

The Anniston Star

Phillip Tutor: Alabama's future? It's hopscotch

04.13.12 - 02:58 am

If you care for a glimpse of Alabama's future, I have some advice.

Come to my house.

During school hours.

Bring chalk.

Not the wimpy kind used on blackboards. Bring the crowbar-thick chalk made for scribbling on sidewalks. You can find it at most dollar stores. I did last week. A box of it cost a buck.

Before school lets out, we'll take your chalk and trace over the hopscotch pattern that's been etched on the path in front of my house. There are more than a hundred squares. Square No. 1 sits at my driveway. In numerical order, the cubes of this hopscotch trail meander up the hill to the east, toward one of Anniston's elementary schools.

For years, gaggles of Anniston children have made their way down that hill to a community center aftercare program on the other end of the block. There's usually an adult leading the group and an adult holding fort in the rear, engine and caboose. That hasn't changed.

What has is what's on the ground.

Each day this week, these Anniston children have bounded down this Anniston hill with the kind of joy only kids can summon. It's carefree and organic. It's not a planned activity. It just happens. Like sunshine.

Single-file they skip down the hill, 20 or 30 in a row, one after the other, a rainbow of shapes and sizes and colors, trying to master this Ironman-like, downhill hopscotch course as best they can.

Our family dog, a fearless dachshund, goes nuts.

Hearty shrieks fill the air.

Laughter drifts through our living-room windows.

About 2:45, my office phone rings. It's my wife calling to update me on the cloudburst of joy that's again arrived on our doorstep. I've yet to see it. Jealous.

I'm starting to think that the hopscotch trail our kids scribbled Easter weekend on the sidewalk

should become permanent. That's where the extra chalk comes in handy.

It's worth a few dollars of sidewalk chalk to keep these daily reminders of Alabama's future, don't you think?

Granted, Alabama's future is more than elementary school students or a mindless children's game. It's not that simple.

Alabama's long-term outlook — like most states' — is enveloped in all things economic, political and demographic.

Alabama needs more dependable, raise-a-family-on-them jobs.

Alabama needs less political posturing in Montgomery.

Alabama needs a plan to deal with a rapidly diversifying population that doesn't start and stop with Neanderthal ideas.

Alabama needs college education made more readily affordable to more people.

Alabama needs new revenue; moving it from one pile to another doesn't count.

Alabama needs a vision: what does it hang its hat on? The automotive industry? Technology jobs? Manufacturing? Higher education? For what are we going to be known — positively, constructively, effectively?

It's important stuff.

But none of that matters — none — if Alabama does not invest in the core of its future, children like those who have sauntered in front of our house the last few days.

They are, the cliché aptly goes, the future. In Alabama's schools today may sit the next Robert Bentley, or Scott Beason, or Artur Davis, or Sue Bell Cobb, or Bob Riley, or Kimble Forrister, or Paul Hubbert, or Richard Shelby.

For better or worse, conservative or liberal, they will become the next generation that pilots the state, writes its laws, advocates for its poor, directs its public schools, oversees its courts and represents it in Washington.

They may become pastors. They may become police chiefs. They may become teachers or professors. They may live next door to your adult children. One of them may marry your daughter.

They own Alabama. They are, in many ways, one and the same. Intertwined, inseparable.

Call it our state's best resource, its human capital. If we don't invest in it, we lose. Today, they

frolic on hopscotch trails. Tomorrow, they need better schools. The next day, they require safe neighborhoods and college opportunities. When they improve, when they learn, when they grow skyward and mature, so do we all.

Invest in them. Buy some chalk. Build their confidence. And reap the benefits they will provide.

*Phillip Tutor — ptutor@annistonstar.com — is *The Star*'s commentary editor. Follow him at [Twitter.com/PTutor_Star](https://twitter.com/PTutor_Star).*

© annistonstar.com 2012