



Tom Scarritt

Government is servant of taxpayers

If there were any doubts about the depth of anti-tax sentiment in Alabama right now, the vote in Shelby County should have dispelled them. The most affluent county in the state had an easily explained need for more money to build schools for its fast-growing population. The voters said no.

There are a number of reasons why Alabamians are unwilling to invest in government. Many simply don't see the need. Most of us do not require Medicaid or mental health services or the intervention of the Department of Human Resources in our daily lives. And we are not fully aware of how much our less-fortunate neighbors depend on the state.

Many don't see the possibilities. We have lived with low expectations so long that we cannot conceive of Alabama as a leader in learning and a land of opportunity. We don't believe we can use government to transform our lives and enhance our future.

The main reason for the tax revolt, though, is the people who have to pay for government have lost faith in the managers they elect and the employees those managers hire. If government is not working for us, why should we pay the bills?

Too much of the news about government at all levels in this state has centered on secrecy, mismanagement and greed. Our public officials must change that pattern. As Gov. Bob Riley said, we have to restore trust.

Whenever a school board or city council meets in secret, it destroys trust. Whenever a sheriff or police chief resists telling people who is being held in jail or where crimes occur, he destroys trust. Whenever a city refuses to open its records to citizens, or makes them fill out a form explaining why they want to look at a document that the law says is public, it destroys trust. Whenever a lawyer hired with our money aids and abets the efforts of public officials to keep secrets from us, he gives us another reason not to trust our government.

Secrecy feeds mismanagement and greed. It is no accident that many of the same school boards that have sought to meet in secret have struggled with financial mismanagement. The same county commission that embarked on a massive sewer project without consulting the people, and had a history of informal meetings outside the public view, set up slush funds to be spent at the whim of its individual members.

As citizens and taxpayers, we are the owners of government. It exists to serve our needs. When legislators funnel our money to their friends and family, when powerful special interests come before the public interest, or when incompetent teachers waste a precious year of our children's lives hiding behind the tenure law, our needs are not served. That is why so many Alabamians have chosen not to put any more money into the enterprise.

Government at all levels must be transparent and trustworthy. Those of us who pay for it must be able to see what is going on, and we must be confident that it is working in our interest.

Riley is working to make state government more open. That is an important first step toward building trust, and one that legislators and local governments should follow.

If you want our money, you will have to show you truly work for us.

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Up in smoke

40 years after Alabamian's report, tobacco still ravaging lives

By ALAN BLUM, ERIC SOLBERG and HOWARD WOLINSKY

This month marks the 40th anniversary of the U.S. surgeon general's report on smoking and health. Its stark and unequivocal conclusion that cigarettes cause lung cancer and other devastating diseases was to have ended a debate that had raged for decades. Until Jan. 11, 1964, the tobacco industry had always managed to drown out the researchers who'd been raising alarms about smoking by flooding the mass media with glamorous ads showing youthful, athletic and sophisticated smokers.

In releasing the review of 7,000 research studies, Dr. Luther Terry, an Alabamian, somberly told a crowd of reporters that cigarettes represented "a health hazard of sufficient importance in the United States to warrant remedial action." Yet in the past four decades since the "War on Smoking" officially began, the tobacco control coalition of health departments, cancer, heart and lung associations and local advocacy groups has suffered far more setbacks than successes.

A full seven years elapsed before Congress would ban cigarette advertisements from TV in 1971, and then only at the request of the tobacco industry, which had seen cigarette sales flatten as the result of the first wave of anti-smoking commercials. The tobacco companies quickly figured out how to circumvent the ad ban by sponsoring NASCAR, women's tennis and other televised sporting events.

For 33 years, until last month, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co.'s Winston Cup Racing saw its popular cigarette brand appear on TV more widely and more cheaply than ever before. As Talladega rolled out the red carpet year after year for its cigarette company benefactor and helped cultivate a generation of homegrown

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What's good for U.S. good for the state

By BOB RILEY

Throughout our history, Alabama has played a critical role in the national security of the United States. The sons and daughters of our state have fought for and defended our nation in every corner of the globe. From Bataan to Bosnia to Baghdad, every time our country has called, Alabamians have been there to answer. Over the years, the sacrifices of our men and women in uniform have liberated millions of people and made the world safer for millions more.

What is sometimes overlooked, however, are the contributions made by Alabama's major military bases to the security of our nation. Alabama is blessed to be the home to four of America's premier installations — Anniston Army Depot, Redstone Arsenal, Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base and Fort Rucker.

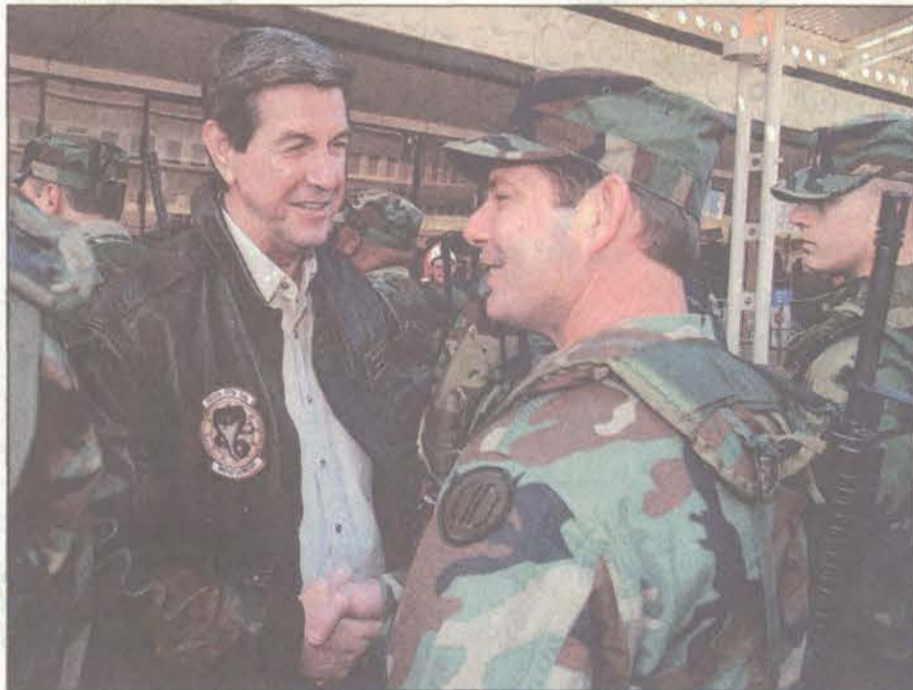
As a former congressman and member of the U.S. House Armed Services Committee, I know that our bases are so exceptional in what they do that America cannot fight and win a war without them. Whether it's weapons systems research and development, weapons systems maintenance and overhaul, leader education or leader training, Alabama's military bases are essential and unique to the success of the American warfighter in the 21st century.

Important work

Redstone Arsenal is the nerve center of the U.S. Army's missile and rocket programs. The Anniston Army Depot is the largest depot within the Army, and work-

ers there repair every tracked combat vehicle in the Army's inventory. Fort Rucker is the home of Army aviation, and not a single helicopter in the Army could fly without the training our pilots receive there. Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base's Air University is vital to America's continued superiority in air and space warfare.

Not only are our bases indispensable to the success of America's military, they are also an engine of economic growth that brings and creates good, quality jobs for Alabama. More than 30,000 of our citizens are employed on our military bases, and thousands more throughout the state have jobs today because these bases are located here. Alabama's military installa-



NEWS STAFF/JOE SONGER

Gov. Bob Riley shakes hands with guardsman Benjamin Cheaves from Leeds in front of the Birmingham Airport Terminal.

tions exceed \$4 billion in operating budgets and payrolls, creating a multibillion dollar impact to our state economy.

Because our four military installations are vital to both America's national security and Alabama's economic security, my administration is taking proactive steps to protect our bases from being negatively affected by the upcoming round of federal base closings.

The U.S. Department of Defense has announced that up to 25 percent of the nation's military bases could be closed or downsized during the 2005 base closing process. While all of us should support

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Bernard Kincaid is mayor of Birmingham. This article is from his "State of the Region" address presented Jan. 9. E-mail him at vmgosse@cs.birmingham.al.us

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Area must learn to cooperate

By BERNARD KINCAID

As I contemplate my second term as mayor of Birmingham, I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility: first and foremost, of course, to the citizens of our great city; but also to the hundreds of thousands of other residents of the region whose "heart" is Birmingham. I know how much the region will benefit if the core city is strong and growing, and how much the region will suffer if its core is allowed to stagnate and deteriorate.

If you look around the country, you will see that the more central cities are plagued by underachieving school systems, high unemployment and a lack of adequate housing, the more surrounding cities and towns are retarded in their social and economic growth. By the same token, communities linked to thriving urban centers experience higher rates of personal income growth, housing starts and economic expansion. Our futures are linked; therefore, if we hope to reach our full potential, we must work together. It stands to reason that our working together multiplies our opportunities, while mitigating our risks.



"If we hope to reach our full potential, we must work together."

Mayor Bernard Kincaid

Speaking of working together, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the wonderful working relationship between the city government of Birmingham and the Jefferson County Commission. My personal relationship with the commission president, Commissioner Larry Langford, and the other commissioners has provided for unprecedented cooperation on economic development projects.

Regional projects

Let me mention briefly a few specific areas in which I am committed personally — and on behalf of the city of Birmingham — to forging or expanding upon regional efforts.

► The first and most obvious such area is regional mass transit. Consensus for a regional transit system has been building, and during last year's session of the Alabama Legislature we came closer than ever to securing the legislative support needed to make regional mass transit a reality. "Close" is not good enough, however, and if we fail to claim the remainder of the \$87 million in federal transit funds set aside through the efforts of U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby, we will have missed a historic opportunity that will not come again.

► A second area in which we must work together is the formulation of regional economic development strategies and land-use priorities. Certainly, every unit of government in the region has an obligation to its citizens and taxpayers to promote and encourage economic growth; but growing at the expense of our neighbors, or in ways which unnecessarily degrade our rich natural resources, is a shortsighted, zero-sum game. If we truly are going to think and act regionally, a clearer vision of regional economic goals must emerge.

► As we consider such issues as mass transit and economic

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