

Election 2010: The Governor's Race / Kay Ivey



Cliff Williams/Opelika-Auburn News

GOP gubernatorial hopeful Kay Ivey speaks with Opelika-Auburn News reporter Brittany Whitley Wednesday Jan. 27, 2010 in Montgomery.

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Kay Ivey the politician and Kay Ivey the person are one and the same. What you see is what you get.

Whether chatting between campaign stops, shaking hands with voters or debating in a public forum, the current state treasurer is a straight talker, and she always has a story to tell.

“There’s a story for everything about me,” she said.

Ivey is one of seven Republicans vying for the GOP nomination for governor in the June 1 primary.

When she’s relaxing, she enjoys spending time with her dog, Bear (No relation to Bear Bryant, she said; she’s an “Auburn girl”). She’s even looking for hotels that will allow her to keep the chow chow with her while campaigning.

“He’s going to be a fine First Dog,” she said.

He has a story, too. Ivey got him after he was injured and turned in by his owner at her vet’s office.

Ivey doesn’t have much time for relaxing now. She is an energetic woman who hits the campaign trail hard, stopping at courthouses to shake hands and making time to visit the local politicians.

Ivey knows PACT

She has positions on all the hot-button issues, including one she knows very well – the Alabama Prepaid College Tuition Program controversy.

Ivey is chairman of the board that oversees PACT, which hit hard times when rising college costs and a tanking stock market combined to threaten the tuition program.

She said she supports funding all 48,000 PACT contracts in Alabama.

Her PACT rescue plan consists of two bills: One would guarantee the state would fulfill all PACT commitments, using the fewest tax dollars possible; the second would divide the assets in the PACT trust fund among all institutions of higher education in return for their guarantee of tuition benefits for eligible PACT students.

The PACT fund now has \$505 million in assets, she said. No student has missed a payment. For the time being, she said, “the program is alive and well ...”

Jobs, jobs, jobs

With unemployment at about 11 percent, Ivey lists jobs as her top priority.

Ivey said as governor she would try to diversify job recruitment. Putting all the state’s eggs in one basket — as Alabama once did with the textile mills and is doing now with the auto industry — is not a good idea, she said.

“We learned our lesson with the textile mills,” she said.

She suggests recruiting aerospace, bio-medical and other knowledge-based industries. And she wants businesses of all sizes.

“We need to recruit not just the big boys ... but the medium-sized firms for medium communities,” she said.

Ivey wants to expand existing businesses, which also helps grow the economy, she said. To make Alabama a viable place for industry, the state needs a well-trained work force, she said.

Ivey, a former teacher, said a four-year school is not right for everyone. For some, a technical school is best.

Whatever the case, students need to be fully engaged, which will help keep them in school.

“Give a child a vision and information and a pathway to success, and they will follow it,” she said.

Education is workforce development, Ivey said. To fund education, she said she would cut administrative overhead, as she’s done in the treasurer’s office.

Dollars wasted at the top need to make it down to the local level, she said.

“You’ve got to do that first,” she said. “You can’t have high bureaucracy. You have to reduce administrative overhead.”

She said she could find \$20 million in pork in the last education budget. “That won’t happen in the Kay Ivey administration,” she said.

No to gambling

Ivey does not support legalizing any aspect of the gambling industry, which is touted by supporters as a source of jobs and tax revenue.

“It’s a poor business model. It’s fool’s gold. ...” she said. “Never fund an essential part of the government with an unstable source of money.”

She said funding education with gambling revenue, a plan tossed around for many years, is not a good idea. The tax revenue would not cover what taxpayers would have to spend for addiction programs and other social services associated with gambling.

Experience counts

Dr. Don-Terry Veal, director of the Auburn University Center for Government Services, said the economy and job creation are top concerns facing Alabama residents. Ivey’s focus on jobs could serve her well, he said.

“She wants to go after aerospace and bio-medical and other knowledge-based areas that lead to high paying jobs ...,” he said. “I think that will connect well with citizens.”

He said Ivey’s idea of creating a cabinet position for work force development will resonate with voters.

Two other pluses are her experience with state budgets and her name recognition.

“This puts her in the experience pool to do well in the top office. That comes with strong name recognition,” he said.

Although Ivey could suffer from her association with PACT, Veal said she can overcome it.

“A clear agenda can overcome many of the challenges,” he said.

Ivey said she is ready for the challenge.

“I have the knowledge and the effectiveness,” she said. “I knew this before I ran.”

Kay Ivey Bio Box

Age: 65

Birthday: Oct. 15, 1944

Hometown: Raised in Camden

Married: Married twice. Currently not married.

Children: None

Education: Auburn University

Profession: High school teacher, banker

Political jobs: Current state treasurer; assistant director of the Alabama Development Office

Favorite book: “To Kill a Mockingbird”

Favorite music: Elvis Presley, Sammy Kaye

Favorite movie: “The Sound of Music”

Favorite hobby: Driving her boat and walking her dog, Bear

Favorite historical figure: Benjamin Franklin

Favorite Food: "A good ol' steak"

Core issue: "Jobs, jobs, jobs"