

VIEWS

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Rufus N. Rhodes | 1888-1910
Victor H. Hanson I | 1910-1945
Clarence B. Hanson I | 1945-1983
Victor H. Hanson II | 1983-2000
Victor H. Hanson III | 2001-2009

OUR VIEW

Get your tickets here

THE ISSUE The Iron Bowl's annual ticket giveaway provided yet another reminder of our elected leaders' twisted priorities.

If Alabama's elected leaders want to see the Iron Bowl, they should do the same thing their constituents do: Buy a ticket.

But every year, they are treated to coveted tickets for the big game, and every year, they come up with all sorts of reasons to jus-

tify taking the freebies. This year was no exception on either count.

Gov. Bob Riley got 20 free tickets. Lt. Gov. Jim Folsom got six. Attorney General Troy King and House Speaker Seth Hammett got four each, and every member of the Legislature got two, as did 66 other assorted elected and appointed officials. Some also got parking passes.

Of course, it's all for the greater good. Don't take our word for it. Take it from the members of Jefferson County's legislative delegation:

Elected officials who go to the game "get to know the schools better," said state Rep. John Rogers. State Sen. Linda Coleman reasons that "it does build a rela-

tionship, with getting to know people." And, it generates "good will," adds state Sen. Steve French.

There.

Don't you feel better as a taxpayer, knowing your elected officials are willing to endure yet another Iron Bowl to better acquaint themselves with and get along with our state's universities?

Sure, you do. And soon, Santa Claus will come down your chimney, too.

We are well aware it's not illegal for public officials to get free tickets to football games and other events.

The state ethics law — written, of course, by lawmakers who get free tickets — allows such forms

of hospitality. It requires only that largess be reported to the state's Ethics Commission if the price tag tops \$250 in any given day.

(Universities typically haven't even complied with that, although they should. Note to Auburn University, this year's host: Four or more Iron Bowl tickets at \$65 a pop should trigger a report this year at least with regard to Riley, Folsom, Hammett and King.)

It would suit us fine if the ethics law barred public officials from taking anything of value, including tickets to football games. But even public officials who like to talk about ethics reform won't go there. In proposing a big ethics overhaul last year, Riley in-

cluded tighter restrictions on gifts and hospitality, but specifically exempted tickets to sporting events.

Far be it for our leaders to let ethics get in the way of football.

Don't get us wrong. If public officials want to go to the Iron Bowl or any other game, that's fine. We might not even quibble if universities made tickets available for public officials to buy, even though that's a better deal than regular Alabama citizens get. The key word, though, is "buy."

Public servants are supposed to serve the public, not use their positions to secure special privileges for themselves. If they want to go to the Iron Bowl, they should pay their own way.