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OUR VIEW: Alabama Senate leadership removes Sen. Scott Beason as chairman of the powerful Rules Committee, and for good reason.

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By Retired: AL.com and The Birmingham News editorial board



Committee. (Special) Scott Beason removed as chairman of the Senate Rules

State Sen. Scott Beason, it seems, was more trouble than he was worth.

Republican leaders in the Senate on Tuesday announced his ouster as chairman of the powerful Senate Rules Committee. We'll find out whether Beason will continue to be trouble for them once the 2012 legislative session starts in February.

Whatever trouble Beason might cause on the Senate floor isn't worth the problems of having the Republican agenda in the Senate pushed by a lawmaker who doesn't hold the line, who is involved as a witness in a controversial bribery trial and who has been called a racist and political opportunist by a respected federal judge in a court order.

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One might argue that Beason's ouster as Rules chairman was long overdue. But give the Senate leadership credit: Beason was cut loose well before next year's legislative session. Clearly, Republicans want to distance themselves from Beason's toxic rhetoric and awkward blunders. That's smart and, really, their only option if they want to keep their legislative momentum going.

The short press release sent from Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh's office Tuesday morning didn't even mention Beason's name. The release was titled: "Waggoner to Serve as Rules Committee Chairman for 2012 Legislative Session," referring to Majority Leader Jabo Waggoner, R-Vestavia Hills, a solid, even-tempered Republican known as a team player.

While Marsh didn't list the "many realities" he said caused the leadership to remove Beason, It was later reported that Republicans were upset because he called black casino customers "aborigines."

As well they should be. Making matters worse, Beason took part in the racially insensitive discussion while he was recording for an FBI investigation in the bribery-for-bingo scandal.

U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson later said Beason and former state Rep. Benjamin Lewis, R-Dothan, lacked credibility as prosecution witnesses in the trial "for two reasons. First, their motive for cooperating with FBI investigators was not to clean up corruption but to increase Republican political fortunes by reducing African-American voter turnout. Second, they lack credibility because the record establishes their purposeful, racist intent."

Unless the Republican leadership purged Beason from its ranks, they, too, could have been tainted by the same "purposeful, racist intent" in every bill they put forward. That just wouldn't do.

Republicans will push an aggressive jobs agenda in the legislative session, Beason, meanwhile, may still have to testify in a retrial of the bribery-for-bingo scandal.

The Senate Committee on Assignments voted to oust Beason. Reportedly, Beason was the only no vote vs. five yes votes to remove him as Rules chairman. Beason supposedly turned down a deal to head another committee. That leaves us to wonder if he will attempt to gather his own supporters and, at the very least, keep Senate Republicans from having a sure-fire, filibuster-proof majority.

Senate leaders certainly considered the down side. To their credit, they decided Beason would be more of an embarrassment as chairman of the Rules Committee than as a renegade troublemaker in the Senate.

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