

# **ALABAMA EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION COMMISSION**

## **MINUTES**

April 30, 2024

10:00 a.m.

*Alabama Public Television, Birmingham Conference Room  
2112 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue S., Suite 400, Birmingham, AL 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 Mr. Wayne Reid, Executive Director.

### **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

Mr. William A. Green, Jr.

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

### **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by Chairman Ferris Stephens.

### **REVIEW OF MINUTES**

Minutes of the January 23, 2024, meeting had been provided in writing prior to the meeting for review by the Commissioners.

**Motion** by: Commissioner Les Barnett to approve the January 23, 2024 minutes

**Second** by: Commissioner Pete Conroy

**Discussion:** No discussion

**Motion Passed Unanimously**

## **SETTING OF OTHER BUSINESS**

Commissioner Barnett expressed his opinion that there should be patriotic programming around Memorial Day. Executive Director Reid noted that this will be discussed by Mike McKenzie during his report.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Chairman Stephens noted that there were no new business items to add to the agenda.

## **EXECUTIVE REVIEW**

Chairman Stephens acknowledged that Director Reid had been with APT for over a year. He highlighted that the state typically conducts annual reviews and awards a one-step or two-step raise based on performance. With only one step remaining in Director Reid's current position, Chairman Stephens recommended granting the final one-step raise. Commissioner Pete Conroy made a motion to grant the raise; Commissioner Bebe Williams seconded it. The motion passed.

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

Executive Director Wayne Reid started the meeting by welcoming new Deputy Director/CFO Melissa Austin, noting her quick adaptation and learning under Phil Hutcheson's guidance. He then discussed recent Nielsen ratings, highlighting a significant increase in viewership due to the AHSAA football championships, with a notable spike of 147,000 households and 337,000 additional viewers in December 2023. Despite concerns about a drop-off post-football, January saw a smaller decline than expected, indicating successful viewer retention. However, February saw an 18% decrease in viewership. Director Reid emphasized ongoing efforts to maintain viewer engagement through promotions and programming, noting a positive trend in household and overall viewer numbers. He highlighted the importance of reaching both adult and child demographics, underscoring APT's steady growth in popularity.

Director Reid discussed the recent basketball ratings, highlighting substantial year-over-year increases in viewership for various championship games. The viewership data showed significant gains across different game categories, with notable spikes in audience numbers during key matchups. Despite scheduling challenges, such as overlapping with Alabama and Auburn basketball games, viewership remained strong. Director Reid confirmed a five-year extension for broadcasting high school football and basketball, with adjustments to game times based on viewership data. He emphasized strategic partnerships and technical capabilities, noting positive feedback on broadcast quality and coverage.

Director Reid addressed the technical failure in the AHSAA 6A football championship broadcasts due to power issues at the Red Mountain tower and the incomplete installation of the new UPS backup system. To prevent future interruptions, a reliable backup such as direct fiber is needed, though cooperation from MVP providers remains a challenge. Director Reid shared that Chief Engineer Daniel Black is actively working with cable and streaming services to enhance broadcast reliability.

Director Reid provided updates on personnel changes, introducing Jeffrey Sanders as a new executive producer for Capital Journal. Additionally, Wyatt Caruthers was hired as Assistant Broadcast Director for the western part of the state. Former Chief Legal Counsel/CFO Phil Hutcheson, recently retired, remains as a contractor under a retainer agreement.

Director Reid discussed transitioning the Montgomery news team to a modern newsroom system to replace the current Excel-based operations, aiming to enhance efficiency and production quality across news programming. He noted that two systems are under review and that a new system will be in place by fall 2024.

Director Reid provided updates on engineering projects, highlighting ongoing work to install new fiber between Birmingham, the Madison Avenue studio, and the State House. He also discussed upgrading internal bandwidth at all locations to improve reliability. The consoles for the Madison Avenue studio are being built, with a target completion in summer to allow for the installation of new equipment. Additionally, he shared that modifications for guy wires and anchors for the WIIP tower have begun.

Director Reid provided an update on the license for the new tower and transmitter in Lamar County which is still pending FCC approval. The project has been held up for more than a year despite repeated inquiries. Congressman Aderholt and his staff are working to expedite matters. The FCC's slowed operations due to remote work have exacerbated the situation.

In funding updates, Director Reid shared that APT is pursuing a \$150,000 supplemental appropriation from the state for a program aimed at showcasing state agencies and attracting better job applicants. The show would promote state job opportunities in Alabama, highlighting over 1,000 current vacancies across various sectors, including technical roles like IT and engineering. He acknowledged the challenge of attracting non-government employees to consider state jobs. Additionally, Director Reid has been collaborating with Alabama State Personnel to develop a funding model where APT would provide underwriting and production in exchange for state appropriations. This arrangement aims to be mutually beneficial and will be presented to Bill Poole, the Director of the Alabama Department of Finance.

Director Reid had a few leaders share highlights of their divisions.

### **Programming and Public Relations**

Mike McKenzie, Programming and Community Affairs Director, provided an update on APT's programming and initiatives. He discussed Memorial Day specials, including *WWII: Alabama Remembers* and the *National Memorial Day Concert*, local stories such as the Tuskegee Airmen, and ensuring documentaries portray Alabama positively. He shared details on upcoming events like the Great Alabama Public Television Barbecue Cook-Off and the APT Young Writers winners. Additionally, he distributed the Community Service Report, which emphasized APT's educational and community outreach efforts across the state for FY 2023.

### **Education**

Tiffany Armstrong, Early Childhood Education Director, discussed various educational initiatives and events. She highlighted the success of their Educator Program, where 110 K-12 educators completed ambassador training to promote APT resources. Additionally, she noted a significant increase in online training participation for early childhood providers, with nearly 6,000 completing on-demand courses in one quarter alone. Mrs. Armstrong recognized outstanding teachers through the "Teacher of the Month" award, featuring educators like Victoria Hogan from Dothan, Ashley Caffey from Hoover, and Bernice Lewis from Selma, who were honored between January and March. She also shared the success of "Be My Neighbor Day", a community event based on Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood, which drew over 1,200 attendees in Dothan in February. This event aimed to promote community involvement and support for children and was made possible through partnerships with Fred Rogers Productions and PNC Bank.

Chairman Stephens requested more specific explanations in the quarterly reports regarding what the sub-organizations program goals are.

Director Reid provided an update on APT's recent achievements and upcoming initiatives. APT received nine EMMY nominations, notably for *Monograph* in the series category and *Yellowhammer History Hunt* across multiple categories such as informational instruction and children's programming. The *Yellowhammer History Hunt* series, which has been particularly successful in schools, showcases short educational videos and accompanying resources developed in collaboration with an education advisory panel. It serves as a model for their innovative educational approach.

Director Reid opened the discussion for questions pertaining to his report.

Commissioner Green inquired about implementing a newsroom system and suggested exploring the development of an internal system using open-source coding solutions. Commissioner Barnett agreed that using open-source code might provide a cost-effective answer. Director Reid explained that they were still asking for cost estimates for a news platform. He mentioned they were considering various options, including a potential offer for six months of free service from a provider, but stressed the need to fully understand ongoing costs before committing to a long-term agreement. He explained he was exploring alternatives to industry-standard systems like iNews and ENPS to identify more cost-effective options. The focus was on selecting a new system that could serve as a basic model meeting their operational needs while managing ongoing licensing fees effectively.

Director Reid then highlighted the ongoing need for significant upgrades in the Madison Avenue studio, including improvements to the lighting grid and other infrastructure. Engineering is preparing a comprehensive equipment list so that Jack Williams and Director Reid can seek funding from the legislature over several years. AETF Board President Johnny Curry inquired about broadcasting one of the state's three symphony performances to complement the *National Memorial Day* and *A Capital Fourth* concerts. Discussions ensued regarding potential local symphony collaborations for similar broadcasts and the considerable cost challenges due to licensing and performance fees. Commissioner Williams suggested exploring university or high school symphonies to lower potential costs. Chairman Stephens suggested that application of the Fair Use Doctrine would appear to allow excerpts of musical performances to be played and would head off any possible legal issues that could arise by a music licensing company.

### **MORGAN STANLEY ACCOUNTS**

Director Wayne Reid indicated that APT needed to update the Morgan Stanley accounts to include new authorized individuals. Wayne Reid, Executive Director and Melissa Austin, Deputy Director/CFO, will be added, while Roy Clem and Phil Hutcheson will be removed. This change necessitates official documentation reflecting the Board's approval, which will be forwarded to Morgan Stanley for updating their records accordingly. Commissioner Les Barnett made a motion to approve this change, seconded by Commissioner J. Holland. The motion passed unanimously.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business.

**SCHEDULING OF NEXT MEETING**

The next AETC meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 23, 2024, in the Birmingham office.

**Motion** by: Commissioner Les Barnett to approve July 23, 2024, as the date of the next meeting

**Seconded** by: Commissioner J. Holland

**Motion Passed Unanimously**

Chairman Stephens said, as there was no further business for the meeting, that he would entertain a motion to adjourn; such was moved and seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion** by: Commissioner Pete Conroy

**Second** by: Commissioner J. Holland

**Motion Passed Unanimously**


The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Lorraine Fancher  
Recording Secretary

**APPROVED – DATE:**



Mr. Ferris Stephens  
Chairman



Mr. J. Holland  
Secretary