

# Governor: Bishop punch should be left behind

By ED HOWELL  
Eagle Senior Writer

The punch thrown by state Sen. Charles Bishop, R-Arley, last year should be forgotten as leaders struggle to bring harmony in the Senate, Gov. Bob Riley said Friday — and added leaders are passing notes to each other to find consensus on issues.

The governor spoke Friday in a conference call interview with the *Daily Mountain Eagle*, the *Troy Messenger*, the *Clanton Advertiser* and the *Daily Sentinel* in Scottsboro.

Fighting has gone on between factions in the state Senate, which has slowed down and stopped progress on legislation last year. Much of the fighting has to do with how the Senate rules have been drawn up, reducing the number of senators needed to stop delaying tactics on a bill from 21 to 18. Republicans and conservative Democrats have been fighting the Democratic rule changes.

Riley said even with recent successes in the state, decisions made in the regular session that starts Feb. 5 will help determine where the state will be in a generation.

"We have too much at stake today to get tied up, locked down like we have in the past," Riley said.

"I've been meeting with the Democrats and I've been meeting with Republicans, and we're actually passing lists back and forth: This is what we agree on as an administration. The Democrats send me a list to say this is what we can agree on. The Republicans send — and we're just moving the list back and forth," Riley said. "If there's something we can't agree on, fine, we're taking it off the table."

The hope is to pass items with consensus between all the sides that would help the citizens, Riley said.

Riley was asked about the Bishop incident, where he and Sen. Lowell Barron got into an argument on the floor of the Senate on the last day of the 2006 regular session. The discussion over legislation resulted in Bishop throwing a punch at Barron, caught by Alabama Public Television and shared on the Internet.



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County drug unit begins

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# Riley

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Both senators accuse each other of cursing, although Barron has never admitted to cursing at Bishop. Bishop said he was provoked by Barron cursing, which he said was an insult to his mother.

The matter has provoked strong feelings between Democrats and Republicans and is currently before a legislative committee that is bogged down on organizational procedures. Editorials and columns in newspapers have indicated the incident will hang over the start of the 2007 regular session.

Riley said he has spoken about the incident to leaders in both parties.

"I always say, look, let's put that behind us and let's go. I'm hoping that from the conversations I've had, I think there's a good chance we can put that behind us and move ahead."

Riley was told that state Rep. Tommy

Sherer, D-Jasper, said in a recent speech that the state has only 12,000 prison beds while holding 25,000 prisoners. Riley said it is a problem that other states and the federal government are having to deal with as well.

"We've got a really comprehensive program that I'll talk about more in the State of the State," Riley said.

He said the state has a long way to go with the program, but that Commissioner of Corrections Richard Allen has done a great job in the past year.

"We're so much better now than we were when we came in. When we came in, it was just trying to keep from going under a court order. We had backlogs in every county that we couldn't accept. We've taken care of that," Riley said.

Riley said he doesn't think he will make an endorsement in the Republican

presidential primary on Feb. 5, saying he likes most of the candidates and could make a case for each of them.

"It would be very difficult for me to pick among all of them, because I think all of them show really great leadership abilities," Riley said. "But I have made up my mind that I will do everything I can to make sure neither Mrs. Clinton nor Mr. Obama ever sit in the Oval Office. I think this is going to be another one of those defining moments for our country. There is such a division now between what the two parties are saying. If you listen to the debates, it becomes very, very clear."

Riley also said Friday state negotiators had just returned a few minutes earlier from three-day water talks in West Virginia between Georgia, Florida and Alabama and that progress continues to be made in areas. He said it was the first time some officials had met all together.