

WINDOM GALLIHER

MONTGOMERY UPDATE

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Legislators to take break before ‘April showers’

General Fund budget heads across street to Gov. Bentley where his veto pen awaits

The Legislature got a head start on Easter weekend by meeting Tuesday and Wednesday, then adjourning for its spring break.

It was an eventful week despite the relatively short meeting time, and outside factors certainly added to the drama.

Legislatively, the most important news of the week was that the Senate concurred in the House changes to the General Fund budget, sending it to Gov. Robert Bentley. For his part, Gov. Bentley has said he will veto the budget. It won't matter. The Legislature will surely override the veto – it only takes a majority vote of both chambers. Even so, most are now expecting a summer special session on Medicaid funding.

One heavy legislative lift was completed Tuesday as HB34 by Rep. Mac McCutcheon (R-Madison) received final passage from the Senate, and the House quickly concurred in Senate amendments. The Alabama Renewal Act, as it is entitled, will provide tax credits for increased activities at the state's ports and launch a new round of economic development incentives. The bill was introduced last year, and while it didn't pass, it gave its proponents the information they needed to shore up support.

Even so, large incentive bills get plenty of attention these days and the bill was reviewed closely. With two calm, steady sponsors – Rep. McCutcheon in the House and Senate Majority Leader Greg Reed (R-Jasper) – the bill moved slowly but surely through the Legislature. Gov. Bentley will sign the bill.

In the House, Rep. John Rogers (D-Birmingham) slowed things to a crawl on



REP. MAC McCUTCHEON (R-MADISON) GUIDED THE ALABAMA RENEWAL ACT THROUGH THE LEGISLATURE; BILL EXPECTED TO EARN GOVERNOR'S SIGNATURE

Tuesday in reaction to a bill that was set for a committee hearing regarding appointments to the Birmingham Water Works Board. Once he was promised that the bill wouldn't come out of committee that day, he relented and the House passed nearly three dozen bills Thursday on a "10-Minute Calendar," which as its name implies restricts debate on each bill to 10 minutes. Such calendars give members the opportunity to pass non-controversial bills quickly and move them through the process.

Beyond the economic incentive bill, the Senate struggled to get much done. It did, however, debate Gov. Bentley's prison bond issue bill. It appears to have wide support, but there's some work to be done to get it through the Senate. After spending some time on the bill Thursday morning, the Senate set the bill aside. Ultimately, Senate Pro Tem Del

Marsh decided the members needed to get an early start on spring break and adjourned the body.

With the Legislature off until April 5, there will be time for members to spend time with families – and their constituents – but make no mistake: there will be plenty of action over the remaining days and weeks of the session.

Officially, upon return on April 5, there will be 12 remaining legislative days that can be used over the remaining 41 calendar days. We're definitely not expecting the session to expend all 41 calendar days, and wouldn't be surprised if legislators didn't use all 12 legislative days. What we know is this: the Senate will return to begin its work on the Education Trust Fund budget, as Finance & Taxation-Education Committee chair Sen.

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Budget

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Arthur Orr (R-Decatur) has set a hearing for the morning of April 5. The prison bill and Sen. Marsh’s teacher tenure reform bill are sure to get debate on the Senate floor at some point soon following the break.

As for the House, an agenda has been

prepared for the first day on its return. The bill that is likely to gain the most attention is a bill to extend a tax credit program for restoring historic structures.

The General Fund budget override votes will have to come at some point, and once the Senate is done with the Education Trust Fund budget, then the House will have to decide to concur or go to a conference committee.

All this will play out with two major sto-

ries consuming political oxygen: the upcoming trial for Speaker of the House Mike Hubbard (R-Auburn), which is currently scheduled for April 11, and the swirling controversy surrounding Gov. Bentley, his senior advisor Rebekah Caldwell Mason, and his former Secretary of Law Enforcement Spencer Collier.

The old saying goes that April showers lead to May flowers. It could be a stormy April in Montgomery.

Note: The Windom Galliher Montgomery Update publishes weekly during the legislative session, monthly in the off-season, and as events warrant otherwise. With the Legislature on spring break this coming week, the Windom Galliher Montgomery Update will take a one-week hiatus.