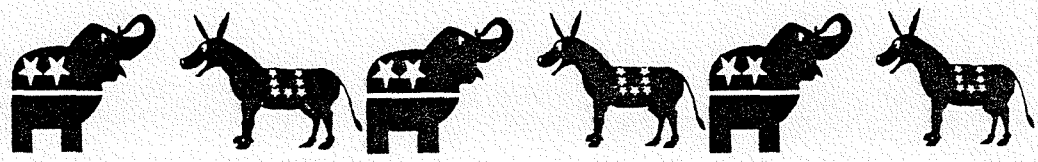
ALABAMA GOVERNMENTAL NEWSLETTER

Alabama Textile Manufacturers Association

May 2, 1997

Volume 2, Issue 13

GROUP WATCH



Negotiations Are At A Standstill

Ten years ago when the criminal trial portion of the fall term in Green County had ended there were usually about a dozen lawyers waiting to try civil lawsuits. Last fall there were about 150 lawyers waiting to try civil cases. There is nothing unusual going on in Greene County, except that it has become the favored place to try civil lawsuits. Greene County, or the 17th Judicial Circuit, includes Greene, Sumter and Marengo Counties.

Plaintiff lawyers have learned that juries in Greene County are more prone to award bigger judgments against corporations. Certainly there are some corporate wolves in this world deserving of some civil sanctions, but it is interesting that plaintiff lawyers feel that justice can be served better in Greene County than say, Jefferson County.

In fact, the number of lawsuits filed in Circuit Court in Jefferson County last year dropped by 18%, while the number filed in Green County rose by 117%. It seems that we are seeing plaintiff lawyers are shopping for the best venue, the best place to get a "good" judgment.

State Senator Stephen Windom of Mobile is sponsoring a bill that tries to level the playing field by restricting the practice of court shopping. This is a key ingredient of tort reform. In a nutshell, Windom's bill requires lawsuits to be filed in either (1) where the wrongful thing supposedly occurred or did not occur, (2) where the corporation has its principal office, or (3) where the supposed victim lives.

Windom and state Senator Roger Bedford, who is a big ally of the Alabama Trial Lawyers Association, were turkey hunting together recently and felt that a compromise could maybe be worked out. This did not happen. Business interests very much liked Windom's bill, but the trial lawyers did not. They saw a threat to their income stream and negotiations broke down. The bill was killed in the Senate Judiciary Committee Tuesday.

John McMillan, chairman of the Alabama Civil Justice Reform Committee, said, "It's obvious a majority of this committee is not in favor of doing anything about lawsuit abuse". "I think it would be foolish to say that they've exhibited any tendency to really want to do something serious about tort reform," McMillan said, referring to Sen. Roger Bedford, D-Russellville, and Lt. Gov. Don Siegelman.

There is a small chance that the Senate will pass a bill to limit punitive damages. The Judiciary Committee passed the bill that would limit punitive damages against companies with 25 or more employees to 15% of the company's net

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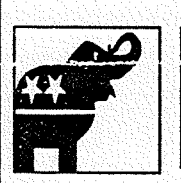
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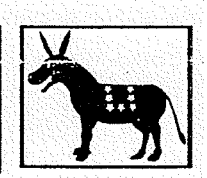
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Alabama Textile Manufacturers Association

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Company Goes From Dirt To Shirt

This week, thousands of volunteers, staff members and fans of the Bruno's Memorial Classic will sport high-quality golf shirts that had their beginnings just miles away from the green grass of Greystone. Russell Corporation's Cross Creek mills in Mount Airy, North Carolina are the source of the shirts bearing the logo of the Bruno's Memorial Classic, but every ounce of the 800,000 pounds of fabric knitted each week at Cross Creek mills comes from yarn-spinning mills in LaFayette, Alabama.

In almost every piece of Russell Corporation literature, the $1.2 billion company is described as a "vertically integrated" manufacturer of athletic and leisure apparel. What this means in civilian terms is, Russell handles cotton from dirt to shirt. Russell Corporation is committed to doing all phases of manufacture rather that spreading the process out to other companies that might could cut production costs here and there. Company officials admit the dirt-to-shirt process may result in higher production costs, but they stress that by having a hand in each process, strict standards for high quality can be maintained. Russell CEO John Adams told shareholders that vertical integration--spinning, knitting, dyeing, finishing, cutting, and sewing--cotton may not be practical for all apparel companies, "but it is right for Russell, and we will continue to do it."

Almost daily, thousands of rolls of cotton yarn spun from Alabama-grown cotton, as well as cotton grown in other Southeastern states, are trucked into mills in Mount Airy. Days later, knitted shirts bearing the Cross Creek brand are packaged, stored or shipped to retail golf shops and department stores throughout the world.

As a major sponsor of the Bruno's Memorial Classic at Greystone, Russell and Cross Creek logos will be seen on the shirtsleeves of volunteer uniforms, corporate sponsor shirts and staff uniforms. Cross Creek has shipped 1,800 volunteer shirts; 1,000 corporate logo shirts; 500 staff member shirts; and 1,200 shirts for retail sales to the Bruno's Classic. If supplies run low, Cross Creek can fill urgent orders from an inventory of 400,000 dozen shirts on hand in its 180,000 square foot Mount Airy warehouse.

The Cross Creek line is just one of several in the Russell Corporation empire, which also includes brands such as Jerzees, Country Cottons, The Game, Chalk Line, PGA Tour and Russell Athletic. Cross Creek products are sold under its own brand name and supplies clothing to Land's End, L.L. Bean, Polo and other private label brands. This information from **The Birmingham News.**

CONVENE TIMES

Senate - Tuesday, May 6, at 9:00 a.m.

House - Tuesday, May 6, at 12:00 p.m.

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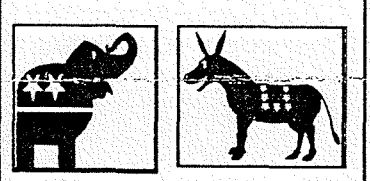
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Not Much Chance For Voter I.D.

Concerned that time is running out in the current legislative session, Secretary of State Jim Bennett, Tuesday called on the Senate to pass the Voter ID Bill in the interest of honest elections. The bill is sponsored by Sen. Larry Dixon, R-Montgomery. "Without some form of voter ID, there's nothing to stop ballot box crooks from voting in the name of others," Sen. Bennett said.

The voter identification bill was on Governor Fob James' priority list for this session, although the administration has been focusing its efforts on other measures. A similar bill was approved by the state House of Representatives in a special session last summer, but died in the Senate. During that special session James signed into law a bill that clarified that state law on absentee ballots. That law was designed to cut down on voter fraud connected to the absentee ballot process.

The head of the Honest Elections Coalition, Glenn Murdock, said the absentee ballot law addressed only part of the voter fraud problem. He said the voter I.D. bill would help reduce election-day irregularities, including attempts to pad vote totals or rig election machines after the polls close. Under the bill, county election officials would have to appoint an equal number of Republicans and Democrats as poll workers. This helps prevent fraud before it occurs by making sure those who monitor the process are not all aligned with one political party. The bill also would stiffen penalties for voter fraud.

Rufus Huffman, a former Bullock County probate judge, said the bill would protect the one-person, one-vote principle that this country was founded on. He said it would also end a practice still taking place in some counties in which illiterate people are coerced into voting for a candidate, or even selling their votes for a few dollars.

Murdock said with lawmakers already well-versed on the bill, there's still time to pass it, even with just five working days in the legislative session. The bill has passed legislative committees in the House and Senate, but has not come up for a vote in either chamber. Larry Dixon, however, says with many major issues pending, it will be a serious challenge to get it through in the final days. This information from **The Birmingham News, the Office of The Alabama Secretary of State, and the Alabama Radio Network.**

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worth or 75 times the financial benefit the company received from its wrongdoing, whichever is less. Punitive damages against individuals or smaller companies would be 10% of the defendant's net worth or 50 times the benefit of the wrongdoing, whichever is less. Windom said senators could try to bring this bill, which is authored by Sen. Bedford, up before the full Senate Thursday, rewrite it to resemble the House-passed bill and send it to the House for debate. Thursday is probably the last chance to do that, however, Windom said, because of the Senate's procedural rules.

It is interesting how two prominent Alabama businessmen feel about this issue. Elmer Harris, the president of Alabama Power Company and D. Paul Jones, the CEO at Compass Bancshares and the incoming chairman of the Business Council of Alabama are not in disagreement over the issue but take different approaches to tort reform. Harris is a man wanting a "win, win" agreement between business and the plaintiff lawyers. Jones, on the other hand is said to be more of a hard-liner, unwilling to sign onto anything he views as a weak-sister agreement. One insider said, "This is like Alabama-Auburn football. Somebody has got to lose." This information from **The Birmingham News and the Montgomery Advertiser.**

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