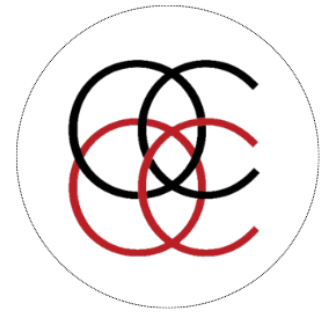


GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS UPDATE



December 2021



Governmental Affairs Newsletter

Advocacy is a key part of what we do here at the Opelika Chamber. We value the importance of keeping our community informed. To learn what's happening in all things governmental relations at the state and federal level, read on.

WHAT'S INCLUDED:

- State of our Economy
- Alabama Legislative Update
- Federal Updates and how they affect Alabama
 - Vaccine Mandate
 - Infrastructure Bill

If you're interested in getting governmental affairs related emails, let us know here!

[CLICK HERE!](#)

State of our Economy

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Employment in Alabama

Alabama's October unemployment rate holds steady at 3.1% compared to October of 2020 which was 4.7%. This is the lowest number of unemployed persons recorded in 2021. In Lee County, we had an unemployment rate of 2.3% for October 2021. Alabama wage and salary employment also increased in October by 28,700.*

Local Companies are Investing in Opelika

The City of Opelika's Economic Development department has released some exciting announcements regarding local companies investing in Opelika.

- **Hanwha Cimarron LLC**, a maker of carbon fiber-wrapped, high-pressure storage tanks, has invested \$130 million to build a manufacturing plant here in Opelika that will employ 261 people. [Learn more.](#)
- **Cumberland Plastics** invested \$5.7 million in a facility with 155,000 square feet for injection molding and value-add assembly. They recently announced an additional expansion plan. [Learn more.](#)
- **Jo-Ann's Fabric** distribution center currently employs 285 employees and now plans to invest an additional \$7.7 million in capital which will create 30 new jobs over the next 3 years. [Learn more.](#)
- **Pharmavite** will be investing more capital into its facility in Opelika to establish additional manufacturing capacity. The company currently employs 460 employees and now plans to invest an additional \$7.9 million in capital which will create 81 new jobs this year. [Learn more.](#)



*According to the Alabama Department of Labor

State of our Economy

Despite the strong growth locally, we are experiencing challenges and hardships due to the following national issues:

Workforce Shortage

The U.S. Chamber released a **special report on the state of the workforce** after conducting a survey of small businesses who have initiated the hiring process. It revealed that businesses are finding it more difficult now than this summer to fill job openings.

Why it matters: Nearly three-in-five small business owners (58%) say they are likely to hire this year. Nearly half (49%) of small businesses that are actively hiring say it's hard to find candidates with the skills they need, and more than half (52%) say they are concerned about their staffing. Just know, you are not alone.

Supply Chain Issues

American businesses and consumers face severe effects from the nation's supply chain shortage. Ports with hundreds of ships waiting to dock, warehouse space shortages, and the lack of rail and highway freight capacity are leading to empty shelves and higher prices. Advocacy is happening now to bring this pertinent issue to Washington's attention. No definitive word on what we expect to come from those meetings, but we feel marginally better that the issue is being prioritized.

At the Opelika Chamber, we've been encouraging a bypass of these issues during the holiday season with our **Keep the Cheer Here** campaign, encouraging our community to shop with our local businesses and partners who can fulfill their orders immediately.

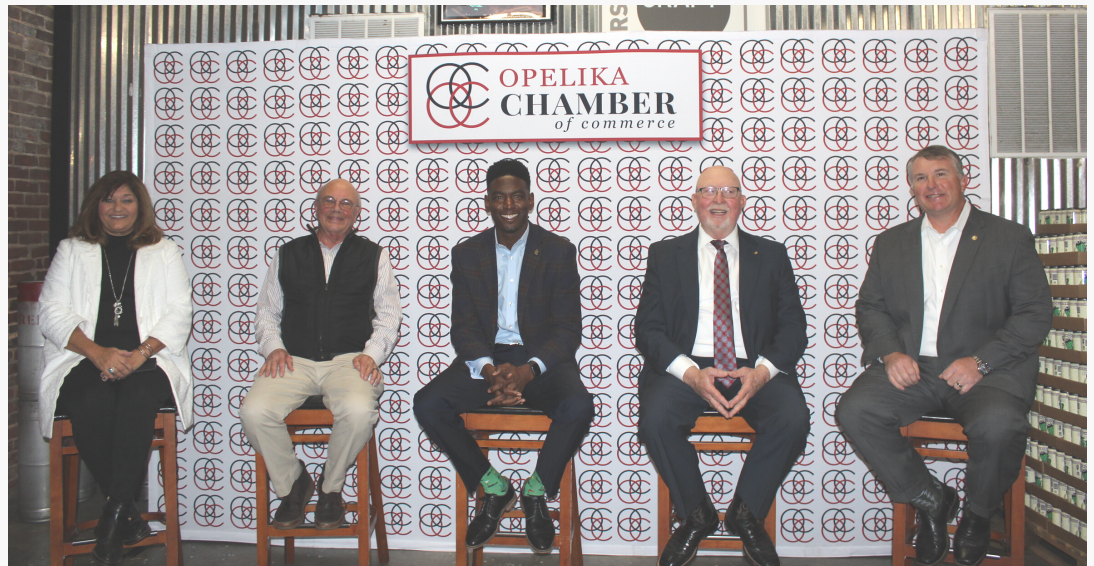
Alabama Legislative Update

Legislative Reception Recap

At the Opelika Chamber's recent Legislative Reception, Alabama legislators gathered together for an informative Q & A session at Red Clay Brewing in Opelika. They first discussed the importance of broadband efforts across the state, especially in rural parts. Alabama legislature has put incentives in place to encourage private businesses to invest in broadband infrastructure, so they hope to see continued improvement of coverage. They also discussed the future of the lottery. The lottery can be a divisive topic, but citizens want to vote on a clean lottery bill.

Legislature was also just passed for the largest education budget in history. The **6%** increase for the 2022 education budget began October 1st, 2021. The increase allocated **\$7.7** billion from the Education Trust

Fund, the largest amount ever and about **\$452** million more than this year. You can learn more about the education budget [here](#).



Pictured (L to R): Representative, District 38, Debbie Wood; Representative, District 37, Bob Fincher, Representative, District 83, Jeremy Gray, Senator, District 13, Randy Price, Representative, District 79, Joe Lovvorn. Not pictured: Representative, District 81, Ed Oliver.

Alabama Legislative Update

SESSION UPDATES

Redistricting Special Session

The Alabama Legislature convened in special session on October 28 to discuss plans for redistricting. Four bills were approved by the legislature which redrew Alabama's House, Senate, Congressional and State Board of Education districts based on the Census data accumulated in 2020. New maps were drawn and can be found below:

- [State Senate District Map](#)
- [State House District Map](#)
- [State Congressional District Map](#)
- [State Board of Education District Map](#)

The upcoming regular session will convene on January 11, 2022. The highest priority item will be the passing of the budget. As it is an election year, many issues will likely be discussed, but it is unlikely that controversial legislation will be considered for a vote.

Federal Updates Affecting AL

VACCINE MANDATES & EXEMPTIONS

The federal vaccine mandate for private sector 100+ employees is currently on pause because OSHA has rescinded their ETS, and there are pending court cases testing its validity. **At this time, 100+ employers do not need to require vaccines.** Learn more about OSHA's decision in relation to the Federal vaccine mandate updates [here](#).

A federal judge in Georgia issued a nationwide preliminary injunction earlier this week **that prohibits the government from enforcing the vaccine mandate that applies to federal contractors.** The court's order covers all contractors and subcontractors in the United States and its territories, and will be in place until further notice. For a full briefing of this ruling, [click here](#).

On a state level, Alabama legislators have focused efforts to pass legislation that would make it easier for employees to obtain exemptions from COVID-19 vaccine mandates. Several pieces of anti-vaccine mandate legislation have been introduced, but SB 9 quickly became the favored vehicle of the House and Senate leadership. SB 9 provides a COVID-19 vaccination exemption to any employee who completes, signs and submits a form based on medical and religious beliefs to their employer. These forms are available at no charge online [here](#). Another bill, SB 15, was approved and will prohibit COVID-19 vaccinations for minors without parental consent. Learn more about the recent Alabama vaccine mandate updates [here](#).

Federal Updates Affecting AL

Infrastructure Bill

A **\$1.2 trillion** dollar federal infrastructure package has recently been approved by Congress. John Sharp at AL.com put out a great article and breakdown of how this bill impacts the state of Alabama in the next five years. Read on below:

- \$5.2 billion for federal-aid highway programs and \$255 million for bridge replacements
- A minimum of \$100 million to upgrade broadband coverage
- \$400 million for public transportation
- \$23 million to protect against wildfires and \$19 million to protect against wildfires
- \$79 million to support the expansion of electric vehicle charging throughout the state.
- \$782 million to improve water infrastructure across the state
- \$140 million for infrastructure development at its airports.

Funding also exists for the state's ports and rail networks. This added funding is obviously necessary after the most recent analysis by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). Alabama was given a C- grade on its infrastructure report card.

We are staying in tune with the upcoming announcements to learn how we can ensure this funding supports our community. Read more on this and how it will affect Alabama [here](#).