Alabama Secretary of State John H. Merrill

Annual Report 2016

Inauguration Day 2015

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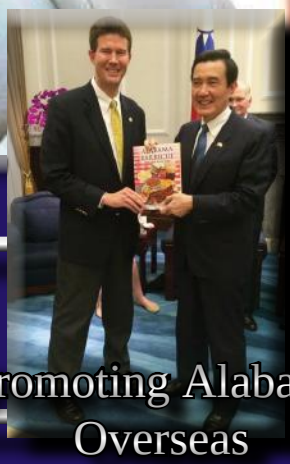

Promoting Alabama Overseas

John & Cindy visit the Maine State Capitol.

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"One person can make a difference, and everyone should try."

-John F. Kennedy

Merrill Family: son, Brooks, wife, Cindy, Secretary John Merrill, & daughter, Allie Grace

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JOHN H. MERRILL
SECRETARY OF STATE

January 1, 2016

Dear Citizens of Alabama:

Happy New Year 2016, and welcome to our first Annual Report. Serving as your Secretary of State has been a tremendous honor, and 2015 was certainly a productive year for those of us who serve you in the office of the Secretary of State.

Inside, you'll find detailed information on the responsibilities of the Secretary of State's Office, the savings we have generated for you, the SEC Presidential Primary, a Constituent Services Report, Alabama's promotion overseas, and much more.

2015 was an outstanding year! Let's make 2016 even greater!

Sincerely,

John H. Merrill
Secretary of State

About the Secretary of State's Office

State law gives the Secretary of State over 1,000 different duties, and virtually all of them involve processing and filing documents that are public records. Many of the documents must have the Great Seal of Alabama affixed in order to make them official. Approximately 500,000 documents are stored in the Secretary of State's office, and they basically fall under four categories: **Executive, Legislative, Elections,** and **Business.**

In order to keep up with the public demand for access to these records, the office uses extensive computer and information technology. The Alabama Secretary of State's Office was one of the first in the nation to successfully store and retrieve the records on an optical disk, but today, many of the corporate and Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) records are available to businesses via the Internet.

Executive: Many of the executive records have both the signatures of the Secretary of State and the Governor because the Secretary of State serves as the Governor's personal notary public. When the Secretary of State is witnessing the Governor's signature, the Great Seal of Alabama is used as the "notary" seal.

Included in this type of executive records are writs of arrest, contracts, deeds, and leases. Other executive records include listings of abandoned vehicles found in the state, information on municipal incorporations, and the names of all the notaries publicly registered in Alabama.

Legislative: The Secretary of State is custodian of the original legislative bills that become law and is responsible for assigning an act number to each. The office ensures that the acts and minutes from the legislative sessions are distributed in bound volumes called the *Acts of Alabama*, the *House Journal*, and the *Senate Journal*. The Secretary of State also distributes the state law books called the *Code of Alabama, 1975* to governmental agencies.

Elections: The Secretary of State is Alabama's "Chief Election Official." The Secretary of State is given many different election duties under state law. Election records include vote totals, certified ballots, and records showing how much money candidates and political committees raised and spent during an election. Copies of certificates of elections, commissions, and oaths of office are also on file for many elected officials.

Business Records: Business records are divided into three categories: **Lands & Trademarks**, **Business Entities**, and **Uniform Commercial Code (UCC).**

The Lands and Trademarks Section has the original state land records dating back to the days when Alabama first achieved statehood. All of the trademarks registered in the state are also found here.

Business Entity staff members reserve names of businesses, index domestic filings, and file foreign filings for businesses that register to do business in Alabama. The state has about 500,000 business entity filings, and staff members usually get about 300 requests each day for information in those files.

The UCC Section maintains more than 800,000 financing statements that are filed by secured parties, which may include attorneys and banking institutions.

Inauguration Day 2015

January 19, 2015 proved an important and festive day in Montgomery, Alabama, as several elected officials were sworn into office. Robert Bentley, Kay Ivey, Luther Strange, Young Boozer, and John McMillan took their oaths, respectively, as Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, State Treasurer, and Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries for their second terms in office. Jim Ziegler became the State Auditor, and John H. Merrill began service as Alabama's 53rd Secretary of State.

The inauguration ceremony commenced at 9:00 a.m. upon a clear, sunny morning, on the front steps of the Alabama State Capitol, and after the Governor's inspirational speech, each elected official took the constitutionally required oath, promising a productive term of public service before an audience of hundreds. "This really is a dream come true," Secretary Merrill stated. "It's the greatest honor of my life to serve as Alabama's 53rd Secretary of State, and I will work each and every day to help and serve the people of Alabama."

A parade followed the ceremony, and a reception was organized at the Alabama Archives and History Museum, where the public congregated to meet the newly elected Secretary.

Inauguration Day 2015 came to a close with the traditional Governor's Ball, and the next morning on January 20, 2015, Secretary Merrill began his first official day as Secretary of State with a friendly smile and detailed plan to develop a brighter future for Alabama.

First International Adoption Day Celebration 2015

Have any questions for our Authentications, Trademarks, & Lands Division? Call 334-242-5325.

Courtesy of Piel Photography

Courtesy of Piel Photography

Have you adopted an international child? Interested in participating in next year's International Adoption Day Celebration? Contact us at 334-242-7200, and we'll add your name to our invitation list!

On January 29, 2015, Secretary John H. Merrill organized Alabama's very first International Adoption Day Ceremony. Over twenty families and agencies attended the event and received well-deserved recognition for their kind and selfless endeavors.

Secretary Merrill explained that he was deeply inspired by the relationship he established with the Allen family. Residents of Northport, Alabama, the Allens experienced a number of difficulties when adopting their second international child, but despite their troublesome circumstances, they were determined to provide a new home for their newest, precious addition. "I was very impressed and motivated by their perseverance," Secretary Merrill stated. "As a result, I want to remove all obstacles from the international adoptions process, as well as honor those who adopt these wonderful children into their families." The Secretary of State's Authentications, Trademarks, and Lands Division is working diligently to make the process easier.

The International Adoption Day Ceremony began at 2:00 p.m. in the Alabama State Capitol's Old House Chamber. Before the ceremony, Secretary Merrill greeted the incoming families and children, who were just as excited about the event as their parents. Governor Robert Bentley and the Secretary delivered heart-warming speeches before bestowing each family with a certificate of recognition, and after taking photographs with the state officials, everyone was invited to the reception held in the Capitol's Old Archives Room. "I was more than happy to honor these magnificent families," Secretary Merrill explained, "and I'm looking forward to honoring more families in next year's ceremony."

Secretary Merrill plans to make International Adoption Day an ongoing, annual event.

NASS Medallion Award Ceremonies 2015

"The NASS Medallion Award allows individual Secretaries of State to recognize outstanding service and dedication to furthering the mission of the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) within the states."

-www.nass.org

2015 Medallion Award Recipients:

Former Secretary of State
Jim Bennett

Former Secretary of State &
Congressman Glen Browder

Professor Emeritus
William Stewart

Civil Rights Attorney
Fred Gray

Birmingham Attorney
Gregory Butrus

www.nass.org

Secretary Merrill's very first NASS Gold Medallion Award was presented to Alabama's former Secretary of State Jim Bennett on March 18, 2015 at Archives and History. Secretary Bennett, a native of Red Oak, Iowa, graduated from Jacksonville State University with a Bachelor of Science degree and The University of Alabama with a Master of Arts. He was appointed as Alabama's 49th and 52nd Secretary of State and served in the Alabama House of Representatives and the State Senate. He also served as President of the National Association of Secretaries of State and wrote a variety of history books, such as *Tannehill and the Growth of the Alabama Iron Industry* in 1999 and *Historic Birmingham and Jefferson County* in 2008.

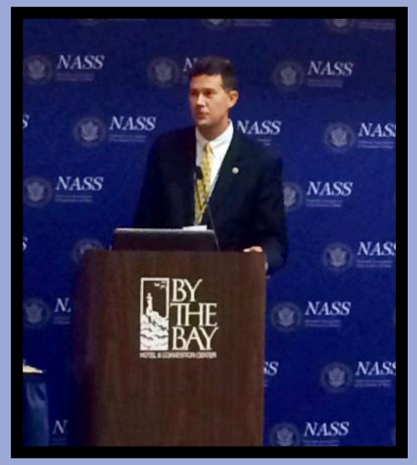
Former Secretary of State and Congressman Glen Browder received the second NASS Medallion Award on April 7, 2015. Born and raised in Sumter, South Carolina, Congressman Browder earned his Bachelor of Arts in History at Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina and a Master of Arts and Ph.D. in Political Science at Atlanta, Georgia's Emory University. Before beginning his political career, he worked as a sportswriter for the *Atlanta Journal*, President of Anniston, Alabama's Data Associates, a Political Science Professor at Jacksonville State University, and an investigator for the United States Civil Service Commission. From 1982 to 1986, he served the Alabama House of Representatives and passed the *Browder Education Reform Act on 1984*, the *Alabama Crime Victims Compensation Act of 1985*, and the *Alabama Performance-Based Career Incentive Program Act of 1985*. Furthermore, Congressman Browder became Alabama's 45th Secretary of State, was elected to serve the One Hundred First Congress, and wrote several books, such as *The Future of American Democracy: A Former Congressman's Unconventional Analysis* in 2002, *The South's New Racial Politics: Inside the Race Game of Southern History* in 2009, and *Stealth Reconstruction: An Untold Story of Racial Politics in Recent Southern History* in 2010.

Secretary Merrill awarded his third NASS Medallion Award of the year on July 21, 2015, to Dr. William H. Stewart, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at The University of Alabama. He received the award during his recognition ceremony at Archives and History before an audience of beloved family members and friends, and he certainly is deserving of such a prestigious honor. A native of Hartselle, Alabama and a current resident of Tuscaloosa, Dr. Stewart has served as a dedicated contributor to the state for over 40 years. He graduated from George Washington University and The University of Alabama, earning Bachelor's and Doctorate's degrees in Political Science and a Master's degree in Public Administration. In later years, Dr. Stewart has worked as a Political Science Professor, Fellow of the Institute for Political and Social Science Research, and Chairman for the Department of Political Science at The University of Alabama, where he currently serves as Professor Emeritus. Furthermore, he wrote a number of **articles**, such as "Reapportionment with Census Districts: The Alabama Case" for the *Alabama Law Review*, "Local and State Government in the South" for the *Encyclopedia of Southern History*, and "Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations: Causes and Consequences of Political Change," **monographs**, such as "Voter's Guide to the 1976 Elections," "Citizen Participation in Public Administration," and "Alabama and the 1976 Presidential Election," and **books**, such as *The Alabama State Constitution: A Reference Guide 1st Edition*, *The Alabama Constitutional Commission*, and *Concepts of Federalism*, amongst various other noteworthy publications. He has also been involved with a number of consultantships throughout the state, which includes serving as the Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs.

Civil Rights Attorney Fred D. Gray was honored on August 12, 2015, with Secretary Merrill's fourth NASS Medallion Award, and the occasion proved to be the most momentous. Dr. Gray, a graduate of the Nashville Christian Institute, Alabama State University, and Case Western Reserve University with several honorary Doctor of Law degrees from The University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Alabama State University, and Southwestern Christian College, significantly impacted prejudice society through his involvement with the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Movements. He represented both Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during their fight for freedom, and also handled a number of notable court cases, such as *Browder vs. Gayle* in 1956, which was argued before the Supreme Court about the desegregation of public buses in Montgomery, *Dixon vs. The Alabama Board of Education* in 1961, which reinstated the Alabama State College's unconstitutionally-expelled students, and *Williams vs. Wallace* in 1965, which led to the protection of the Selma to Montgomery marchers. Furthermore, he is admitted to practice in multiple courts, such as the Supreme Court of Ohio, 1954, Supreme Court of Alabama, 1954, U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Alabama, 1955, the Supreme Court of the United States, 1956, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, 1958, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Alabama, 1963, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, 1968, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, 1982, and Tax Court, 1968. Moreover, Dr. Gray's endeavors have led to his Presidency of the National Bar Association, as well as his 2002 Presidency of the Alabama State Bar Association, serving as the first African American President of the association, amongst countless other noteworthy accomplishments.

Birmingham Attorney Gregory Butrus received Secretary Merrill's fifth and final NASS Medallion Award of the year on November 6, 2015. A graduate of the University of Notre Dame and its affiliated law school, Mr. Butrus currently works as a partner in the Energy Section of the Balch & Bingham LLP law firm, handling state and federal legislative matters and government relations laws, political law compliance and regulation, and economic development policy and issues, amongst various other subjects. He worked for U.S. Senator Howell Heflin in Washington, D.C. and also served on a variety of boards and committees, which includes but is not limited to the Alabama State Bar in the Elections, Ethics, and Government Relations Law Section, the Business Council of Alabama's Judicial and Legal Reform Committee, the Council on Governmental Ethics Laws, the Birmingham Bar Association, the Alabama Law Institute, the Mountain Brook City Schools Foundation Board of Directors, the Alabama Study Committee of Campaign Finance Reform, the Children's Hospital Committee for the Future, and the Governor's Black Belt Action Committee. Secretary Merrill was pleased to nominate all five recipients for the NASS Gold Medallion Award in 2015 and plans to nominate others for the award in 2016.

NASS Summer Conference 2015



"Founded in 1904, the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) is the nation's oldest, nonpartisan professional organization for public officials."

-www.nass.org

July 9-12, 2015 marked the National Association of Secretaries of State's (NASS) annual Summer Conference, which was held in Portland, Maine. Secretary Merrill and over 35 other Secretaries of State and Lieutenant Governors were invited to discuss a number of topics, which included strategic methods to promote voter registration within all 50 states, new voting technology and elections techniques, and programs, as well as state policies, concerning elections, international relations, and business-related services, amongst various other subjects. Furthermore, Secretary Merrill was invited to speak during the conference's Elections Committee Meeting, where he discussed the latest updates for the upcoming SEC Primary, which is set for March 1, 2016. "I'm excited that the citizens of Alabama will have an opportunity to make a significant impact on who will serve as the next President of the United States," Secretary Merrill stated in a press release on June 9, 2015. Governor Robert Bentley officially signed the SEC Primary bill the next day on June 10, 2015.

Online Business Filings

Secretary of State contact for questions or suggestions:

Rebecca A. Morris
Business Services Director
rebecca.a.morris@sos.alabama.gov
334-242-7221

Online Business Filings (Authorized by Act No. 2015-479)

The Act allows the Secretary of State to develop an electronic filing processing program and allow any county that voluntarily chooses to participate in the program by written cooperative participation agreement between the county and Secretary of State. The Act further authorizes participating county commissions and judges of probate to satisfy general and local law requirements by participating in the electronic filing processing program.

In short, Act No. 2015-479 allows for the online recordation of filing activities by business and nonprofit entities. This new online capability will benefit the business community through expedited service and benefit the counties and state by decreasing public expenditures required to provide the services at the county courthouse and at the State Capitol.

At this time, the Secretary of State's Office is working with Alabama's counties to encourage their participation.

Responsibilities of the Secretary of State

- Develop an electronic process for the recordation of filings in accordance with *Alabama Code*, Title 10A and any county local law or statutory requirement
- Contracting for a service provider to supply both the counties and the Secretary of State with the filing document and all data as soon as the filer completes the filing (in real time)
- Contracting for a service provider to supply the counties with the fees appropriate to the transaction no less than twice per month
- Making the filing available as public information to the general public in accordance with *Alabama Code*, Title 10A

Responsibilities of the County

- Execute a cooperative participation agreement with the Alabama Secretary of State
- Provide information on any local statutory requirements relative to filing and recordation of entity filing types designated in *Alabama Code*, Title 10A
- Provide the Secretary the information on the current county filing fee schedule including the corresponding general or local law or other statutory authority related to each filing fee
- Notify the Secretary of any changes to the filing fees, by legislative or other local action, no less than 10 business days prior to a change in fees taking effect
- Provide bank account information for deposit of funds
- Provide changes to any statutory or bank account information no less than ten business days prior to a change taking effect

Online Business Pre-Filings

Online Business Pre-Filings

If a county is not participating in the electronic filing processing program (Online Business Filings) authorized by Act No. 2015-479, the Secretary of State allows pre-filing of the required information online to improve the efficiency of business filings and to encourage the growth of business in Alabama. The Secretary of State is responsible for providing the online system, maintaining the system, and working with customers on their service issues, which may arise regarding the online system.

At this time, the Secretary of State's Office is working to unveil the ability to pre-file entities by March 2016.

Required Filing Information

The filer will go to the Secretary of State's website and choose the type of entity they want to file (currently only LLCs will be accepted in this new, online method). Then the filer will use the provided Secretary of State forms to complete and generate forms. Thereafter, information will be stored in the Secretary of State's database to speed up the filing process when the filing is forwarded from the county probate office to the Secretary of State.

Required Transmission of Filing Document Information

There will be no change in the transmission of documents between the county and the state. The filer will print the document and file it with the appropriate county, which is the usual practice under Title 10A of the Alabama Code. The county probate office will record the filing and forward the filing document and the fees to the Secretary of State per the Alabama Code. When the filing is received from the county, the staff of the Secretary of State will post the state filing fees and scan the document into the state's system. Data will populate from the stored pre-file data.

Required Transmission of Funds Information

There will be no change in the manner of transmission of funds between the county and the state.

2015 Legislative Agenda

The 2015 Alabama State Legislative Session commenced March 3, 2015 and came to a close on June 4, 2015. This past year's Session was the first in several years where the Secretary of State has promoted an extensive list of bills. Here is an extensive, legislative package of the eight bills that passed.

SB 148 Senator Dial/Representative Sanderford
Status: *Enacted- Assigned Act No. 2015-477*
Serving as a technical amendment to the Alabama Code, in regards to the statutes that govern the presidential elections for military men and women, this bill will change the primary runoff deadline in compliance with the Federal Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA).

SB 210 Senator Brewbaker/Representative Givan
Status: *Enacted- Assigned Act No. 2015-440*
Serving as another technical amendment to the Alabama Code, dates for the county wet/dry referendums will also comply with the federal UOCAVA standards.

SB 229 Senator Livingston/Representative England
Status: *Enacted- Assigned Act No. 2015-479*
Due to this bill's enactment, business filing requirements will be filed directly and electronically through the Secretary of State's Office. The program is voluntary, and other counties may participate through written consent.

SB 240 Senator Ross/Representative Henry
Status: *Enacted- Assigned Act No. 2015-239*
Dubbed by the media as the "SEC Primary" due to its act of aligning Alabama's election with the other southern states' elections, this bill changes the date of the presidential preference primary from March 8, 2016 to March 1, 2016. Alabama will therefore have a larger voice in the presidential election process.

HB 41 Representative Standridge/Senator Shelnutt
Status: *Enacted- Assigned Act No. 2015-41*
To assist Alabama's seniors regarding the long lines at the polling stations, this bill will ensure that the physically disabled and those over 70 years old will move to the front of the line.

HB 204 Representative Wingo/Senator Beasley
Status: *Enacted- Assigned Act No. 2015-290*
Initially, Legislators were required to *apply* for free copies of their district's registered voters list, but now Alabama Legislators will automatically receive a free copy of this list within 90 days of their appointment.

HB 254 Representative Ainsworth/Senator Ross
Status: *Enacted- Assigned Act No. 2015-459*
Secretary Merrill initially introduced this bill in the 2014 Legislative Session during his term as an Alabama House Representative. Unfortunately, the bill had died in the Senate. Now enacted, the Secretary of State may exchange free-of-charge, annual, electronic voter registration lists with other states, which will help eliminate double voting in Alabama.

HB 323 Representative Davis/Senator Albritton
Status: *Enacted- Assigned Act No. 2015-367*
This bill will ensure that County Boards of Registrars investigate reports regarding deceased voters, as well as voters who are no longer residents of a precinct.

HB 29 Representative Lindsey/Senator Dial (*Special Session)
Status: *Enacted- Assigned Act No. 2015-518*
Pursuant to the "Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act," this bill will provide a procedure for conducting a federal instant runoff primary election and a special federal ballot for those who vote via an absentee ballot during primary elections.

***For more information on these and other bills on last year's Legislative Agenda, please call Brent Beal at 334-353-7857.**

Taxpayers' Savings

In an effort to efficiently utilize taxpayers' money, Secretary of State John Merrill initiated an aggressive review of office expenditures, since taking office January 19, 2015 and has reduced expenses of the office by approximately $790,000.

"Every day, Alabama's citizens have to look for ways to make ends meet, and it's important that government follow their example," said Secretary Merrill. "This is a simple step to save taxpayer dollars without any negative impact to the citizens of Alabama."

For more information, please contact our Chief of Staff David Brewer at 334-242-7207.

Probate Judges Advisory Council

Secretary of State John Merrill announces the establishment of a Probate Judges Advisory Council to ensure that elections and corporate filings are administered appropriately, accurately, efficiently, and as effectively as possible at the county and state levels. The Advisory Council held its first meeting on Tuesday, January 13, 2015 at Ross Bridge Resort to establish criteria and goals for the year.

The eight-person council is a bi-partisan collection of Probate Judges from counties over the state that will advise Secretary Merrill and keep him informed about issues that need improvement in the counties and at the state level.

Members of the Probate Judges Advisory Council are Democrats:
Earlean Isaac - Greene County
W. Hardy McCollum - Tuscaloosa County
Steven Reed - Montgomery County

Republican Advisory Council members are Probate Judges:
Tammy Brown - Cullman County
Bill English - Lee County
Terry Mitchell - Coosa County
Ryan Robertson - Cleburne County
Tim Russell - Baldwin County

Probate Judges Advisory Council Meeting held at The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa on October 28, 2015.

Secretary Merrill says that the council will bring a great perspective to the Secretary of State's Office. "I look forward to working with the Probate Judges to discuss business filings and elections at the county and state levels to ensure the issues important to the people of Alabama are clearly introduced, evaluated, and addressed as quickly and directly as possible."

Constituent Services Report

- As of December 2015, Secretary Merrill has visited all 67 counties at least once to discuss voter registration and voter photo I.D. delivery.
- Alabama joined the SEC Presidential Primary in June 2015, thus moving Alabama's primary election date to March 1, 2016.
- Since August 2015, several presidential candidates have visited Alabama. (*See pgs. 18-19).
- Since his inauguration on January 19, 2015, Secretary Merrill has reduced office expenses by approximately $790,000. An itemized list of your savings is available for review upon your request.
- Secretary Merrill's first letter in office was written to the Chief Examiner of the Alabama Department of Examiners of Public Accounts' Office to request a formal audit in regards to the current benchmarks of the office. Secretary Merrill is working to turn around nearly a decade of audit issues in the office.
- Coaches Nick Saban of Alabama and Gus Malzahn of Auburn agreed to assist with voter registration methods within the state.
- In April 2015, four of the nine divisions of the Secretary of State's Office relocated to the Alabama State House, which will save tax payers nearly $270,000 over a four-year period.
- Fair Campaign Finance Reports are under constant review.
- The Alabama Election Fairness Project was established to ensure fairer elections in Alabama.
- The Probate Judges Advisory Council was created to ensure that elections and corporate filings are efficiently administered.
- The Secretary of State's website is updated on a regular basis with only the most vital information.
- A new web link has been added to the Secretary of State's website to provide citizens with information regarding Alabama's upcoming statewide, local, and referendum elections.
- The Secretary of State's Office helped plan and participated in the Alabama Elections Conference on October 28-29, 2015.
- A minimum 24-hour turnaround time has been implemented for the fulfillment of public records requests.
- Alabama joined both the ERIC (Electronic Registration Information Center) and the Interstate Voter Registration Crosscheck programs in October 2015.
- Secretary Merrill awarded five NASS Gold Medallion Awards in 2015. (*See pgs. 6-8).
- The Secretary of State's Office contributed to the 2016 United Way Campaign, achieved 100% employee participation, and exceeded the donation goal.
- The Secretary of State Office's Elections Division held a Board of Registrars training session, which involved nearly 200 participants.
- To help the state's fiscal issues, the Legislature was asked to remove the Secretary of State's primary General Fund Appropriation for Administrative Services, which led to an approximate decrease in state funding of $1.3 million dollars. The office is now run with existing revenues.
- The counties will be assisted with the AutoMark Handicap Voting Machines' maintenance until December 2016.
- All counties were encouraged to sign a contract with the Secretary of State's Office to provide full, domestic LLC online filings, and soon, all domestic filings will be available, as well.
- Voter lists will soon be available for purchase online by mid March 2016.
- The first International Adoption Day Celebration was held on January 29, 2015, and the second ceremony is scheduled for February 5, 2016. (*See pg. 5).
- Nine bills sponsored by the Secretary of State's Office were passed in the 2015 Legislative Sessions, and approximately seven to eight bills will be considered for the office's 2016 Legislative Agenda.
- The HAVA Federal Grant Program administered by the Secretary of State's Office has been restructured. In the past, former administrations didn't give the counties the full expectations required on the grant program, which has been corrected.
- Secretary Merrill was chosen to participate in the National Association of Secretaries of State's Toll Fellowship Program. On December 12, 2015, he graduated in the 29th Toll Fellowship class, which was held in Nashville, Tennessee during the Council of State Government's annual meeting. Fred Smith, the Founder and CEO of FedEx, served as the event's speaker.

ERIC & The Interstate Crosscheck

Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC)

- "ERIC," organized by the Pew Organization, is a "non-profit corporation governed by a Board of Directors made up of member states," according to ericstates.org. Secretary Merrill is a member of the Board of Directors.
- ERIC allows participating states to pro-actively register anyone with a driver's license to vote, while keeping the voter rolls up-to-date.
- A cost-saving data list compares each voter's information to the DMVs,' postal services,' and social security organizations' data, which helps the state know if a voter has passed away or moved.
- All personal information is anonymized and handled by the participating states.
- As of October 2015, the member states include Alabama, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and Washington D.C.
- In order to join ERIC, a one-time initiation fee of $25,000 and a yearly fee of $21,035 are required.
- As a result of joining the program, Alabama is required to send mailings to all Alabamians with driver's licenses who *aren't* registered to vote. The Secretary of State' s Office must cover the postal costs, which are currently unknown. However, the Pew Research Group has awarded Alabama a grant for $137,500 to help cover the expenses.
- Mailing is scheduled to take place no later than February 2016.

Interstate Voter Registration Crosscheck Program

- Organized by Kansas Secretary of State Kris W. Kobach and structured after the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 "to ensure that accurate and current voter registration rolls are maintained," the program "protects the integrity of the electoral process by ensuring the maintenance of an accurate and current voter registration roll for federal office elections." All states are eligible and free to join, and there's no cost to participate in the Interstate Crosscheck System.
- Once the participating states pull the data every January 15th using a designated data format, the information is uploaded to a secure FTP (File Transfer Protocol) site hosted by Arkansas, which is then compared to other data by the Kansas IT Department. After the results are uploaded to the FTP site, the states download and process the data, while Kansas is responsible for deleting the other states' information.
- The files are encrypted and secured, and the integrity of the original voter registration list is protected and uncompromised.
- As of October 2015, the member states include Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Virginia, amongst more than 30 others.
- As of 2012, 45,247,823 records were processed and compared in the program.

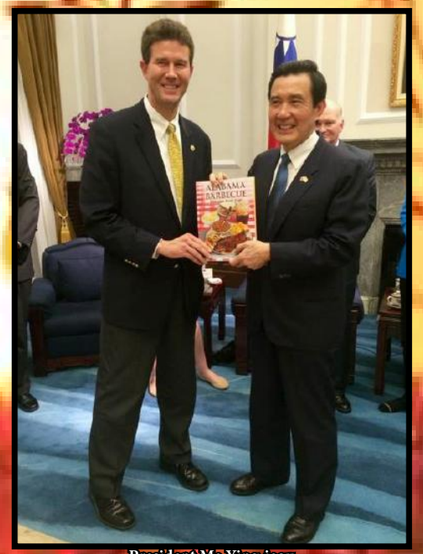
*** For more information on the Interstate Crosscheck Program, visit www.nased.org/NASED_Winter_2013_PP.../KANSAS.pdf.**

Promoting Alabama Overseas

In April and May-June 2015, Alabama took a huge step in cultural relations with Taiwan, the Province of China, and China. From April 18-25, 2015, Secretary Merrill was invited to attend a set of meetings in Taiwan, the Province of China, that focused on geopolitical relations between the latter and the United States. The invitation was extended by the Taiwanese officials, and with the exception of some minor reimbursement, the trip wasn't funded by the State of Alabama. Fifteen individual groups were organized for the discussion of a wide variety of topics, which include governmental relations, elections, business climate, education, cultural exchanges, infrastructure, health care, and economic development. Secretary Merrill was honored and pleased to meet President Ma Ying-jeou, who gladly received an Alabama cookbook, amongst a few other tokens, as a gift from our state. The Secretary was also pleased and excited to visit Taipei and the magnificently picturesque Taroko National Park.

May 30-June 7, 2015 marked Secretary Merrill's next cultural exchange trip, this time to the People's Republic of China. Once again, the invitation was extended by the Chinese government, and with the exception of some, if any, minor reimbursement, the State of Alabama was not responsible for the trip's funding. An orientation and cultural introduction commenced the event, and Secretary Merrill attended five formal meetings with the Chinese governmental and local cultural officials to discuss governmental relations, cultural exchange, economic development opportunities, and educational exchanges. The Secretary, along with a few other invited American officials, were given the opportunity to visit Beijing, Henan, which is a province located in Central China's Yellow River Valley, and Shanghai, and the group even visited the renown Great Wall of China during their stay.

"It was a privilege to be invited to participate in these cultural opportunities and to internationally represent the greatest state in the union," Secretary Merrill stated.



President Ma Ying-jeou

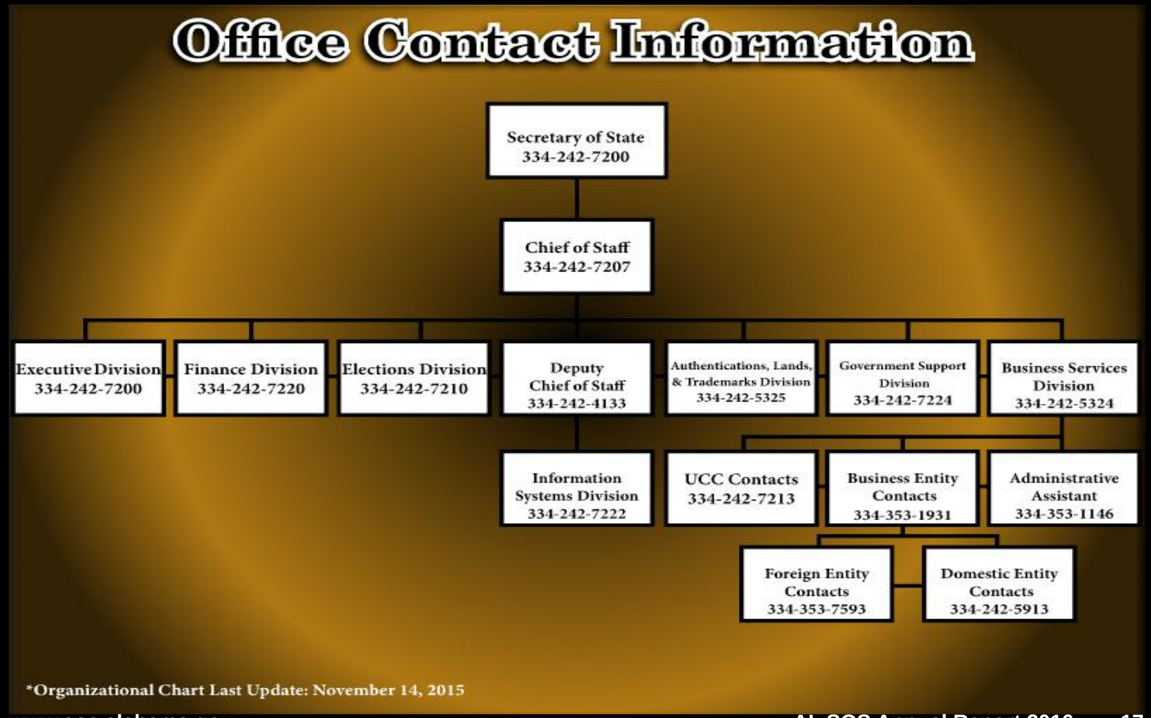
Five Secretaries of State from around the nation participated.

Increasing Transparency

"The government of the people, by the people, and for the people conducts its business in front of the people."

-Author Unknown

Since his inauguration in January 2015, Secretary Merrill has worked to enhance and increase the operations of the Secretary of State's Office. Press Releases are posted regularly under the website's "News" tab, and for the first time, several documents are available online for the benefit of public knowledge, such as Quarterly and Annual Reports, which are posted the first week of every April, July, October, and January, all fees and funds assessed by the office, every board, commission, and committee under the office, which includes a list of meeting durations for each, ballot measures, upcoming elections, and elections laws. Due to the fact that elections laws are now available online, there's no longer a need to publish hard copies, which saves taxpayers approximately $11,000 per year. A Public Records Request link on the website and the goal to answer all public records requests in 24 hours or less are also new additions to increase transparency within the office.



SEC Primary: Presidential Campaign Stops

The idea for the SEC Primary, which has been in operation for over a year, was conceived and initiated by Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp. Named after the Southeastern Conference of the NCAA Athletics, the project was designed to ensure that the Republican and Democratic nominees were candidates that resemble the mainstream thoughts of the United States and to generate more voter participation. As a result, the primary provides an opportunity for conservative candidates to gain additional votes from the participating states, which gives conservatives a more significant voice than in previous years.

The project sought to remove the hindrance the southern states faced in making an influential decision on the selection of the presidential nominees, as well as boost the voters' enthusiasm. Citizens will most likely want to vote in an election that heavily depends on their participation, which overall supplies a much-needed boost in each individual state's government, as well.

Legislative action was required for Alabama to join the SEC Primary, thus changing the election date to March 1, 2016. Secretary Merrill was responsible for overseeing the bill during the 2015 Alabama Legislative Regular Session that officially changed the date for Alabama. During this period, the bill was carried into the Alabama Senate by an African American Senator who is also a Democratic Minority Leader, and it passed after a conservative, white Republican carried the bill into the House of Representatives, which resulted in a collaborative, bipartisan effort between the Republican and Democratic parties. The bill states that "primary elections for the purpose of determining the preferred candidates for President of the United States shall be held the first Tuesday in March each year in which a President is to be elected beginning in the year 2016." After its official passage on June 9, 2015, Alabama Governor Robert Bentley signed the bill into law on June 10, 2015.

Alabama joined the SEC Primary not only to have a more significant impact on the selection of the next U.S. President but to also strengthen the state by generating more news coverage and participation from Alabamians on Elections Day, which, in turn, translates into more votes for the candidates.

The Alabama Secretary of State's Office oversees elections and voter registration within the state, and the project allows our office to execute its responsibilities due to its direct connection with elections. The project's promotion through press releases, local and national news outlets, and social media brings a clearer awareness of the presidential primary to the citizens, which leads to more campaign stops, voter participation, and a better and stronger state government. Also, Alabama could see a significant increase in registered voters because of these promotional efforts.

Since Alabama joined the SEC Primary, the state has gained many of the presidential candidates' attention. From August to December 2015, Jeb Bush, Ben Carson, Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, Mike Huckabee, John Kasich, Marco Rubio, Donald Trump, and Scott Walker have brought their campaigns to Alabama. Their appearances resulted in the increased revenue within each visited community due to the candidates' entourage, as well as increased awareness of the candidates' positions and provided a clearer evaluation of each campaign by the citizens. As previously mentioned, Alabama's economy benefits from the candidates' visits, for people from all over the state and neighboring states attend the rallies, thus providing business for the local hotels, restaurants, and shops. Donald Trump's first visit in Mobile, Alabama, on August 21, 2015, brought in an audience of over 30,000 people, which is the largest crowd of any presidential candidate at any venue in the entire nation.

Jeb Bush

Ben Carson

Hillary Clinton

*Photo courtesy of Al.com & The Associated Press
*Conflicting schedules have prevented meetings with Secretary Clinton to this date.

Ted Cruz

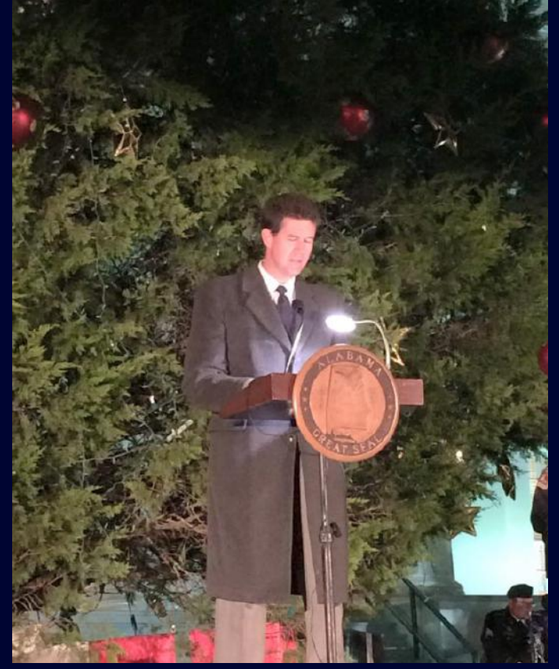
Mike Huckabee

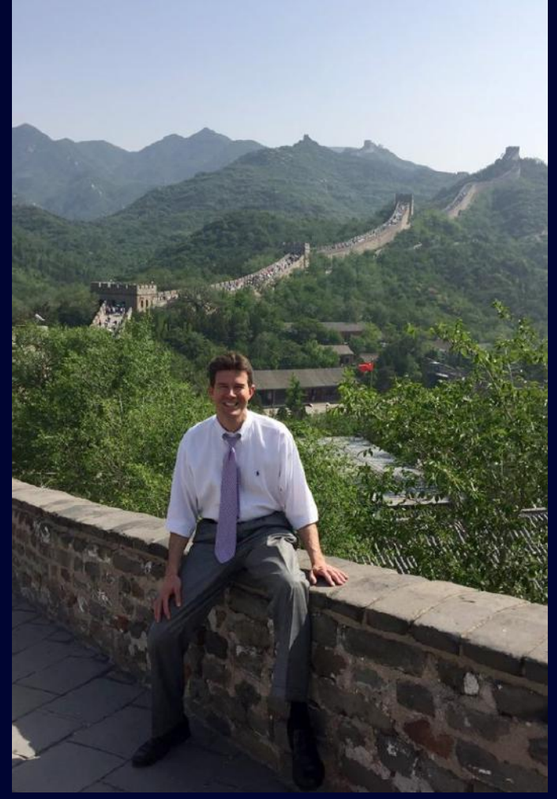
John Kasich

Marco Rubio

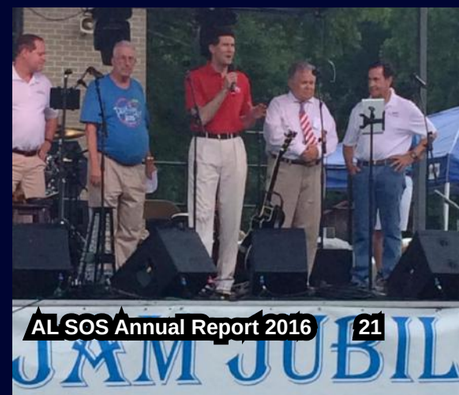
Donald Trump

Scott Walker





A Year in Photos 2015



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