decision after it has been made while offering affected residents little opportunity to influence it beforehand. This problem is particularly important in Alabama's smaller municipalities, where local officials may be responsible for public needs without possessing sufficient resources or legal authority to address them.

Jones has proposed greater local government authority, public participation reforms and additional government accountability measures. The next governor could also influence how executive agencies involve residents in planning, spending and evaluating public programs. Can they help shape those decisions before the consequences become irreversible?

ALABAMA'S HISTORY SHOWS WHAT EXECUTIVE POWER CAN DO

On June 11, 1963, Gov. George Wallace stood at the University of Alabama in an attempt to prevent Vivian Malone and James Hood, two Black students, from enrolling. Wallace used the authority and visibility of his office to defend racial segregation. Federal intervention ultimately ended his obstruction.

For Malone and Hood, the dispute was not an abstraction about competing constitutional principles. It concerned whether they could attend a public university in their own state. The governing question is not only what officials intended. It is what their decisions did to the people affected.

A policy does not need an explicitly racial purpose to have unequal racial effects. When communities begin with different levels of wealth, transportation access, health care, political influence and public investment, seemingly uniform decisions can deepen existing disparities.

WHAT THE CANDIDATES' RECORDS REVEAL

Tuberville and Jones have spent years exercising public authority, although neither has previously served as governor. Jones served as U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Alabama and later as a U.S. senator. As a federal prosecutor, he helped secure convictions in the 1963 bombing of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

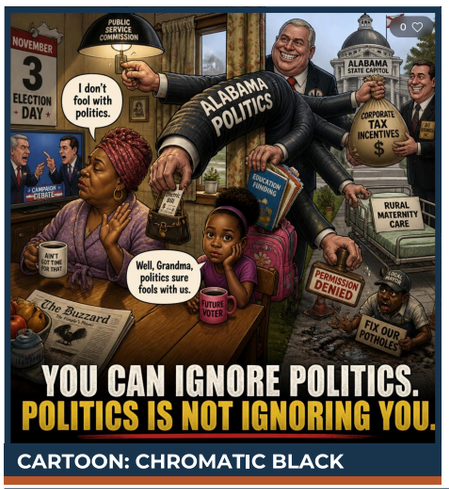
How would Jones negotiate with a Republican-controlled Legislature that has resisted Medicaid expansion? How would he finance his priorities? Which changes could be accomplished administratively, and which would depend on lawmakers willing to support them? Tuberville, a former college football coach, defeated Jones in the 2020 Senate election and has built his political identity around conservative priorities and alignment with Trump.

In 2023, Tuberville delayed hundreds of senior military promotions to protest a Pentagon reproductive health policy. He defended the holds; Pentagon officials and lawmakers from both parties said the delays harmed readiness and military families. Who would lead the agencies responsible for carrying them out? How would tax reductions affect the state's ability to fund services? What requirements would accompany corporate incentives? How would the administration measure its results?

THE TEST IS WHAT HAPPENS AFTER ELECTION DAY

The governor's authority is considerable. The question is how it will be exercised, and whose lives will be better because of it.

END



CARTOON: CHROMATIC BLACK

OPINION & ANALYSIS

POLITICS IS NOT IGNORING YOU.

BY KEVIN LOCH



ARTWORK: CHROMATIC BLACK

You ever notice how everybody hates politics until politics shows up at their house? People will tell you, "I don't fool with politics." Well, politics fools with you.

Politics was at your house before you woke up this morning. It helped determine what you paid to turn on those lights. It had something to do with the road you drove to work on. It had a hand in what your child's school can afford, whether your mother can find a doctor and how much of your paycheck disappears before you get a chance to enjoy it. Politics is the only thing I know that can reach into your wallet without ever meeting you.

You might not even know the name of the person who authorized it.

YOUR ELECTRIC BILL HAS A GOVERNMENT AGENCY BEHIND IT

You get your electric bill, and you start looking around the house like somebody has been running a nightclub in the basement. Alabama has something called the Public Service Commission. Sounds important, doesn't it? Sounds like a group of people who should be serving the public. Their job includes regulating Alabama Power's rates.

In 2026, the Legislature passed a law expanding the commission from three members to seven, moving toward district-based representation. It also restricted increases in electric base rates through 2028. Some officials were appointed to serve during the transition. But most people can name every starting player on the Alabama or Auburn football team and couldn't name the people overseeing one of their biggest household expenses. But somebody makes a decision that affects what electricity costs, and nobody knows what meeting it happened in.

Maybe we ought to know who's on the commission.

THE HOSPITAL IS CLOSED, BUT EVERYBODY'S GOT A CAMPAIGN SIGN

Imagine living in rural Alabama. You're pregnant. It's two in the morning. You're having contractions. And the nearest hospital that delivers babies is an hour away. Alabama's own public-health data show that, as of 2022, only 15 rural counties had hospitals with labor and delivery units. Now, hospitals are complicated. They need doctors, nurses, patients and money. Some hospitals struggle because too few people live nearby. Others face reimbursement problems, staffing shortages or financial mismanagement.

Legislators decide how much money Alabama puts into Medicaid. Federal policymakers make decisions affecting Medicare and Medicaid payments. State officials administer healthcare programs. And Alabama has not adopted the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion. People disagree about whether expansion would produce benefits that justify its costs. That's a legitimate policy argument. What is the plan for the woman whose hospital no longer delivers babies?

Because telling somebody that Alabama is a great place to raise a family sounds different when they have to leave their county to give birth to one. You can't put a campaign slogan in the passenger seat and ask it to deliver a baby.

WE LOVE OUR CHILDREN. NOW LET'S TALK ABOUT THEIR SCHOOLS.

Now explain why a teacher is buying classroom supplies with her own money. Explain why some

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CLOSING ARGUMENT · OPINION

THE DECISIONS LAST FOR YEARS.

BY KEVIN LOCH

Election Day is one moment. Accountability continues afterward.

children attend schools with more educational resources than others. Explain why the ZIP code where a child grows up can influence the opportunities available to them.

In the November 3, 2026 general election, Alabama voters are being asked to consider constitutional amendments involving school system consolidation, the Pledge of Allegiance, student-led prayer and the national anthem. While we're debating what children should recite, what are we doing to make sure they can read? They need qualified teachers, safe buildings, adequate resources and adults who pay attention to the results.

APPARENTLY, THERE'S MONEY. IT JUST DEPENDS ON WHO'S ASKING.

When a big company wants to build a factory, government officials may offer tax incentives, infrastructure improvements and other economic development assistance. Sometimes these investments create jobs and generate public benefits. Sometimes the promised benefits fall short. But imagine you're a resident asking for a sidewalk. But if we're putting public resources into a private development, the public ought to know what it's getting back.

How many jobs? What wages? Who gets hired? What happens if the company doesn't deliver? Who pays for the infrastructure? And who is measuring the results? Because a ribbon-cutting is not a return on investment.

BLACK ALABAMIANS KNOW THIS STORY HAS A HISTORY

People were beaten, threatened, arrested and killed in the struggle for voting rights. Voting was about access to the institutions making decisions about education, employment, housing, public services and the law. You can have the right to vote and still live in a neighborhood that has been ignored for decades. You can elect Black officials and still have inadequate public services. You can elect white officials who make decisions that benefit Black communities. Race alone does not tell us whether someone governs effectively.

What matters is what happens when power is exercised. A politician can love Black history and still fail to improve the conditions in which Black people live. But representation and results are not synonyms.

ALABAMA HAS TURNED LOCAL GOVERNMENT INTO A PERMISSION SLIP

But Alabama's constitutional structure places substantial limits on what local governments can do without state authorization.

Sometimes communities need constitutional amendments to make changes that other states handle through ordinary legislation. If a mayor cannot act without the Legislature, residents need to understand which institution actually controls the decision. Budgets get adopted. Contracts get approved. Regulators hold hearings. Appointments get made. School boards establish policies. State agencies make decisions.

What did they promise? What authority do they actually have? What did they spend? Who benefited? Who was left out? And what changed?

SO WHY DOES VOTING MATTER?

And no, voting does not fix everything. But the people occupying public offices have different powers, priorities, records and obligations. Voting is one way residents help determine who gets to exercise that authority. Public meetings, organizing, investigative journalism and continued scrutiny are ways to hold that authority accountable. These institutions influence the conditions under which millions of people live. You don't have to be interested in government for government to be interested in you.

END

ELECTION ANALYSIS · PART 1 OF 2

FOUR AMENDMENTS, 32 LOCAL DECISIONS

Read the proposed changes, the safeguards and what a Yes or No vote means.

BY LESLIE JACKSON

NONPARTISAN ELECTION GUIDE
SCAN TO OPEN

Four proposed amendments to the Alabama Constitution will appear on every ballot in the state. Another 32 proposed amendments concern individual counties. These are not abstract constitutional questions. For a retired homeowner in Mobile, a local amendment could affect property taxes on a house held for decades. For a rural parent, another could eventually determine whether the school board overseeing a child's education remains accountable to one county or becomes part of a regional system.

AMENDMENT 1: WHO CONTROLS THE OFFICE — AND WHO CONTROLS THE MONEY?

Statewide Amendment 1 addresses three matters: filling vacancies in the lieutenant governor's office, determining compensation of certain legislative leaders and approving legislators' travel expenses. The proposal would establish an election process for certain vacancies occurring during the first two years of a term. It would also allow lawmakers to set salaries of the lieutenant governor and legislative officers through a joint resolution not subject to the governor's veto, and transfer approval of legislative travel expenses to officers elected by each chamber.

The amendment combines all three changes into one ballot question. A voter cannot approve the vacancy provision while rejecting the compensation provision. A Yes vote approves the changes; a No vote retains the existing framework.

AMENDMENT 2: WHEN SCHOOL SYSTEMS MERGE, WHO GETS A VOICE?

Amendment 2 would establish a process allowing neighboring county school systems to consolidate. Boards would first agree to pursue consolidation and establish a plan. The State Board of Education would study effects on students, programs, transportation, finances, taxes and operations.

PARCA found that administrative spending in fiscal 2024 averaged $1,083 per pupil in small county systems, compared with $471 in large systems. Sharing operations could redirect resources toward instruction. But size is not the only measure of effectiveness. A merger could change attendance boundaries, transportation, tax-revenue distribution and representation. Would a predominantly Black county retain meaningful representation? Would resources follow student needs? Could students face longer bus rides or fewer neighborhood schools?

If at least 25 percent of qualified voters in an affected system protest within 30 days, a merger must go to referendum, requiring majorities in each affected county and overall. That offers direct approval, but the petition threshold is substantial.

AMENDMENT 3: PRAYER, THE PLEDGE AND THE RIGHTS OF STUDENTS

Amendment 3 would require local school boards to adopt policies for daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance and student-initiated, student-led prayer, with protections for students who decline participation. Alabama students already have the right to voluntary religious expression, and schools are already required by state law to conduct a voluntary daily Pledge. The amendment would place additional requirements in the Constitution.

The legal distinction is between protecting student expression and allowing a public school to sponsor or coerce religious participation. The First Amendment protects religious freedom while restricting government establishment of religion. In Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe, the U.S. Supreme Court held that a policy permitting student-led prayer over a loudspeaker before football games violated the Constitution. Calling a prayer voluntary or student-led does not settle every issue, and a state amendment cannot override federal protections.

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ELECTION ANALYSIS · PART 2 OF 2

WHAT CHANGES—AND WHAT IT MEANS HERE

A closer look at Mobile County, public resources and community voice.

BY LESLIE JACKSON



ARTWORK: CHROMATIC BLACK

How would schools protect students who decline? Would minority religions receive equal treatment? How would officials distinguish student-initiated prayer from activity organized by school personnel? A No vote would not eliminate existing protections for voluntary prayer or current Pledge requirements.

AMENDMENT 4: A NATIONAL ANTHEM REQUIREMENT BECOMES CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

Amendment 4 would require every local school board to ensure that K–12 schools broadcast or perform the first stanza of The Star-Spangled Banner at least weekly. It would not require individual students to sing or participate.

Schools are already free to play the anthem. The proposal would make a weekly observance constitutional law, harder to alter through ordinary legislation. Voters must weigh the value of regular patriotic observance against whether that operating instruction belongs in the state's highest legal document.

THE 32 LOCAL AMENDMENTS: WHERE HOUSEHOLD CONSEQUENCES BECOME CLEARER

According to PARCA, 18 of the 32 local proposals concern property-tax relief for older homeowners, including a proposal in Mobile County. Most would allow eligible homeowners age 65 or older to freeze the assessed value of a primary residence, subject to residency and other requirements. Freezing assessed value is not necessarily freezing the entire tax bill; taxes may still change because of rates or other provisions.

For a retiree on fixed income, limiting assessment increases could provide predictability and make it easier to remain at home. But renters and younger homeowners would not directly qualify. Mobile County would also raise an income threshold for certain existing senior homestead relief to $50,000. Those questions matter in the Black Belt, where public institutions face poverty, limited revenue and historic disinvestment. Relief can protect household stability while school systems still require sustainable funding.

Voters also need to understand what happens if an amendment fails. A No vote leaves the proposed constitutional change unadopted; it does not necessarily prohibit the underlying activity under existing law. Schools, for example, can already provide voluntary prayer and play the national anthem.

The four statewide measures will appear on every Alabama ballot. Local proposals appear only where applicable. Together they illustrate a persistent feature of Alabama politics: decisions involving public authority, local resources and everyday administration are often routed through constitutional amendment.

SOURCES AND REPORTING NOTES

This analysis is based on the Alabama Secretary of State's official 2026 Fair Ballot Commission statements, PARCA's October 2026 statewide and local amendment analyses, the Alabama Department of Revenue, Alabama Arise's 2026 Tax and Budget Handbook, and reporting by Alabama Reflector. The Buzzard's analysis distinguishes documented legal effects from potential community consequences that depend on implementation. This article does not constitute an endorsement of any amendment.

END

EDITORIAL · PART 1 OF 3

WHAT WOULD THE BUZZARD DO? FOLLOW THE POWER.

Who gets the power, who gets the money and who gets stuck with the bill?

BY THE BUZZARD EDITORIAL BOARD

We have schools struggling to teach children to read. Hospitals fighting to keep their doors open. Families looking at their electric bills like somebody has added a mortgage payment. Now, there's nothing wrong with the national anthem. Nothing at all. But if a child can't read the words, we might have our priorities a little backward. In the November 3, 2026 general election, voters will face four statewide constitutional amendments and 32 local proposals.

Some of them are legitimate attempts to solve problems. Some could improve people's lives. Others appear to be solutions looking for problems to solve. Who has it. Who wants more of it. Who gets to exercise it. And, perhaps most important, who gets to tell them no. Here's how we would approach the four statewide amendments. These are proposed editorial positions, not instructions to voters. Reasonable people can reach different conclusions.

AMENDMENT 1: WHEN POLITICIANS SAY, "TRUST US," CHECK YOUR WALLET

If the lieutenant governor's office becomes vacant early enough in a term, voters should have a process for choosing a replacement. It would also allow lawmakers to determine compensation for certain legislative officers through a joint resolution, without the governor's veto. It would change who approves legislative travel expenses. Supporters can reasonably argue that the Legislature should have authority over its internal operations. That's a legitimate principle of government.

And whenever public officials are making decisions involving their own compensation, the public is entitled to ask whether the safeguards are sufficient. You cannot vote yes on the election provision and no on the compensation changes.

Our position: No.

Bring the vacancy-election provision back on its own. Then let legislators make their case for changes to compensation and expense oversight separately.

AMENDMENT 2: THEY WANT TO CONSOLIDATE THE SCHOOLS. FINE. WHO GETS TO DECIDE?

Alabama has rural school systems operating with limited resources, shrinking populations and administrative costs that can consume money desperately needed in classrooms. If two school systems can share administrative services and put more money toward teachers, transportation, libraries and children, we ought to examine that possibility seriously. Saving money on education and improving education are not necessarily the same thing. Amendment 2 would create a process allowing neighboring county school systems to merge.

It includes a public safeguard. If at least 25 percent of qualified voters in an affected school system submit a valid protest petition within the prescribed period, the merger must go to a referendum. And we're asking residents to organize a major petition effort just to secure a vote on who governs their children's schools.

In the Black Belt, where communities have fought for generations to secure political representation, that is not a minor consideration. Suppose a predominantly Black county merges its school system with a neighboring county. Those questions should be answered before the merger, not after the buses start running new routes. We're against treating community consent as an obstacle to administrative efficiency.

Our position: No, as written.

Bring back a proposal requiring an affirmative vote in every affected county, along with a full public accounting of the financial, educational and representational consequences.

AMENDMENT 3: EVERYBODY CAN PRAY. THAT'S NOT THE ARGUMENT.

Children can already pray voluntarily in public schools. And

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EDITORIAL · PART 2 OF 3

FOLLOW THE POWER.

BY THE BUZZARD EDITORIAL BOARD

THE BUZZARD'S BALLOT TEST

FOUR AMENDMENTS. FOUR PROPOSED POSITIONS.

AMENDMENT	WHAT IT WOULD DO	POSITION	WHY
1 **Lieutenant governor and legislative administration**	Changes vacancy rules and legislative leadership compensation and travel.	NO	A good election idea is bundled with reduced oversight. Separate the questions.
2 **School consolidation**	Creates a process for neighboring systems to merge; a qualifying protest triggers a referendum.	NO, AS WRITTEN	Changing who governs schools should require direct approval in every affected county.
3 **Prayer and the Pledge**	Adds constitutional requirements for school policies on voluntary prayer and the Pledge.	NO	Students already possess protections. Government should identify the additional problem.
4 **National anthem**	Requires a weekly anthem performance or broadcast in public schools.	NO	Turning an ordinary school practice into constitutional law is unnecessary.

Alabama already has a law requiring schools to provide for voluntary recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Amendment 3 would add constitutional obligations for local school-board policies concerning student-initiated, student-led prayer and the Pledge. You have the right to practice your faith. And the person sitting next to you has the right not to practice yours. That includes Christian students. Muslim students. Jewish students. Students of other faiths. And students whose families aren't religious at all.

The government doesn't get to declare that one child is more American, more moral or more welcome because of what that child believes. Churches were organizing centers during the civil rights movement. Faith helped sustain people facing extraordinary violence and exclusion. Religious institutions remain central to many communities. It is whether the government is protecting voluntary religious expression or creating circumstances in which children may feel pressured to participate.

Our position: No.

Protect the right to pray. Protect the right not to pray. Enforce existing protections.

AMENDMENT 4: THE CHILDREN CAN'T READ, BUT WE'RE GOING TO MAKE SURE THEY HEAR THE ANTHEM?

Amendment 4 would require public schools to provide for a performance or broadcast of the first stanza of The Star-Spangled Banner at least once a week. We need effective literacy instruction. Qualified teachers. Safe facilities. Schools capable of serving children with disabilities. Reliable transportation. Adequate educational resources. We can respect patriotic traditions without confusing them with educational improvement. But it doesn't explain why a local school board needs a constitutional command to provide for an activity it can already authorize.

Our position: No.

Let schools recognize patriotic traditions. Protect students' constitutional rights. And direct serious public attention toward whether children are receiving the education they deserve.

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EDITORIAL · PART 3 OF 3

FOLLOW THE POWER.

BY THE BUZZARD EDITORIAL BOARD



ARTWORK: CHROMATIC BLACK

VOTER TOOL

CHECK YOUR REGISTRATION & POLLING PLACE

SCAN TO VERIFY

THE 32 LOCAL AMENDMENTS: NOW WE'RE TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE'S MONEY

Eighteen of the local proposals address property tax relief for certain homeowners age 65 or older. A freeze on assessed property value might provide meaningful protection. Renters may be just as financially vulnerable, yet they do not receive the same direct homeowner benefit.

We want to know who qualifies for relief, who does not and what the distribution of benefits looks like. A property tax freeze may help residents remain in their homes. That's valuable. But if local schools lose revenue growth they were counting on, we need to understand that consequence, too. That's why The Buzzard would not endorse or reject all 32 local amendments as a group. Each deserves its own examination.

ALABAMA HAS A CONSTITUTION WITH A CONTROL PROBLEM

Alabama's 1901 Constitution was part of a political project designed to preserve white supremacy, disenfranchise Black voters and concentrate political and economic power. It also restricted the ability of local governments to govern and raise revenue. In 2022, Alabama reorganized its Constitution, removing racist language and obsolete provisions. But the underlying structure of local authority and taxation was not fundamentally transformed. You can take the racist words out of a governing document without fixing every system of power those words helped establish.

When communities lack the authority or resources to address their own needs, somebody else gets to decide what happens. And when that somebody is far away from the consequences, the people living with those consequences may have very little leverage. At some point, we have to ask whether the real problem is the amendment process or the governing arrangement that makes so many amendments necessary.

WHAT WOULD THE BUZZARD ACTUALLY DO?

If the state changes how school systems can consolidate, we want to know who ends up governing the schools and whether children benefit. If homeowners receive tax relief, we want to know how much relief they receive, which households qualify and what happens to public revenue. If a utility comes under new regulation, we want to know whether the service improves and what happens to the bill. If lawmakers acquire additional authority, we want to know what safeguards apply.

And if the promised benefits never arrive, we want the names of the officials responsible for explaining why. Power is not an achievement. It's a responsibility. And when somebody asks Alabama voters for more of it, they ought to be able to explain what the people are going to get in return.

The Buzzard's proposed positions reflect an editorial evaluation of the four statewide amendments. The 32 local proposals require separate analysis. The newspaper's reporting and editorial judgments should remain clearly distinguished.



ARTWORK: CHROMATIC BLACK

END



ARTWORK: CHROMATIC BLACK

NOVEMBER **03**

YOUR VOTE. YOUR PLAN.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3
POLLS OPEN 7 A.M. TO 7 P.M.

Know what's on your ballot.

Read it. Research it. Make your plan.

OCT 27
Mail applications due
Application must be received by your county absentee election manager.

OCT 29
Apply in person
Last day to apply for an absentee ballot in person.

NOV 02
Return by hand
Hand-delivered absentee ballot due by close of business.

NOV 03
Election Day
Mailed absentee ballots due by noon, except UOCAVA voters.

READER FEEDBACK
Talk Back to The Buzzard.

BRING AN ACCEPTED PHYSICAL PHOTO ID.
Check your polling place. If you are in line when polls close, stay in line.

AFTER THE BALLOT

ACCOUNTABILITY BEGINS WHEN THE POLLS CLOSE.

An election is more than a contest between candidates. It is a decision about who gets to exercise public power — and what they will do with it.

The people elected on November 3 will help determine how public money is spent, how schools are funded, how healthcare is delivered, how utilities are regulated and whether local communities have the resources and authority to solve their own problems.

Those decisions have consequences long after campaign signs disappear.

That is why knowing what's on your ballot matters. Every office carries particular responsibilities. Every constitutional amendment has implications. And every candidate seeking public authority should be examined not simply for what they promise, but for what they have done, whom their decisions have benefited and how they intend to be held accountable.

MAKE YOUR VOTING PLAN BEFORE ELECTION DAY.

Review your sample ballot. Research the candidates and amendments. Confirm your polling location and make sure you have an accepted form of photo identification. If you qualify to vote absentee, pay close attention to the application and ballot-return deadlines.

On Tuesday, November 3, Alabama's polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. If you are in line when the polls close, remain in line.

Voting alone will not fix everything that needs fixing in Alabama. But it is one way to influence who makes the decisions. What happens afterward — at budget hearings, school board meetings, regulatory proceedings and legislative sessions — matters just as much.

The election lasts one day. Accountability belongs to every day that follows.