

How to contact your Elected Officials: State & District

Ala. House of Representatives, Dist. 65 (Choctaw, Clarke and Washington counties)

Rep. Marc Keahey
State Capitol Office:
11 South Union Street
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(334) 242-7600

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P.O. Box 297
Grove Hill, AL 26451
(251) 275-3127
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Home:
756 Allen Road
Grove Hill, AL 36451
(251) 275-3541

Ala. House of Representatives, Dist. 68 (Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Marengo and Monroe counties)

Rep. Thomas E. Jackson
State Capitol Office:
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Work:
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(334) 246-3597

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P.O. Box 656
Thomasville, AL 36784
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Ala. State Senate, District 22 (Baldwin, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Escambia, Mobile and Washington counties)

Sen. W.H. "Pat" Lindsey
State Capitol Office:
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Ala. State Senate, District 24 (Bibb, Choctaw, Greene, Hale, Marengo, Perry, Sumter and Tuscaloosa counties)

Sen. Bobby Singleton
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Alabama Governor's Office

Bob Riley
State Capitol
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Montgomery, AL 36130
(334) 242-7100
FAX (334) 353-0004

Website: www.alabama.gov

Alabama Attorney General

Troy King
11 South Union Street
Montgomery, AL 36130

General Office Number — (334) 242-7300
Consumer Affairs — (800) 392-5658
Victim's Assistance — (800) 626-7676
Family Protection Unit — (800) 230-9485
Workers Comp Fraud — (800) 923-2533
Investigations — (334) 242-7345
Public Corruption — (334) 353-8494

Website: www.ago.alabama.gov

Each week we will rotate lists of elected officials at the federal, state, county and municipal levels. The contact information was obtained from the most reliable sources. However, if an address, phone/fax number, email or website address is in error, please let us know so that we can correct it before the next publication date.

This listing is published as a public service by **The Choctaw Sun**. We encourage readers to let these and other elected officials know how you feel about issues that are important to you.

Bus drivers still want answers

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

GILBERTOWN — With still no solution to their ongoing quest for salary increases, bus drivers for the Choctaw County Public School System held the third in a recent series of meetings last Wednesday. Gathering in the gymnasium at Southern Choctaw High School, the drivers discussed their options with Alabama Education Association (AEA) UniServe Director Cynthia Older.

Older, whose role includes providing advice in employment matters and acting a liaison between school board employees and their employers, advised the group of their legal options in their push for raises.

With the possibility of a strike still being voiced by at least a portion of the drivers, Older informed the group that, because of Alabama state law, there could be consequences if that action were taken.

"If you strike in this state," she said, "you can get fired."

"But if we pull the buses up and walk off, they've got to find 20 certified drivers," Bennie Moss countered. "Where are they going to find them?"

However, several other drivers stated that, for many of them, walking off of their jobs was not a viable option.

"A lot of us just can't walk off," one driver stated. "We need our jobs."

Older offered another solution. "There is nothing to say that you can't drive your buses and come back to the school and picket during the school day," Older said. "That might get attention. You can also use the newspaper, the media, and get help through public opinion."

The drivers discussed the possibility of organizing a union in order to better negotiate their grievances and to help with any problems that may arise in the future. But, according to Older, doing so would still not ensure that all drivers would join, or that all drivers would be willing to strike — and potentially lose their jobs — for higher wages if a union were formed.

Older informed the drivers that since Alabama is a 'right-to-work' state, employees are under no obligation to join any union — including the AEA — but can do so voluntarily.

One of 22 states that hold such laws, Alabama law prohibits unions from making membership a condition of employment, either before or after hire. An employee cannot be compelled to join an already-existing union, nor can the employee be fired for doing so.

Many of the bus drivers who are employed by the BOE are, in fact, members of the AEA, an organization that assists employees in the state's education system and offers help through Older and others like her. However, Older told the group, even with their AEA membership, the drivers cannot negotiate their own employment contracts.

Silas resident delivers ultimatum on jail

By Tommy Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER — A Silas resident who recently took Sheriff Donald Lolley and the Choctaw Co. Commission to task for what she called "unsafe, filthy, nasty, horrendous" conditions at the local Jail, was back on Jan. 8th meeting with an affidavit regarding air conditioning in jails around the state.

Judith McDowell, who spent one night in the jail in October as the result of a domestic incident, told the Sun that the experience was the biggest "eye opener" of her life.

Mrs. McDowell asked at a December meeting of the board if there were plans to air condition the jail.

Probate Judge Michael Armistead replied, "not at this point."

"Why not?" she wanted to know. "It's not required," Armistead stated. "The new administration might want to do it but at this point in time it's not going to be done."

Mrs. McDowell said that heat rises and in multi-floored buildings such as the jail, when summertime temperatures get into the 90's and 100's, inmates — especially on the second floor — could suffer serious,

even fatal, health consequences.

At the Jan. 8th meeting of the board, Mrs. McDowell presented the board with copies of yet another notarized affidavit in which she outlined how she had personally contacted officials in all 67 of Alabama's counties to ask if their jails are air conditioned.

According to the document, the jails in Choctaw, Elmore, and Perry counties are the only non-air conditioned facilities in the state.

But Elmore County, which built a new jail in the 1990's, is now considering installing air conditioning, and in Perry County, a new jail is under construction and will be air conditioned.

That, she said, would leave only the Choctaw County Jail which would stand alone among the other 66 facilities as the only non-air conditioned lock-up in Alabama.

"Due to nasty, filthy conditions in the Choctaw County Jail, air conditioning will serve a dual purpose," she said at the Jan. 8th meeting. "It will prevent inmates from overheating and help prevent growth of bacteria and disease."

As a result of her investigation, Mrs. McDowell said she has learned that the Choctaw County Jail is the

"Alabama is one of 14 states like this," Older explained to the drivers last Wednesday. "You don't have the right to choose to bargain your contract."

"In bargain states," Older continued, "the state sends a lump sum to the school system and we (organizations like the AEA) would go and bargain contracts for everyone — salaries, insurance, health care, all of that. But in Alabama the legislature handles all of that."

In addition to the discussion of salaries, several of the drivers had questions about their employee files at the central office, with some stating that they had been told that there were negative comments in their files, but they had not been made aware of the problem by the administration.

"Nothing should be in your files unless it has been verified," Older told them. "Everyone has the right to see their personnel file. It's your official file at the central office, and you ought to check to see what's in it often."

"You also have the right to rebut anything negative that's in there," she added. "I'll be glad to help anyone write a rebuttal."

Although there is still no definite plan of action concerning their quest for raises, Moss urged all drivers to attend all upcoming meetings of the Board of Education.

"They need to look out there and see all of our faces," he said. "We need to show them we are there."

only facility in the state where officials have done "absolutely nothing" to provide a safe environment for inmates.

"I was surprised to learn that elected officials in Choctaw County know so little about the condition and operation of the jail," she said.

She also issued an ultimatum to the Commission — have a plan in place for air conditioning the jail by the first meeting in April, and to have that plan operational by May first.

"Officials should have a plan for a new jail in place by January of 2008 or give a legitimate reason for not having a plan," she added. "The air conditioning problem at the jail should have been addressed years ago .. by continuing to ignore it you are setting Choctaw County up for a major lawsuit the county cannot afford."

Some of the issues Mrs. McDowell addressed in December have either been taken care of or are in the process of being repaired, Sheriff Donald Lolley told the Sun, such as non-operational smoke alarms, plumbing issues, and bedding concerns. The issue of air conditioning, however, has not yet been addressed.

Commissioner wants to use inmates to pick up trash in District Four

By Tommy Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER — Commissioner Henry Lovette said Monday that he would like to begin using inmates from the Choctaw Co. Jail on a regular basis to pick up litter alongside of county roads.

"I want to know if, one day a week, myself or one of my men could pick up from one to three inmates and pick up litter on the rights-of-way," he said during the Jan. 8th meeting of the County Commission.

Probate Judge Michael Armistead said that several communities have gotten involved with the program, using inmates with community clean-up projects.

Sheriff Donald Lolley, who was present at the meeting for other business, commented that a church or community group is welcome to request the use of inmates as long as they can pick them up at the jail, supervise them, feed them lunch, and bring them back to the jail in the afternoon.

Lolley said that no inmates who are considered dangerous, violent or escape risks are allowed to participate.

Commissioner C.D. "Budd" Ruffin said he has used inmates on several clean-up projects in District Two and has been pleased with the inmates' work and the overall results.

"They did a fine job and we didn't have any problems," he said.

Law enforcement agencies team up to raise funds for Dean Roberts

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER — The Choctaw County Sheriff's Department and the Butler Police Department are teaming up to help one of their own.

Through a joint effort of the two law enforcement agencies, efforts are being made to raise funds on behalf of former Sheriff's Deputy and Butler Policeman Dean Roberts.

Roberts suffered a stroke in May of last year and is currently confined to a wheelchair. He is now going through rehabilitation through Willow Trace Nursing Center's Rehab

Unit.

According to local attorney Lee McPhearson, who is working with the agencies to set up the event, the funds raised will be used to purchase a specially-equipped van with a wheelchair lift.

"Originally, the plans were to raise the money and buy a van," McPhearson explained. "But while we were looking into this, Dean's therapist (Reggie Thompson at Willow Trace), who is from Satsuma, located a van there. We bought the van and financed it. Now we need to raise money to pay for it."

The van will allow Roberts to travel more

easily without having to depend on others to lift him in and out of a vehicle. Local residents are being asked to help raise some \$6,500 to pay off the van, with donations to be made through their local churches.

By giving through local churches on Roberts' behalf, McPhearson explained, donors will be able to give to a very worthy cause while also earning tax credit for their charitable gift. Churches throughout the area are now being contacted about participating the effort.

Over the course of his 30-year career in law enforcement, Roberts was

instrumental in the work of both the Sheriff's Department and the Butler Police Department. The fund-raiser, says McPhearson, is just their way of saying 'thank-you'.

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and FRIDAY!

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