

# **ALABAMA EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION COMMISSION**

## **MINUTES**

November 12, 2024

10:00 a.m.

*Lakeshore Foundation, Multimedia Room*

*4000 Ridgeway Drive, Birmingham, Alabama 35209*

### **PRIOR NOTICE**

Sufficient Prior Notice was given as required by the Alabama Open Meetings Act, the FCC, the CPB, and the policies of the AETC, as reported by APT Executive Director, Wayne Reid.

### **ROLL CALL (VERBAL)**

Since Commissioner J. Holland was absent, Chairman Ferris Stephens asked Lorraine Fancher, Executive Assistant, to call roll. Lorraine Fancher conducted a verbal roll call.

### **AETC Commissioners Present:**

Mr. Ferris Stephens, Chairman

Mrs. Bebe Williams, Vice Chairwoman

Mr. Les Barnett

Mr. Pete Conroy

Mr. William A. Green, Jr.

The Alabama Educational Television Commission consists of seven members. Mrs. Tijuanna Adetunji and Mr. J. Holland were absent; however, a quorum was present and official business could be conducted.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 10:12 a.m. by Chairman Ferris Stephens.

### **REVIEW OF MINUTES**

Minutes of the July 23, 2024 meeting had been provided in writing prior to the meeting for review by the Commissioners. Commissioner Les Barnett noted a typo on Page 2 where it showed FB should have read GB. Chairman Ferris Stephens requested that in the future for consistency to please include the commissioner's or board member's first and last name in the minutes the first time their name is mentioned.

**Motion** by: Commissioner Pete Conroy to approve the July 23, 2024 minutes with changes noted.

**Second** by: Commissioner Les Barnett

**Discussion:** No discussion

**Motion Passed Unanimously**

## **SETTING OF OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business was set.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

Chairman Ferris Stephens noted that there is no old business to be discussed.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

## **EXECUTIVE REVIEW**

Chairman Stephens asked Executive Director Wayne Reid to give his report.

### **Executive Director's Report – Wayne Reid**

Executive Director Wayne Reid shared that the fourth quarter STEM reports were in the Commissioners and Board Members binders and invited any question they may have about it.

Director Reid noted the change in binders to a three-ring binder was to make reading easier. Electronic copies were also distributed via email for those who preferred that method. This change has already saved money by reducing mailing costs and the binders were recycled from the office.

Director Reid thanked Lakeshore Foundation for providing the conference room as well as Commissioner Pete Conroy for helping make the connection. Director Reid informed those present that there would be a tour of the facility available for anyone interested following the AETC and AETFA meetings.

### **Executive Director Highlights**

Sports Update: Director Reid announced that the high school football championships will take place at Protective Stadium in Birmingham on December 4, 5, and 6. Last year's event was the most-watched program, and he expressed confidence in surpassing that viewership this year.

To boost awareness, new marketing efforts included airing commercials on Gray TV stations in Birmingham, Dothan, Huntsville, Mobile, and Montgomery, as well as WIAT CBS 42 in Birmingham during local news segments.

Engage Program Success: The APT debate on the topic: *Should the Use of Absentee Ballots Be Limited?* was broadcasted in August with strong audience ratings. Aired following *Capitol Journal*, the program doubled its lead-in audience. The program was moderated by Pam Huff. The success generated discussions among the Commissioners about expanding such debates locally and perhaps making such special programs available nationally. Chairman Ferris Stephens pointed out that the debaters, Hans von Spakovsky, Manager of Election Law Reform issues at the Heritage Foundation, and Jonah Minkoff-Zern, co-director of The Democracy Campaign at Public Citizen, are leading national experts on the topic.

Friday Cinema Classics Update: Director Reid reported positive progress for the Friday Cinema Classics programming, which has developed a strong following and achieved viewership numbers exceeding last year's average.

Alabama Career Connection: A new show promoting state job opportunities across Alabama, that was developed with the Alabama Personnel Department, and funded through supplemental funding, debuted in October. While audience data is pending, early feedback at the Capitol has been positive. The program highlights various state agencies and will be promoted via social media and websites as well to reach a broader audience.

Director Reid shared a clip from the Alabama Career Connection show, noting that producer Mike Ousley was present. Ousley explained that each agency is allotted three minutes, with eight agencies featured in a half-hour segment. Director Reid outlined the show's format, which showcases state agency directors and the diverse career opportunities available, from fieldwork to lab testing. The show aims to dispel the misconception that state jobs are only office-based in Montgomery. He emphasized that the state offers various roles, including opportunities for individuals with specialized degrees.

New Hires for *Capitol Journal*: Director Reid expressed excitement about the new journalists joining *Capitol Journal*, noting the collaboration with *Alabama Daily News* to enhance coverage.

Trish Powell Crain, former top education reporter at AL.com, has joined the team to cover education and already made a strong impact, especially with her coverage of the Education Funding Task Force in Montgomery.

Alex Angle will join in January as a Washington, D.C.-based reporter, bringing original reporting from D.C. to expand *Capitol Journal's* coverage. Todd Stacy, *Alabama Daily News* and *Capitol Journal* host, emphasized the significance of having a dedicated D.C. correspondent—a goal *Capitol Journal* has been working toward, as no other local news outlet currently has one.

Digital Strategy Overview: Director Reid introduced Lowell Shull, Digital Engagement Specialist, who would present a review of the organization's digital strategy for fiscal year 2024. The presentation covered the performance of digital products over the past year and outlined future goals and initiatives to continue growth in the digital space.

Digital Traffic and Engagement Report: Lowell Shull reported a 60% increase in overall digital traffic from 2023 to 2024, with a 98% increase in education content sessions and a 140% rise in user engagement.

Successful focus areas include organic traffic, blogs, professional development, and Google AdWords campaigns.

Football- and basketball-related content gained significant traction, with visitors searching for APT sports content, establishing APT as a key sports content destination.

Top-streamed programs included *Mighty: The Life and Legacy of Pat Dye*, *Yellow Hammer History Hunt*, *Discovering Alabama*, and *Journey Proud*.

Audience Engagement: The social media engagement rate was 4.15%, within the ideal 2-5% range.

Instagram engagement, especially with longer-form videos like *Garden Party*, increased, with education-related content such as "Ed Reels" seeing a 7% engagement rate, up from 3.1%.

APT's production content had a 10.31% engagement rate, reflecting a dedicated audience.

Digital Campaign Successes: The *Garden Party* campaign had an 8.74% engagement rate on Instagram and led to a broadcast special, *Garden Party's Summer Celebration*, which ranked in the top 20 programs for July.

The football campaign exceeded engagement benchmarks, with a 40% increase in web sections and a 734% rise in local live streams.

Be My Neighbor Day achieved a 9.9% social media engagement rate.

Upcoming Events and Updates: The new *Garden Party* episode, airing on November 14, will feature Wayne Reid helping Trace Barnett prepare a Thanksgiving turkey recipe.

*In the Margins* PBS series released two additional episodes in the fourth quarter. One episode on the Tuskegee VA Hospital earned over 170,000 views, while another on "the role black banks" reached 225,000 views, making it the highest-performing video in the series. Combined, the series has accumulated over 450,000 views, with the final episode, focusing on the MOWA Choctaw tribe, set to air in November.

The *In the Margins* series has provided valuable experience in digital video production and "edutainment", benefiting other APT projects like *Garden Party*.

Mike McKenzie provided an update on programming. For Veterans Day, APT aired a series of special programs honoring veterans, including *Beyond the War* (focused on Vietnam War veterans), *Go for Broke*, and the *Salute to Service Veterans Day* celebration hosted by Nikki Jitin, featuring the U.S. Army Field Band. New specials included *Dad's Secret War* (about an American working with British Special Operations in WWII) and *Make Peace or Die* (about a U.S. Marine veteran creating battlefield memorials).

Mike then highlighted December programming which included:

- *American Masters: Brenda Lee* (exploring her holiday music career)
- *Joy, the Christmas* from the Mormon Tabernacle Choir
- *Too Hot to Handle* (a gospel version of Handel's Messiah)
- Classic Christmas films like *Scrooge Christmas Wish* and *Bells of St. Mary's* (airing twice)
- Special programming from Jacksonville State University's ROC and Randy Owen Center concert series featuring JSU graduates
- Annual broadcasts of *Advent Episcopal School Lessons in Carols* and a new special from the Birmingham Southern Alumni Choir

Chris Holmes reported the completion of the long-awaited *Journey Proud* special, initially planned for 2020 but delayed due to unforeseen circumstances. The 90-minute special documents Alabama's diverse landscapes and unique individuals through all four seasons.

The special highlights Alabama gardeners who are preserving heirloom vegetable varieties through seed saving. It covers the revival of traditional gardening practices, the cultural significance of seed saving, and its importance for food safety, sustainability, and local traditions. The special will premiere on Thanksgiving night, with another primetime broadcast scheduled in December.

Mike McKenzie shared the 2024 Young Heroes series, where vignettes were created for each of the students involved, noting that these stories will be shared soon. A clip from one of the Young Heroes features was shown.

Director Reid called on Todd Stacy, *Capitol Journal*, to give an update. Todd shared updates on recent developments and plans for the upcoming year noting that the team has had a strong quarter, particularly during the dramatic election season. Feedback has been positive regarding *Capitol Journal's* interviews with candidates, especially those running in the state's second district, a significant race. The team continues to prioritize balanced, diverse, and topical reporting.

Todd again highlighted Alex Angle, the new Washington correspondent who will start in January, and will be based in an office partnership with Auburn University near the U.S. Senate offices. Alex will conduct weekly interviews and reports from Washington, offering exclusive insights into national politics, particularly Alabama's congressional delegation. Director Reid and Governmental Affairs Manager, Jack Williams, emphasized the significance of having a Washington correspondent, noting that no other local station offers this type of coverage. They discussed how this unique advantage can help the organization better connect Alabama citizens with their representatives.

AETFA Board Chairman, Barry Copeland, offered feedback on how to maximize the impact of the Washington reporting. He suggested ensuring high-quality production and exploring ways to share exclusive content with commercial stations, thus broadening the audience and enhancing APT's visibility.

Commissioner Barnett proposed an easy and cost-free method to increase reach by sending brief email alerts about upcoming interviews with key political figures, complete with a link to the content.

Director Reid acknowledged the work of the engineering team, particularly Daniel Black, in setting up new equipment at the Madison Avenue Studio. The new setup has significantly improved production quality, as seen in recent projects like the Scholars Bowl. APT is also moving forward with the transition to ASTC 3.0 and working on bidding for the NOC.

Commissioner Barnett followed up on the MOWA (Band of Choctaw Indians) story, noting their school is well known for its strong community ties and academic success. The school has defied challenges while maintaining a strong educational program, which serves as an example of grassroots efforts in education.

Director Reid called on Dr. Briana Morton to give a quick update on education. Dr. Morton shared progress on the Certified Educator Program, which has been running since January. Tracy Carter, Technical Education Specialist, has led the program, and it has seen remarkable success, with over 200 educators certified. The program has

now expanded to include a master's level, and while it requires additional work, there are teachers who have committed. Four educators have already completed the master's program, and they are now being utilized for assignments and services, providing local expertise, and reducing the need for frequent travel.

Heather Daniels-Whitson announced the launch of a new professional development website after months of development. The site serves as a one-page, searchable hub that streamlines Alabama's education professional development offerings. Users can filter by categories such as training type (facilitated, on-demand, in-person), grade bands, location, and topic. A key feature allows users to view upcoming early childhood facilitated training sessions and track enrollment openings for high-demand sessions, aimed at boosting engagement.

Dr. Morton highlighted that professional development numbers have already seen significant growth over the past year, with further increases expected from the new site.

Commissioner Pete Conroy asked about class capacity. Dr. Morton clarified that on-demand classes have no cap, while facilitated sessions typically accommodate 20-32 participants.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business.

### **SCHEDULING OF NEXT MEETING**

The Commissioners discussed the scheduling date for the next meeting, with suggested dates of January 28, 2025 or February 4, 2025. After discussion, there was a motion to set the next AETC meeting for Tuesday, January 28, 2025, in the Birmingham office.

**Motion** by: Commissioner Pete Conroy to approve January 28, 2025, as the date of the next meeting

**Seconded** by: Commissioner Bebe Williams

**Motion Passed Unanimously**

Chairman Stephens noted that there was no further business to discuss and entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion** by: Commissioner Les Barnett  
**Second** by: Commissioner Pete Conroy

**Motion Passed Unanimously**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:24 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Lorraine Fancher  
Recording Secretary

**APPROVED – DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_



Mr. Ferris Stephens  
Chairman



Mr. J. Holland  
Secretary