

ALABAMA EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION COMMISSION

MINUTES

April 22, 2025

10:00 a.m.

*Alabama Public Television, Birmingham Conference Room
2112 11th Avenue S., Suite 400, Birmingham, Alabama 35205*

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)

A verbal roll call was conducted by Mr. J. Holland, Secretary.

AETC Commissioners Present:

Mr. Ferris Stephens, Chairman	Mrs. Bebe Williams, Vice Chairwoman
Mr. J. Holland, Secretary	Mr. Les Barnett
Mr. Pete Conroy	

The Alabama Educational Television Commission consists of seven members. Mrs. Tijuanna Adetunji and Mr. William A. Green, Jr. were absent, and 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 January 28, 2025 meeting had been provided in writing prior to the meeting for review by the Commissioners. There was no discussion.

Motion by: Commissioner J. Holland to approve the January 28, 2025 minutes

Second by: Commissioner Les Barnett

Discussion: No discussion

Motion Passed Unanimously

SETTING OF OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Les Barnett proposed adding three items to be discussed.

1. Requesting update on traditional programming for holidays that has recently been broadcast or will be broadcast that originates from PBS as well as the programming our network obtains from other sources or produced by our network.
2. Update on the "legacy moments" to be produced for the U.S. Semiquincentennial.
3. Discussion about the head of Cyber Command for U.S.

Executive Director Wayne Reid introduced the new station manager of WLRH, Erich Brukner and welcomed him to APT.

There was a motion by Commissioner Barnett to add these items to the agenda with a second by Commissioner Holland. Motion passed.

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 provide his report.

Update of APT Activities – Wayne Reid

Executive Director Wayne Reid provided an update on various activities, including:

Audience Reach and Viewership

- APT remains Alabama's most-watched station, averaging 600,000 households and 950,000 viewers (age 2+) monthly.
- December viewership spike is attributed to high school football broadcasts.

Expansion of High School Sports Programming

- New Weekly Series: "High School Game of the Week" begins August 21 (airs Thursdays through October 30).
- Added Coverage: Includes playoffs, championships, and December all-star games.
- Content Growth: Live local sports coverage will nearly double — from 55 to 109 hours.

Young Heroes Program Update

The board received an update on the 2025 Young Heroes Awards, which was held on April 9 in Montgomery. The annual event honored high school students in Alabama who demonstrated exceptional resilience, leadership, and service. Program highlights included:

- \$51,000 in scholarships were awarded to five recipients.
- Board members Ferris Stephens and Tijuana Adetunji attended.
- Honorees gave moving speeches that left a lasting emotional impact.

Engineering Update

Daniel Black, Director of Engineering, provided updates on multiple ongoing projects aimed at enhancing broadcast capabilities and replacing aging infrastructure.

1. WJIQ Tower Project

- The WJIQ site has officially been deeded to our organization.
- Work is underway to clear trees, allow three-phase power access, and prepare the tower site (e.g., guy wire paths, driveway improvements).
- The existing tower requires reinforcement before an antenna can be mounted.
- Fiber internet has already been installed at the location. Two fiber providers will be used for redundancy.
- Tower height will remain under 200 feet to avoid FAA lighting requirements.

2. WLRH Transmitter Upgrade

- Two new transmitters (30kW main and 15kW backup) were procured after successful negotiation with Gates Air, allowing the project to stay within budget.
- Installation is scheduled for Tuesday, May 6. In the interim, the station will operate at reduced power using a backup transmitter.

- iHeartRadio is assisting by removing and storing the old equipment at no cost.
- There was discussion around preserving the vacuum tubes from the outgoing system for potential personal or historical use.

3. Mount Cheaha Transmitter Site

- The original building (circa 1955) at the Mount Cheaha site is deteriorating. Initial analysis indicates some asbestos is present in the flooring, and further inspection is underway to determine the amount of its presence in ceiling and window structures.
- Plans are being considered to:
 - Demolish the current building and replace it with one or two prefabricated structures; will separate APT equipment and tower tenant equipment.
 - Relocate all tenants who currently use the facility.
- The project is not yet budgeted. Efforts are underway to involve state legislators and the Department of Conservation by organizing a site visit to help secure funding.
- The building currently has a temporary patch for a roof leak, further indication the urgency of the situation.

4. Update on FEMA Grant and ATSC-3 Deployment

- Daniel Black reported that the \$529,000 FEMA grant intended for ATSC-3 equipment at the Network Operations Center remains frozen. While all transmitters and towers are ATSC-3 ready, essential operations center equipment cannot be purchased until funds are released.

Birmingham Production

Chris Holmes, Vice President of Birmingham Production, discussed current projects:

- Bill Baxley Documentary: Recently conducted a key interview; early research underway focusing specifically on Baxley's clash with the KKK, ties to George Wallace, and how those incidents affected his legacy as Attorney General.
- "Way To Go Alabama" Series: Pilot on trains (Mobile–New Orleans) completed; future episodes to cover air, water, and trail travel. Funding in progress.
- Youth Outreach: Active partnerships with Sidewalk Film Festival (student workshops) and Roboto Piano Competition (Oxford High School collaboration on broadcast production).

- Archival Preservation: Participated in Mellon grant project to digitize 1980s–90s Clifford and Virginia Durr documentary (raw media associated with an unfinished documentary that dates back to the 90s); now available on American Archive and Library of Congress. There are plans for in-house digitization with legacy decks to preserve and manage older, sensitive content securely.
- 250th Anniversary Vignettes: Proposed production of 75 historical segments for U.S. Semiquincentennial; funding is pending. APT to maintain editorial control and ownership to ensure accuracy and context.
- New Production – *Higher Education Matters*: A new series by the Montgomery Production Team focusing on postsecondary education, launching May 8 is a spin-off from *Education Matters*; it is the first season highlighting of community colleges, with plans to feature universities. Originated from a conversation with Lt. Gov. Will Ainsworth, it emphasizes alternatives to four-year degrees. Episodes will also be edited for high school use to inform students about educational and career pathways.

Government Affairs and CPB and State Funding Update

Director Reid transitioned to a discussion on government affairs and Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) funding, turning the floor over to Jack Williams, Director of External Affairs, for further updates.

- Jack Williams spent significant time in D.C. securing APT's inclusion in the federal Continuing Resolution, working closely with key Alabama legislators.
- CPB funding, allocated two years in advance, is threatened by a rumored White House "precision budget resolution" that could claw back already granted funds.
- If introduced April 28, Congress would have 45 days to respond; outcome is uncertain due to political divisions.
- National public broadcasting content is under political scrutiny; APT is distancing itself from perceived NPR/PBS bias and advocating for reform.
- Potential cuts could cost APT \$2.8 million; efforts continue to protect funding and coordinate with CPB, peers, and lawmakers.
- Commissioners J. Holland, Les Barnett, and Ferris Stephens voiced strong concern over NPR/PBS's national leadership, in particular the poor

performance by those media spokespersons at Congressional hearings. There was a consensus of Commissioners that APT in our involvement with ongoing discussions with Washington and other officials should make our position known that the admitted bias by the national public media should not continue to go on.

- Commissioners Barnett and Holland discussed possibilities of a shift to block grant funding.
- Commissioner Barnett emphasized the importance of APT demonstrating editorial neutrality and public value amid increasing political scrutiny. Director Reid emphasized his commitment to keep internal editorial practices up to date and to ensure what viewers see on our state network be balanced.
- Jack Williams reported a 3.9% increase in state funding and a \$4 million supplemental appropriation related to the new State House. However, the total request remains \$4.2 million short of fully funding the new State House studio and Madison Avenue studio rebuild.
- Efforts continue to close the gap, including pursuing potential underwriting support from private partners.

Programming Strategy and Planning

- New team member Erich Buckner will explore local programming opportunities in Huntsville and support content development amid the shift towards discontinuing NPR availability on that station.
- Leadership is actively discussing contingency plans for securing quality programming if PBS access changes, noting challenges from streaming trends and distribution shifts.
- Director Reid spoke of broadcast content shortages that are affecting both public and commercial broadcasters, with companies like Gray developing more in-house shows due to fewer syndicated options.

OTHER BUSINESS

Programming Aligned with National and Cultural Holidays

Commissioner Les Barnett proposed developing and implementing a structured programming strategy that aligns APT content with culturally and historically significant U.S. and Alabama holidays.

Commissioner Barnett reiterated a previously discussed initiative to better align APT's programming with holidays and culturally-significant events that celebrate positive aspects of U.S. and Alabama history and culture. He proposed a two-part plan:

1. Create a Holiday Programming Calendar

A formal list of national, state, and cultural holidays (e.g., Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, Easter) should be compiled. This list will help guide thematic programming throughout the year. Commission members' input from the Commissioner's districts to be received on this holiday list to achieve goals of relevancy and broad viewer support.

2. Curate Public Domain or Cost-Effective Content

This particular initiative as a supplement is to acquire and schedule appropriate existing media, especially content in the public domain or available at minimal cost. Examples of types of classics are *Ben-Hur*, *Love Affair* (1930's version), *The Bells of St. Mary's*, and *A Christmas Wish*, etc. Challenges in obtaining broadcast-quality versions due to copyright or licensing costs were noted.

- Mike McKenzie and Director Reid are tasked with assembling a preliminary list of recommended programming based on available, affordable media and the newly developed calendar.
- The board emphasized that this is not to become a budgetary issue at this stage, but a matter of planning and content selection.

Motion by: Commissioner Les Barnett for Director Reid to compile a list of applicable holidays and a preliminary list of free or low-cost content suitable programs for those occasions within approximately one month. Also, requested was a notation on availability (public domain, licensing cost if any, existing in APT's library, etc.)

Second by: Commissioner J. Holland

Discussion: No discussion

Motion Passed Unanimously

Cyber Command for U.S.

A brief discussion followed regarding educational programming and the potential to highlight modern accomplishments (e.g., cyber command leaders like General Joe O'Neil), as well as historic topics like the CSS Alabama, with the goal of telling Alabama's story.

Update on "Legacy Moments" for the Semiquincentennial

Director Reid inquired from Commissioner Barnett regarding the "vignettes", and as to whether what was reported earlier in the meeting about them answered his questions. Commissioner Barnett replied that he wanted to make sure that this was in the works.

SCHEDULING OF NEXT MEETING

The Commissioners discussed the scheduling date for the next meeting. After a brief discussion, there was a motion to set the next AETC meeting for Tuesday, July 29, 2025, in the Birmingham office.

Motion by: Commissioner J. Holland to approve July 29, 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 on the agenda and entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by: Commissioner Pete Conroy

Second by: Commissioner Bebe Williams

Motion Passed Unanimously

The meeting was adjourned at 11:56 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Lorraine Fancher
Recording Secretary

APPROVED – DATE:


Mr. Ferris Stephens
Chairman


Mr. J. Holland
Secretary