



A G R I C O L A • L A W

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February 13, 2026

ALGOP Candidate Committee
3505 Lorna Road
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By Email Only
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Attn: Shannon Whitt
Chief of Staff

RESPONSE TO LETTER OF CHALLENGE

Re: Response to Challenge to Candidacy of Jesse Battles for the Republican Nomination for Alabama Senate District 10

To the Members of the ALGOP Candidate Committee:

Please accept this letter and the documents submitted with it as Jesse Battles's Response to the Letter of Challenge to his Candidacy for the Republican Nomination for Alabama Senate District 10, to be decided in the May 19, 2026, Republican primary election.

In pertinent part, the Standing Rules Adopted by the Alabama Republican Party (Last amended on August 2, 2025), state as follows:

Denying Ballot Access: The State Committee ... shall ... deny ballot access to a candidate for public or Party office if in a prior election that person voted or ran in the primary election of another political party, publicly supported another political party, a nominee of another political party or an independent candidate, financially contributed to another political party, a candidate of another political party or an independent candidate or was a member or officer of a club that is strictly aligned with another political party. **The provisions of this rule shall apply for a period of six years after such person so participated,** but actions taken by incumbent Republicans or 2022 Republican

nominees prior to the passage of this amended standing rule shall be exempt from consideration.

Standing Rules Adopted by the Alabama Republican Party (Last amended on August 2, 2025) [Emphasis supplied].

The challenger makes three accusations, none of which is a valid basis for denying Jesse Battles ballot access. The first accusation is that in the year 2018, Jesse Battles was paid by the Craig Ford campaign to do work that Jesse Battles has described as moving signs from place to place. The only reason Jesse agreed to do this work grew out of a close personal relationship with Craig Ford's son, Jonathan, Jesse's classmate from sixth grade through high school, and the fact that Craig Ford was Jesse's middle school football coach. Nevertheless, this work comes within the meaning of the language of the Standing Rule which prohibits public support of an independent candidate (Ford did not run as a Democrat in 2018). However, August, 2018, when the challenger alleges that Jesse publicly supported Ford, was more than six years ago. According to the Standing Rule, it shall apply for a period of six years after Jesse's participation, until August 2024. After the expiration of the six-year period, such conduct does not provide a basis upon which to deny ballot access. To consider this conduct as a basis for denial of ballot access for Jesse two years outside of the six-year rule is not authorized by the rule. Accordingly, Jesse's work for Craig Ford's campaign in 2018, should not be considered by this Committee. Jesse has written a summary of his Republican History which is attached hereto as Exhibit 1 and incorporated herein by reference.

The challenger next asserts that Jesse Battles has publicly supported, campaigned with, and appeared at political events and fundraisers with Larry Means and Craig Ford. Notably, the challenger does not provide any dates when this conduct is alleged to have occurred. If the challenger is referring to conduct which occurred during Jesse Battles's campaign for Senate District 10, during the year 2025, Larry Means was Mayor of Attalla, Alabama during this period of time. The fact that Larry Means, as Mayor of Attalla since 2012, a non-partisan office, supported Jesse Battles's candidacy for Senate District 10 by appearing with him at campaign events shows Jesse's attractiveness as a candidate and demonstrates his ability to generate broad support for his campaign. Nothing in Larry Means's support for Jesse's campaign supplies a reason to deny him ballot access. Jesse has written a summary of his association with Larry Means which is attached hereto as Exhibit 2 and incorporated herein by reference.

ALGOP Candidate Committee
February 13, 2026
Page 3

The only association with Craig Ford shown by the challenger is from the photos of Jesse at a Craig Ford campaign event in 2018. There is no other association with Craig Ford. The summary attached hereto as Exhibit 1 addresses Jesse's relationship with Craig Ford and his son, Jonathan.

The final accusation made by the challenger asserts that Jesse's wife, Melissa, was employed by Mayor Craig Ford as Executive Assistant in the Mayor's Office. The challenger asserts that Melissa's employment in the office of the Mayor of Gadsden somehow demonstrates an ongoing Democratic political relationship with Jesse that violates Party rules. Jesse has written a summary of Melissa's background in Republican politics going back to her college years at Jacksonville State University where she was actively involved in the JSU College Republicans and served as Chair of that organization. Melissa currently is employed in the office of U.S. Senator Katie Britt. Melissa's employment in the office of the Mayor of Gadsden in 2022, fails to provide a basis upon which to deny Jesse ballot access. Jesse's summary of Melissa's involvement in Republican politics is set out in Exhibit 3 attached hereto and incorporated herein by reference.

In summary, for all the reasons set out above and in the attached exhibits, the challenger has failed to provide this Committee with any valid basis upon which to deny Jesse ballot access. In connection with Jesse's work with Craig Ford, he has stated:

In 2018, when I worked for Craig Ford, it was brief, and I've reflected on it deeply and learned from it. That experience strengthened my judgment and reinforced my Republican values, which had never wavered. I hope a short chapter in my past does not overshadow more than a decade of dedicated service to the party I love and have worked tirelessly to support.

See Exhibit 1.

We request that the Committee deny the challenge to Jesse's candidacy and grant him ballot access so that the Republican voters of Senate District 10 can decide on May 19, 2026, who they want to represent them in the Alabama Senate.

ALGOP Candidate Committee
February 13, 2026
Page 4

Respectfully submitted,

Algert S. Agricola, Jr.
Counsel for Jesse Battles

pc: David Bowsher
Julia N. Cleland

Exhibit 1

Challenge Dispute:

Jesse Battles Republican History

- My lifelong commitment to **Republican principles** and active involvement in party activities spans more than a decade. My grandfather, Jimmy Wagnon, served for many years on the **Etowah County Republican Executive Committee** until his passing. Some of my earliest political memories involve attending **Republican gatherings** with him at the Noccalula Kiwanis Pavilion, experiences that helped shape my understanding of **grassroots party engagement and conservative values**.
- The first vote I ever cast was for Mitt Romney in 2012, shortly after I turned 18.
- In 2015, I attended a **Donald Trump rally** in Madison County with my brother, an experience that left a lasting impression on me. Seeing **thousands of fellow Americans energized by Trump's message of economic growth, strong national security, and conservative values** deeply inspired me to become more active in Republican politics. I felt excitement about being part of a movement that emphasized **pro-business policies, law and order, and traditional American principles**. Motivated by this experience, I contributed to the campaign by purchasing two "Trump" yard signs, an early campaign item that predated the selection of Mike Pence as vice-presidential nominee. I still retain one of those signs, a tangible reminder of my **early commitment to supporting Republican candidates** and my personal connection to the principles and ideals of the Republican Party.
- In 2016, I volunteered with the **Trump Campaign**, making calls and sending text messages in support of the campaign.
- In the fall of 2016, I enrolled at Jacksonville State University, and I quickly noticed that we did not have an active College Republicans, and I knew we needed to change that. I wanted to promote Conservative Values on Campus.
- In 2017, I led the effort to **reestablish the Jacksonville State University College Republicans, where I became the Chairman**. Under our leadership, the chapter became highly engaged, hosting **on-campus events**, organizing **candidate forums**, and bringing **Republican candidates from local to statewide races directly to students**. I brought candidates such as **Roy Moore, John Merrill, Del Marsh, and many others to speak on campus**.
 - I worked to give students access to Republican candidates up and down the ballot.

- I debated Republican ideals against Democrats and Libertarians.
 - I worked very closely with the College Republican Federation of Alabama, where I became the North Regional Vice Chairman.
- **I stayed very active in the College Republicans and Republican campaigns all the way through the June primary, helping multiple Republican Candidates.**
- **In 2017 I worked as a volunteer with ALGOP to knock on doors for Roy Moore in the Birmingham area against Doug Jones.**
- **In the fall of 2017, Phil Williams gave me a table at the Etowah County Republican Party Annual Dinner.** I brought a group of College Republicans from JSU with me to fill the table. That is where I met Mack Butler for the first time. He told me he was running for the State Senate District 10 and that he would love my help. He said his Kickoff was in a couple of weeks at the Center Stage in Rainbow City and asked me to attend. I told him I was eager to attend and find out how I could help and be a part of his campaign.
 - On the day of the kickoff, my wife and I were excited to attend. When we arrived, we stood in the lobby for a while without being greeted or acknowledged. As first-time attendees at an event like this, we weren't sure how to proceed, and it felt as though the focus was primarily on financial contributions rather than welcoming new volunteers. At the time, I was in college and unable to contribute financially, but I was eager to help the campaign in any way I could. Ultimately, it seemed that our grassroots involvement wasn't really part of the plan for Rep. Butler's campaign, so we never got involved.
 - Since this, however, Rep. Butler and I have become close friends, and I appreciate his work on behalf of our Party and State.
 - After this experience, I went back to college and continued to be very active in Republican Politics through the College Republicans and Statewide races.
- In June of 2018, I had just graduated with a **Political Science degree** and was eager to put my education to work. Throughout college, I had supported myself by **working as a server in a restaurant**, all while balancing academics and staying actively engaged in **Republican activities and campaigns**. By this point, I was ready to **move on from serving tables** and fully pursue opportunities where I could apply my degree. At this point, all the Republican Primaries were over, and basically all republican candidates I was supporting either lost their primary or had no democratic opposition. And if they did have

opposition, it was not serious, and they needed no staff. Especially someone fresh out of college with no experience.

- One day, I got a call from Craig Ford. I had been classmates with his son Jonathan since 6th grade and were in the same Class of 2013 at Westbrook Christian School. Jonathan and I had always been good friends and ran in the same circle. Our graduating class was 65 people, so we were all very close, and most of us went to school together for many years. Craig had been my football coach in middle school. And he was very active in Jonathan's life, so I had known him growing up. Not as the Democratic Minority Leader. But as Coach Ford or simply Jonathan's Dad.
 - Since graduation, Jonathan and I have been in a fantasy football group with 8 more of our classmates, so we always kept in touch after graduation.
- Craig called me and told me he knew I was active in politics and that he was running for the State Senate seat as an Independent and asked if I would help him move some signs, and that he would pay me \$10.00 an hour.
 - I had been working in the restaurant business and serving tables since I was 16 years old, and I was eager to put my new degree to work. So, I accepted his offer and moved the signs.
 - I did a good job because I take pride in my work, and he noticed that. So, he kept giving me more sign jobs to do. He had a lot of signs, and the campaign would give me a list, and I would go and put them out.
 - Over the course of the campaign, I got paid \$10.00 an hour to put signs out.
- **During this time, working for Craig, I kept my close relationship with John Merrill.**
 - I helped work multiple campaign events and meet and greets for John Merrill's campaign for re-election to the Secretary of State's Office. He had democratic opposition, but she was no real threat.
- After Craig Ford's race, my wife graduated, we got married and moved to Montgomery so she could work as an accountant in the Secretary of State's office.
 - During this time, John Merrill told me he was running for the US Senate and asked me to be his South Alabama Field Director. I happily accepted and worked in that role until he dropped out of the Senate race.

- In this role, I worked directly with **Republican clubs, county parties, elected officials, and party leaders across approximately forty counties in South Alabama**. I served as the primary liaison between the campaign and local Republican groups, attending **county GOP meetings, Republican club gatherings, and regional party events**. My responsibilities included supporting **local Republican initiatives**, recruiting and activating volunteers, assisting with **candidate forums and meet-and-greets**, and cultivating relationships with **Republicans on all levels of leadership throughout the region**. Through this work, I developed extensive connections with **Republicans across South Alabama**, many with decades of party experience, and I continue to maintain these relationships to this day. This position allowed me to focus entirely on **strengthening Republican networks**, ensuring that local, county, and regional Republican leaders were fully engaged and connected throughout the campaign.
- Following John Merrill dropping out of the US Senate race, I **volunteered for Trump's 2020 Campaign** and transitioned into the Secretary of State's Office, where I worked until I opened my business in 2021.
- While residing in Montgomery, I remained active in the **Montgomery County Republican Party, the River Region Republican Club, and the Capital City Young Republicans**, attending Republican meetings and events across the state whenever possible.
- In 2022, my wife and I returned to Etowah County, where I immediately reengaged with the **Etowah County Republican Party**.
 - Since that time, I have attended each Etowah County Republican Dinner
 - In 2024 and 2025, I was a Gold Sponsor for the Dinner
 - Regularly attend executive committee meetings
 - Regularly attend the monthly GOP Breakfast
- My wife and I also attended the 2024 ALGOP Winter Dinner, where Kellyanne Conway spoke.
- I have also volunteered my time to help with party events.
 - I have been active in promoting the party during First Friday in Gadsden.
 - I was responsible for selling many Trump 2024 signs during the 2024 Presidential Campaign.
 - I also made phone calls and sent texts for the Trump Victory Campaign.
 - In 2024, I worked with the Etowah County Republican Women all day to help set up the 2024 Etowah GOP Dinner

- In 2025, I stayed late with the Etowah County Republican Women to take down the Etowah GOP Dinner.
- In 2024 and 2025, I expanded my involvement in Republican groups into neighboring counties
 - In 2024 and 2025, I was a Gold Sponsor for the Cherokee GOP Dinner.
 - I have been an active attendee of the Cherokee County GOP Breakfast
 - I have been an active attendee of the DeKalb GOP Breakfast.
- In 2024, I attempted to establish an **Etowah County Young Republicans chapter**. While scheduling conflicts among potential members prevented the effort from gaining sufficient traction, I redirected that energy toward **strengthening participation and attendance at the Etowah County GOP Breakfast**.
- For more than a decade, I have devoted significant time, energy, and resources to advancing Republican principles and supporting the party at the local, state, and national levels. **I remain a proud, loyal, and committed Republican.**
- **In 2018, when I worked for Craig Ford, it was brief, and I've reflected on it deeply and learned from it. That experience strengthened my judgment and reinforced my Republican values, which had never wavered. I hope a short chapter in my past does not overshadow more than a decade of dedicated service to the party I love and have worked tirelessly to support.**

Exhibit 2

Battles Association with Larry Means:

I became acquainted with Larry Means after moving to Attalla in 2022. While my mailing address lists Attalla, my residence is just outside the city limits. My family has deep roots in Attalla, spanning seven generations, and Mayor Means is familiar with my family. I regularly attend events within the City of Attalla, and, over the years, I have been invited to attend Etowah County Mayors Association meetings, of which Mayor Means is an active member.

I do not know Democratic Senator Larry Means. I only know Larry Means in his capacity as Mayor of Attalla, the city where I live and am raising my family.

Mayor Means and I have not “campaigned together for months, including coordinated travel during overlapping political efforts,” as alleged by Ms. Cleland in her challenge.

The first photograph referenced by Ms. Cleland was taken by the Etowah Chamber of Commerce at an ALFA Insurance ribbon cutting in Attalla. I am an active member of the Etowah Chamber of Commerce and regularly attend ribbon cuttings and chamber events, where photographs are commonly taken with multiple attendees. This was a chamber-sponsored event open to its members, and where Mayor Means attended because it was held in the city where he serves as its mayor. This event does not constitute coordinated travel or overlapping political efforts.

The second photograph referenced was taken at Attalla Heritage Day, one of the largest events in Etowah County, with attendance exceeding 10,000 people. As Mayor of Attalla, Mayor Means’ presence at this event was expected. We also took a photograph with Representative Mack Butler at the same event. Given the scale of the event and the hundreds of booths, including ours, and attendees, this encounter was in no way “coordinated travel during overlapping political efforts”.

The third photograph referenced was taken at the Attalla Christmas Parade. This event was held in the City of Attalla, where Larry Means serves as Mayor. His attendance was entirely expected since he was to light the city Christmas tree and lead the parade. This was not “coordinated travel during overlapping political efforts”.

The fourth photograph referenced was taken at a birthday celebration for Rodney Austin, one of Attalla’s largest business owners. I was invited to attend, and a photograph was taken of Mr. Austin, Mayor Means, and myself. Given Mr. Austin’s prominence in the community, it was not unusual for Mayor Means to attend. My attendance at a private social event where Mayor Means was also present does not mean “coordinated travel during overlapping political efforts”.

The fifth and final photograph referenced was taken at one of my publicly advertised campaign events. Five mayors were in attendance, including Mayor Means. A central theme of my campaign has been collaboration with local elected officials, and the event was attended by

mayors, council members, and county commissioners. This was not “coordinated travel during overlapping political efforts”.

Additionally, Mayor Means has made financial contributions to multiple Republican candidates since 2018, including:

- Mack Butler: \$200
- Brynn Crain: \$100
- Becky Nordgren: \$150
- Troy King: \$100
- Gerald Dial: \$100

Mayor Means has also been photographed with numerous Republican elected officials, both locally and across the state.

The article referenced by Ms. Cleland in her challenge is a Gadsden Times article from 2010—sixteen years ago—and since then, he has been elected Mayor of Atalla 4 times. He was also acquitted of all charges.

Finally, the Facebook post Ms. Cleland submitted from the Etowah County Democratic Women's Club is a reference to the 2017 Gadsden Times Readers' Choice Awards. The poll was taken by the local newspaper.

Exhibit 3

Melissa Battles:

Ms. Cleland's challenge is sufficiently lacking in merit that it attempts to involve my wife, Melissa, despite the fact that her background and career clearly demonstrate longstanding and consistent involvement in Republican politics.

Melissa has been actively engaged in Republican politics throughout our relationship. While attending Jacksonville State University, she was heavily involved with the College Republicans and worked closely with me in that organization. After my graduation, she went on to serve as Chair of the College Republicans.

Following college, Melissa worked as an accountant in the Alabama Secretary of State's Office under Secretary John Merrill. She later served in the accounting department of the Alabama Department of Education.

In 2022, Melissa and I had the opportunity to return to our hometown, which required her to seek new employment. Given her extensive experience in government service, she sought to remain in the public sector. At this time, Craig Ford had been elected Mayor of Gadsden. Melissa accepted a position as Executive Assistant in the Mayor's Office, where she also played an active accounting role due to her substantial accounting background.

Melissa worked in the Mayor's Office for a few months before being selected for a position with United States Senator Katie Britt, where she remains employed today.

Melissa is a member of the Etowah County Republican Women's organization and is active in the Etowah County Republican Party.