

6 opinions from Wayne F on Alabama politics, the Democratic Party, Mike Hubbard, Parker Griffith and Robert Bentley

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Wayne Flynt visits Huntsville 5.8.14

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[HUNTSVILLE, Alabama](#) - Wayne Flynt knows Alabama history.

A [professor emeritus in the history department at Auburn University](#), Flynt has written 11 books, including *Alabama in the Twentieth Century* and *Alabama: A History of a Deep South State* that was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

During a visit to Huntsville last week, Flynt sat down for a minute interview with AL.com discussing his views on Alabama politics, the upcoming elections and the corruption investigation in Montgomery that has already led to [one lawmaker pleading guilty to using his office for personal gain](#) and [another lawmaker being indicted](#).

Flynt described his political evolution as wide-ranging: He began as a Republican, switched to the Democratic Party during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and became an independent in the 1990s.

We've broken down the interview into six topics that Flynt discussed. The interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

On the future of House Speaker Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, who represents the district where Flynt lives and has been named in the indictment of state Rep. Barry Moore, R-Enterprise:

"My hunch is he will be indicted. My hunch is he will not be convicted. And the reason is the Supreme Court has made it increasingly difficult to do what happened to (former Gov. Don) Siegelman where there is a performance of a certain service - you appoint somebody to the hospital board - and that person gives you contributions. I don't think this (Alabama) Supreme Court is ever going to say that because those two events happened, they are somehow related unless you've got a quid-pro-quo, unless you've got a document (such as) from Richard Scrushy that says if I give

you \$1 million for the lottery, will you appoint me to the board so I can protect HealthSouth (in the scandal that sent Scrushy and Siegelman to prison).

"The real political question is if the indictment is going to come before the Republican primary. If he is indicted - and we don't know what's going happen - he could lose the primary against Shell Toomer. Toomer - Toomer's Corner -- is a pretty significant name in Lee County history. If he is indicted and wins the primary, I don't think any Democrat is going to beat him in November despite the fact that there will not have been a trial."

On the role of race in Alabama politics:

"What Mike (Hubbard) has done is spend probably 250 or half-million dollars in a very good pre-campaign blitz of Lee County in which he's basically running against Barack Obama. One of the really interesting things to me is that the people in Alabama are criticizing Obama for not being effective when actually Obama is running against every Republican in Alabama. How can one man in Washington who is president of the United States morph into the opponent of every Republican running for office? It's a good example of political demagoguery. I really think demagoguery can take religious forms, it can take race forms, it can take class forms, left and right.

The most fundamental thing about Alabama is race and the that. And in a day when you can no longer talk like George Wallace did because 70-80 percent of African Americans are registered to vote and it hurts the state and it hurts you with people like the Business Council of Alabama and corporate types. What you can do is you use Obama as a metaphor and everybody understands what that's about. It's not about Obama and it's not about race in Washington and it's not about race in America. But it's about race in Alabama. And that's what you're voting for if you vote against Mike Hubbard."

On the status of the Democratic Party in Alabama:

"Nobody takes the Democratic Party seriously. And so the debate is between the establishment - country club, business wing versus the Tea Party. The real contest for political supremacy in Alabama is not by party but by ideologicals. It's two ideological camps. Scott Beason and his ilk representing the Tea Party wing and Paul DeMarco and Spencer Bachus, the Business Council of Alabama, the chamber of commerce, Bradley Byrne representing the establishment side of it. The curiosity of that is that just as an awful lot of thoughtful Republicans in the 1950s would vote in the Democratic primary because there was not even a contested race, now it's just the opposite.

"I vote in the Republican primary - and I'm sure that must drive Mike Hubbard crazy. But what I do is I vote in the Republican

Primary in order to pick the least objectionable of the many objectionable candidates - virtually none of whom I would in November unless it happens to be someone I personally and trust. Otherwise, Paul DeMarco is a former student of mine at Auburn and Paul is a really decent, good guy. If I were in the 6th Congressional District, I would vote for Paul. But ideologically, Paul and I are as different as the Tea Party and the NAACP."

On Democratic gubernatorial candidate Parker Griffith of Huntsville, with whom Flynt had dinner during his visit:

"I would say all the political instincts would say he will lose. But politics is such a funny thing. The singular most important thing about Alabama voters is that they are so damned cantankerous and unpredictable. In that sense, it's not like Virginia where you have a party hierarchy who says all civilized people who wear shoes and know how to use table silver will always vote for this candidate. If you said that in Alabama, that candidate would probably lose. (Alabama voters are) very independent.

"The liability Parker has is that he is a Democrat. And I kind of like the fact that he is a more independent Democrat. He's got some things he thinks ought to be done on health and things he knows a lot about, like education, which actually transcend party altogether, so that the establishment people, if there was a serious Tea Party challenger to Bentley and Bentley actually lost the Republican primary, I can see a lot of my business friends and Business Council of Alabama supporting Parker. They're not going to support a Tea Party person. Of course, that's not going to

happen. Bentley's not going to lose. What could happen is Parker is capable of penetrating the political rhetoric to get to the political reality."

On Gov. Robert Bentley, who is seeking a second term:

"Alabama is sucking wind in so many ways. Notably, in December 2007, we had 2.015 million jobs. Now we have just a little over 1.9 million jobs. If you look at what the Alabama job market was like when Bentley took office, he hasn't created jobs and all this media attention is absolutely not true. We had, next to Alaska, we had the poorest job creation in 2013. And you ask where are we in education? Well, same place. Our high school graduation rate is 55-56 percent. We have one of the highest percentages of people in the south go to college and one of the lowest percentage of college graduates.

"What kind of leadership has he given us? Certainly not in health care. Every category of health care that you can think of, Alabama is in the bottom five - obesity, heart attack, stroke, cancer, premature births, mortality rate of infants. He's a doctor and he can't give us a good health system. We still have this huge public albatross of health care, we have an education system that can't

compete and the idea that you ship money to private schools in a state where the majority of the population of high school students by 2017 is going to be majority minority, he is all about the future. I think he's a good man. I personally respect him. But I think his vision of the future is the vision of the future of the 20th century. It's not the vision of the 21st century. And I think Parker's vision is the vision of the 21st century."

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On the photo ID law that goes into effect with the 2014 election cycle, which Flynt said is the "replacement for the poll tax":

"We now have a legal system, to the degree we can, of marginalizing black voters and Hispanic voters - by challenging citizenship, by challenging residence, by challenging who they are. To white voters, the argument is, why should anybody be offended by having to have a photo ID. Everyone has a photo ID. Everyone who is in their class has a photo ID. My dad, a sharecropper's son, he didn't have a birth certificate. To get a driver's license, he had to go back and get someone to certify he was in fact who he said he was. If you're white, that's one thing. If you're black, and you think the whole system is targeted against you and any visibility within that system requires you get a photo ID is not unlike the [Tuskegee](#)

syphilis experiment or a hundred other ways in which they government that is white is trying to do something to them

"So you have, one, a lot of ignorance, a lot of people who are educated and they don't have a birth certificate or they were born at a time when there was no documentation of their birth. For us to say, oh, well, I'm going to have to take two or three hours out of my day to get a voter ID, it's a very simple fact. For an African American with no education, for an African American who has dropped out of every visible kind of system - worked in an underground economy, not paid taxes, got paid in cash - to get a photo ID is to get inside that system, which you do not trust and do not understand. It's even worse for Hispanics. Basically, Republicans have been very shrewd by taking something that a rational, educated person of any race understands, which is this unique thing of having an identity, and then impose that on a political system where they know the effect is going to be disenfranchise all the eligible people they don't want to vote."