



## State history faces return of Dark Ages

Agency says cuts may force lights out, loss of sites

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State budget cuts have already forced the state Capitol to close to visitors on Saturdays. Next, the floodlights that illuminate the 153-year-old building at night may soon go black.

The Alabama Historical Commission also may be forced to "close, give away or lease" some of Alabama's dozen or so state historical sites, Lee Warner, commission director, told The Times' editorial board Thursday afternoon.

Before that, he said, escalators in the Capitol will be shut down and its chandeliers will be turned off, along with the floodlights, to save on maintenance and power bills

The commission, which oversees the Capitol, was to consider those and other cost-cutting measures today in a meeting at the Huntsville Museum of Art.

Warner said there's no way to put a value on the history that could be lost if the commission is forced to give up some of its historical sites. But he said state officials can't ignore the signal voters seemed to send last month by overwhelmingly rejecting Gov. Bob Riley's \$1.2 billion tax package.

"People evidently said they wanted a smaller government. If that is what they want," he said, "we need to find a way to make it smaller."

Places that draw lots of people and generate adequate admission fees will be protected. Those on a list to be spared include the Joe Wheeler Plantation near Courtland, the historic bus station where the Montgomery bus boycott was launched, Old Cahaba in South Alabama (Alabama's first capital) and Fort Toulouse near Montgomery, he said.

Those in danger of being turned loose include the Gaineswood Plantation near Demopolis, the Magnolia Grove home near Greensboro, and the Middle Bay Lighthouse in Mobile Bay. The 117-year-old lighthouse is a rare, pentagonal shaped Chesapeake-style lighthouse with a rich maritime history.

The agency's money for supplies like light bulbs and janitorial products was whacked from \$243,000 to \$81,000 in the new budget. "We may have to ask people to donate or bring their own toilet paper," he said.

The agency has reduced its staff by 10 percent, or 14 jobs, authorized admission increases at many historic sites and halted its grants program, including the popular "main street" downtown revitalization program for small cities.