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## Tyson brings AG campaign to town

**Sonny Turner**

CNHI News Service

— Mobile County District Attorney John Tyson Jr., a candidate for Alabama attorney general, was in Athens Tuesday seeking votes in the upcoming campaign.

Tyson, who served on the State Board of Education for 14 years including spending the last nine as the board's presiding officer, announced earlier that he will run for attorney general on a platform that seeks to prevent crime rather than just prosecuting it.

Tyson, 53, was the first Democrat to announce plans to run for the seat held by Republican Troy King, who was appointed by Gov. Bob Riley in March 2004 and plans to seek a full term this year.

As a district attorney for 11 years, Tyson and his staff have been responsible for more than 25,000 felony convictions, but he said he has learned there is more to stopping crime than just prosecuting cases.

"It's better to stop it before it happens," Tyson said.

"We had 196,000 crimes in Alabama in 2004," Tyson said. "I don't have the figures for 2005 because they won't be out until fall. But you can do the math, a person on average in Alabama has a one in 23 chance of having a major crime interrupt his life within a year in Alabama.

"Crime is such a problem in Alabama that I think it is time the attorney general declared it top priority."

If elected attorney general, Tyson wants to develop partnerships across the state like the one in Mobile County he established that gets help for troublesome students before they become adult criminals. He said 150 public and private agencies in Mobile County help students who are referred for intervention through the "Make the Right Choice, Helping Families Initiative."

"Educators cannot be expected to correct such problems without significant assistance from families and the community as a whole," he said. "Alabama law requires parents to make sure that their children attend school and that they behave themselves appropriately in class. I am mandated to vigorously enforce these laws," said Tyson. "However, I also realize that misbehavior in school is sometimes a symptom of problems that need something other than a law enforcement solution. Catching these problems early enough and giving families the targeted assistance they need can help divert an at-risk child from trouble. Making sure that nothing (bad) happens is hard work. Nothing happened is a victory," Tyson said.

Seventy percent of the students who have come into the program for some serious school infraction didn't repeat it the following year, he said.

Tyson is responsible for more than 25,000 felony convictions. When he became district attorney for Mobile County 11 years ago, he decided it took too long to complete criminal cases so he used technology and modern management techniques to cut the time in half. When he encountered elderly crime victims who couldn't afford to repair their damaged homes, he organized volunteers to provide repairs and recovery help. When violence at schools became a problem, he taught teachers how to use our laws to maintain discipline and backed them up by intervening when teachers believed discipline problem might lead to violence.

Tyson said he is running for the AG's post because he believes we can't wait any longer to strike back at crime. And because he knows crime must be defeated where it happens — in our local communities.

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