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Rants and Raves: Screenings set healthy example

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RAVE: For the good example shown by Mayor Todd Strange and his cabinet members, who all underwent health assessments recently at the new Perry Hill Primary Care and Wellness Clinic, one of three such clinics available for city and county employees. Employees are encouraged to get screenings for four critical factors that contribute to many major health problems. In addition to the benefits of having healthier employees, this also can help lower insurance costs, and that helps the taxpayers.

RANT: For the telephone scam artists trying to bilk Alabamians out of money by claiming to be representatives of Alabama Power Co., the state's largest electric utility. Alabama Power officials say the scam artists demand that the customer provide credit card information over the phone, threatening to immediately cut off service for nonpayment. (In such hot weather, that's a scary prospect.) A spokesman noted that the company never asks customers for credit card information over the phone.

RAVE: For the commendable efforts of the Bryce Hospital Historic Preservation Committee to create a memorial garden in honor of the more than 5,000 patients buried on the grounds of the historic hospital. Bryce's history has both shining periods and dark ones. When it was first established in 1861, it was a model for mental health facilities across the country and was led by progressive physicians. Over time, however, both the facilities and the quality of care declined dramatically and Bryce became a place of unspeakable horrors. It took a federal court lawsuit to turn things around. The memorial garden would be a proper tribute to the good done there and to those who suffered unjustly there. There was a great deal of both.

RAVE: For the good work of Cindy Lowry, Alabama Rivers Alliance executive director. Lowry has been elected to the board of directors of Clean Water Network, a coalition of more than 1,200 public interest organizations across the country. The network represents more than 5 million people and works to strengthen clean water and wetlands policy. The alliance, led by Lowry since 2007, is

Alabama's statewide organization for defending and restoring Alabama's rivers.

RANT: For critics of the move to ban off-road vehicles from Little River Canyon National Preserve. This is one of Alabama's most scenic places and it fully deserves the protection. Actually, it should have had the protection all along. The National Park Service mistakenly allowed ATV use on some of the park's roads, but park Superintendent John Bundy says officials have begun enforcing federal regulations prohibiting the use of off-road vehicles and all-terrain vehicles on roads in the preserve.

RAVE: For the underappreciated contribution to journalism of Dorothy Sucher, who died last week at 77. Sucher was reporting for a small Maryland newspaper in 1965 when she -- accurately -- quoted residents attending a city council meeting as characterizing a developer's attempt to win a zoning variance as "blackmail."

The developer sued for libel and the case eventually ended up before the U.S. Supreme Court, which held unanimously in *Greenbelt Cooperative Publishing Association. v. Bresler* that the press could not be held liable for reporting exaggerated charges leveled against public figures when it was clear that the accusations were "hyperbole." Justice Potter Stewart's opinion noted that "even the most careless reader must have perceived that the word was no more than rhetorical hyperbole, a vigorous epithet used by those who considered Bresler's negotiating position extremely unreasonable." To rule otherwise, Stewart wrote for the court, "would

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subvert the most fundamental meaning of the free press."

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NO, I have some rules!

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