

Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh
Press Clips
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Gov. Bentley still considering special session for Alabama economic development incentives

Gov. Robert Bentley said he is still considering a special session to address economic development incentives but only if he has a consensus from legislative leadership and a there is a clear plan for the session.

Speaking at the Economic Development Association of Alabama's Summer 2014 Conference at the Grand Hotel, Bentley said he has tasked Alabama Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield with determining what is needed in the way of new incentives and identifying funding options.

In an interview after his talk, Bentley said the state is moving closer to the \$750 million cap in the bond issue dollars for economic development the state approved through Amendment 666 in 2000.

That's even after the state freed up \$160 million with some refinancing approved in another amendment in 2012.

Bentley was criticized last week for saying a proposed special session would consider using money in the state's Education Trust Fund for economic development incentives.

Today, Bentley did not say the ETF would be off limits, but did say any proposed plan would have to be a net gain for the fund.

"I will never take money out of the Education Trust Fund," Bentley said. "Anything I will do will put more money into the Education Trust Fund."

Earlier in the day at the conference, Robert Boehringer, senior manager of KPMG, said Alabama is falling behind other southern states in its incentives for both new and existing industry.

Since Alabama took its spot at the top of the incentives mountain in 1994 with the successful recruitment of Mercedes-Benz in Vance, other states have become competitive and even overtaken Alabama in the incentives offered.

Boehringer said other states are more creative with their incentives – from the way they collect corporate taxes to their use of non-statutory, or discretionary, incentives.

A ranking of the state's statutory incentives packages put Alabama at 19th in the nation while neighboring states Georgia and Mississippi ranked in the Top Five. Louisiana and Arkansas also ranked higher than Alabama.

When it comes to incentives available for existing industries, Alabama now ranks 13th and has been steadily giving up ground to competing states, Boehringer said.

Boehringer awarded "helmet stickers" like a football coach would award players when scoring the different economic development incentives states offer. Louisiana's nearly full playbook earned it several more helmet stickers than Alabama.

"I think you as Alabama need some more helmet stickers" when it comes to incentives, he said.

He suggested Alabama create new, better incentives and then reach out to companies to market what's different – in much the way a store would promote a sale or new merchandise.

Despite any identified need for more incentives, tapping the ETF will not be a popular move, if an online poll at AL.com is any indication. The poll asking, "Do you support using state education dollars to pay the cost of recruiting industry into Alabama?" had 86.81 percent of people voting against it as of this afternoon.

Bentley said he will wait to see what incentives plan the Department of Commerce proposes and if and when a special session is needed. But he said he believes something needs to be done for Alabama to continue to compete for the big projects that bring jobs and capital investment to the state.

"We need to be Number One in everything we do," Bentley said. "Our goal is always to be the best. We want to be the best at workforce development and recruitment."

[More than 400 immigrant children have been placed in Alabama this year: Today in state politics](#)

Even before the first unaccompanied minor is placed at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama is already providing homes to more than 400 immigrant children.

Data released Thursday by the Department of Health and Human Services Offices of Refugee Resettlement shows 407 children were placed with sponsors in Alabama between Jan. 1-July 7. It is not known to which Alabama counties the children were sent or how many went with relatives or other forms of care.

Alabama has received less immigrant children than three neighboring states. Tennessee has received 760 children, Georgia 1,154 and Florida 3,181. At 3,347, Texas has received the most number of placements.

Nationwide, more than 30,000 nationwide placements have been made from the more than 50,000 immigrant children that have crossed into the U.S. since last October.

Gov. Robert Bentley has joined with other GOP governors to question the Obama administration's handling of the immigration issue. You can read more about that here.

[Gov. Bentley appoints replacement for ousted Alabama State Trustee Elton Dean](#)

Gov. Robert Bentley has appointed an employee of the Business Council of Alabama to replace former Alabama State University Trustee Elton Dean.

Bentley requested Dean's resignation last week, alleging he violated conflict-of-interest laws by having relatives to who received money from the school.

Dean announced he would voluntarily resign in a radio interview Thursday.

Bentley's office announced today that Pam Ware of Pike Road will replace Dean on the board.

Ware currently works for the Business Council of Alabama as manager of intergovernmental affairs.

In a statement, Ware said she was deeply honored by the appointment and excited about the opportunity work with the board, ASU President Gwendolyn Boyd, faculty, staff and students.

"We have a critical mission that involves restoring this institution to financial soundness and restoring public confidence in the administration," she said. "As an alumna, I have a great love for my university, and I am humbled to be selected to help move this university in the right direction."

In addition to Dean's voluntary resignation, Bentley removed Vice Chairman Marvin Wiggins from office Friday, citing violations of conflict-of-interest laws. That announcement came after Wiggins refused the governor's request that he step down voluntarily.

Bentley appointed Ralph Ruggs of Bessemer to replace Wiggins. Ruggs is the executive director of the Tuscaloosa Housing Authority and the former executive director of the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District.

Both appointments are subject to the approval of the Alabama Senate during the next legislative session in the spring.

[Attorney General Strange faces tough questions from sheriffs on permits, guns at polls](#)

Attorney General Luther Strange, under fire from some sheriffs over his handling of gun legislation, said Monday that he would support legislation to ban the open carry of firearms in polling places.

The issue erupted during the June 3 primary when at least three people in Shelby County challenged gun prohibitions at voting locations. A Tuscaloosa County man cast his ballot in this month's primary runoff with a .40-caliber pistol on his hip.

The Attorney General's Office advised in an official opinion that government buildings that already ban guns can prohibit them when those locations double as polling places but that the decision on whether to allow guns rests with the owners when voting takes place in churches or other private property.

"Just be straight with us," said Montgomery County Sheriff D.T. Marshall, who implored Strange not to give a political answer.

Responded Strange: "I agree with you. I would support that. ... I have no interest in trying to intimidate people in polling places."

Strange added that whatever stand he takes on proposals before the Legislature, he has to make sure they are constitutional. He cited a court ruling in the District of Columbia over the weekend striking down a law prohibiting people from have guns in public.

Marshall said he understands that a law restricting guns in polling places likely would be challenged.

"This is plain and simple. Either you can or you can't," he said. "This will go to court if it passes."

Strange told reporters outside Ballroom D at the Perdido Beach Resort that he must enforce and defend duly enacted laws passed by the Legislature.

"It's a controversial issue. I'm a strong Second Amendment supporter. Our job is to get it right," he said. "We need to look at the constitutionality of any proposal."

Strange noted that his office is working on a second opinion regarding whether sheriffs have the discretion to regulate guns in polling places under current law. He said that opinion would be issued before the November election.

"It's a little premature about whether we need legislation," he said.

Marshall told reporters that he wishes the Attorney General's Office would have provided that guidance before the primary. He said people should not be taking guns into voting booths.

"That intimidates a whole lot of people," he said.

Escambia County Sheriff Grover Smith he has no problem with someone taking a concealed handgun into a polling place. Depending on the circumstances, he added, having a gun in public view can be intimidating.

"If we've got someone loud and boisterous and they've also got a gun, I've got concerns," he told reporters.

During the session in front of the Alabama Sheriffs' Association, Smith chided Strange for his performance during the debate over a law passed in 2013 narrowing the discretion of sheriffs to deny permits to carry concealed guns. Most sheriffs opposed the bill, and Smith – who was the association's president and later the organization's representative on the issue – said he tried to get Strange to support the sheriffs.

Instead, Smith said, Strange told him that he would review the matter and get back to him.

"That never happened, sir," he said.

Strange downplayed the disagreement. "We're with you, but we may not always agree," he told the assembly of law enforcement officers.

Smith said after Strange's appearance that he would have accepted a straight answer that attorney general supported the bill or even that would not take a stance. Instead, Smith said, he could not get Strange to return his phone calls.

"He nor his office would ever commit to me that he would oppose or support the gun legislation," he said.

Governor Bentley to feds, prison reform advocates: 'You all are crazy to sue us'

Gov. Robert Bentley acknowledged the immense problems facing the state's prison system but said Monday that his administration needs time to address them, not lawsuits.

Speaking at the annual convention at the Alabama Sheriffs' Association, Bentley said his message is the same whether his audience is the U.S. Justice Department or advocacy groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center.

"You all are crazy to sue us," he said. "What good does it do to sue us?"

Bentley said he is as interested as anyone in solving problems that include overcrowding and allegations of mistreatment of inmates. He said he wants to work with anyone who has ideas about how to improve the system but added that lawsuits only divert time and money away from those solutions.

The Montgomery-based Southern Poverty Law Center has, in fact, sued the state over its prisons. The organization alleged last month that the state has failed to meet its constitutional responsibilities to provide adequate health care to prisoners.

Maria Morris, an attorney for the Southern Poverty Law Center, said her organization had no choice but to sue to force improvement to years-old problems.

The Justice Department so far has not sued. But a scathing report in January detailing alleged abuses at the Tutwiler Prison for Women in Wetumpka has raised fears among the state's elected leaders that federal authorities are preparing to do so.

Bentley said the state cannot solve its prison problem without taking further steps to reduce long sentences, although he offered no specific proposals.

"It is a real problem in this state. Not only is it a problem, but our sentencing of our prisoners is a real problem," he said.

The Legislature already has taken action in recent years on that front. Sentencing guidelines designed to reduce penalties for certain nonviolent and drug crimes have been "presumptive" since October, meaning that judges must cite specific reasons if they depart from the recommendations.

As far as additional action, Bentley said the state is waiting recommendations from the Justice Reinvestment Initiative, a program coordinated by the National Council of State Governments Justice Center.

He acknowledged the political difficulty of taking on the prison issue.

"I can't run for governor talking about prison reform. People say, 'I don't care about that,'" he said. "But they do care if you have to raise taxes to build more prisons. They do care if you let violent prisoners out."

Bentley suggested changes in the state's Habitual Felony Offender Act, which was designed to crack down on repeat criminals but has helped spark a massive increase in the state's prison population since its passage in 1977.

"The habitual offender act probably has increased our prison population more than anything else," he said.

Bentley said he opposes leniency for violent criminals and sex offenders – "I don't think we ought to let them out" – but said some nonviolent offenders serving longer prison terms because of the law probably can be rehabilitated faster.

"If we don't do that, we're going to have to find money to build more prisons," he said.

Bentley called on sheriffs with extra space in their county jails to consider negotiating with the Corrections Department to house state inmates. The state already pays some sheriff's offices to incarcerate state inmates.

One sheriff asked Bentley about mentally disturbed people who end up in the criminal justice system. He said he has an inmate who has been in his jail for four years awaiting trial on a murder charge. Jails are not equipped to deal with the mentally ill, the sheriff said.

Bentley agreed. "Mental health is a real issue. That's one of the issues we need to look at," he said.

Some already working at Alabama's new Remington plant, VP says, more jobs available on rolling basis

A skeleton crew of 10 is already hard at work at Huntsville's new Remington manufacturing plant, said VP of corporate finance and planning, Corry Doyle.

Approximately 35 individuals have already been hired to work at the facility, including 14 engineers, 10 people in operations, and 11 in support staff including finance and HR, Doyle told a crowd at the Economic Development Association of Alabama's summer 2014 conference.

Another 10 individuals are currently enrolled in a training program with AIDT, Alabama Industrial Development Training, which is providing pre-employment screening and training to Remington as part of an incentive valued at \$15.9 million. Once they make it through the AIDT program, Remington's Huntsville plant will have 45 employees on staff in total.

It's definitely not too late to apply-- in fact, most of the manufacturing jobs haven't even been posted yet. Hiring will continue on a rolling basis, Doyle said. Those interested in jobs should check frequently for open ads.

Remington announced in February 2014 it would be opening a \$110M, 843,000 square foot firearms manufacturing facility near the Huntsville International Airport. The facility will likely have a modern look to it, Doyle said in a speech congratulating Alabama on "doing what it takes to win." Alabama was chosen over 27 other states vying for the plant.

Operations at the facility, which previously housed Chrysler and Continental Automotive, are expected to begin full time in 2015 once upgrades and renovations are complete. About 2,000 new jobs are expected to be available at Remington, making it the third-largest private employer in Madison County.

In May, Remington officials confirmed the Huntsville facility will manufacture the Bushmaster and R1 semiautomatic pistol lines, which were previously made at the company's Iliion, NY facility. The company will also move six subsidiary operations from throughout the country to Alabama.

Limestone and Morgan County officials have said that landing Remington was a "regional effort" and that the impact in Madison county and for the state will be "huge."

[Bentley: proposed EPA regs will 'devastate' Alabama, kill jobs, 'make electricity bills go up'](#)

Roughly 1,600 people are scheduled to testify at Environmental Protection Agency public hearings across the nation on Tuesday, including elected officials, industry professionals, scientists and environmentalists who support or oppose proposed EPA regulations that would drastically cut carbon emissions from the country's power plants.

The southeast hearings are scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. in Atlanta, Georgia. And although Alabama governor Robert Bentley will not be present for the marathon proceedings, he made his feelings on the proposed regulations abundantly clear in a statement to Yellowhammer Tuesday morning.

"The EPA has exceeded its authority in issuing these new regulations," Bentley said. "Coal is the most reliable source of electricity in Alabama and it costs less than any other source in the state. Alabama's coal mining industry employs more than 4,500 workers and supports other industries that provide ancillary services to the mining industry. The new EPA plan will effectively kill these jobs and force us

to comply with Washington mandates that will make electricity bills go up for Alabama families and businesses. The EPA's overreach will have devastating effects on the people of Alabama."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimates the EPA's plan will thwart \$50 billion a year in GDP and prevent 220,000 jobs per year from being created. Household disposable income is expected to drop more than \$550 billion a year. But advocates for the proposal insist that it will go a long way toward saving the planet and its inhabitants from the effects of global warming.

EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy, who has taken the lead in pushing the regulations for the Obama administration, does not plan to attend any of the hearings, but told reporters Monday that they are about "listening to people."

McCarthy and Bentley have had numerous one-on-one conversations about the regulations.

"I spoke to Gina McCarthy... I had dinner with her in Washington when I was up there in February," Bentley recalled during an interview with Yellowhammer in June (video below). "She was trying to explain to me about [the new] emissions standard... I asked her, I said, 'Gina, who comes up with these crazy ideas?' Well, she stammered around because she couldn't answer me. I said, 'You're killing jobs!'"

Blaine Galliher, a senior advisor to Bentley, will testify on the governor's behalf Tuesday. Alabama elected officials who are slated to testify include Attorney General Luther Strange, Public Service Commissioner President Twinkle Cavanaugh, Commissioner Jeremy Oden and Commissioner-elect Chip Beeker. Representatives from numerous Alabama trade associations and environmental groups are also slated to voice their opinions.