

A good intention that will probably go nowhere

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By [ART PARKER](#)

You can imagine how difficult it was to pick myself up off the floor when I read the recent report about Alabama State Senator Cam Ward's proposal. Ward, a Republican from Alabaster, said he intends to propose a bill that will lower the required number of signatures for ballot access. According to a news reports on al.com, Ward wants to make it easier for independent candidates and candidates from smaller parties to be able to run and have their name on the ballot. The number of signatures required to get on the ballot in Alabama is three (3) percent of the votes cast in the last governor's race in the applicable district. Ward wants to reduce the number to 1.5 percent.

The argument established parties always present is that softer requirements could bring too many people to the ballot. That point has yet to be proved and Ward claims that states with lesser requirements do not have those problems.

The real reason most politicians do not want the change is because it may be damaging to incumbents and that should not be a surprise to any of us. What will be a surprise? If this even gets close to passage by the legislature. I'm sure the Republicans will be against because they are the party in power and the Democrats will be against it in areas that are protected for them after years of gerrymandering.

While I agree with Ward and praise him for his efforts at making elections fairer, I would be even

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happier if he would introduce legislation that required the parties to pay for their own primary elections. There is no reason why the taxpayers should foot the bill for a political party to enjoy a process and use public resources that intentionally refuses to serve all of the people. Both the Republicans and Democrats certify candidates based upon their own rules and therefore can forbid someone from participating in the democratic process that is funded with public dollars.

The political parties should step forward and pay for their own primary elections instead of the taxpayer bearing the costs. I don't think that will ever happen since we can't depend on the parties to do the right thing.

As far as the upcoming legislative session is concerned it appears that the Republican majority is making plans to get a few things done and leave early. According to the latest edition of Inside Alabama Politics (IAP), a compromise of sorts has been reached between lawmakers who want to meet three days a week and finish the session on April 1, and other lawmakers that want to meet just two days a week and consume all 105 calendar days allotted for a session and adjourn a couple of days before the end of April. It appears that lawmakers will meet three days a week for the first couple of weeks of the session, and then rotate between two-days and three-days a week, ending the session on April 8.

The motivation for this is obvious. There is no need to do all of the people's work in any year of an election. It looks like Republicans are ready to hurry the session along by passing budgets, avoiding controversy, getting a little work done and going home as early as possible. IAP also reported that controversial issues such as repealing Common Core education standards will not be on the agenda.

I think Republicans have an additional motivation to leave early this year. Sure, they want more time to raise more campaign money. But the rumors are running rampant about the Grand Jury investigation in Auburn, which most everyone believes is aimed at Speaker of the House Mike Hubbard and possibly other Republicans. If a minute amount of the rumors are true the final Grand Jury action will send tremors throughout the state. The number of total witnesses subpoenaed by the Grand Jury seems to grow everyday and, if the speculation is true, many of the witnesses are members of the Legislature. All of this leaves me with the thought that Republican incumbents need extra time to weather a storm. In other words, they need to get back home quickly because they have a lot of explaining to do.