

AL Looks To Limit Lawsuits For Airbus Suppliers

Phillip Rawls, Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Now that Alabama is getting an Airbus manufacturing plant, state lawmakers want to prevent Airbus suppliers from setting up shop in neighboring states where it's not as easy for them to be sued.

After a last-minute compromise with plaintiff lawyers, House and Senate committees voted unanimously Tuesday for legislation to limit lawsuits involving large commercial planes made in Alabama. Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, said he hopes to get the Senate to approve the bill Thursday.

Gov. Robert Bentley recruited Airbus to Mobile last year with \$158 million in cash, tax breaks and other incentives. Airbus America Chairman Allan McArtor said groundbreaking is set for April. When fully operational, the plant is expected to create 1,000 jobs.

Bentley said 3,700 more jobs could be created by companies supplying products to the plant. He said Mississippi and Florida have stricter litigation laws than Alabama, and they are using that to recruit suppliers because both states are near Mobile.

"If we are going to put this much money into getting a plant, we want the suppliers in Alabama," Bentley said. The governor visited Europe two months ago to talk to potential suppliers about locating plants in Alabama.

The bill limits lawsuits against the plane's manufacturer and suppliers to causes of action arising within 12 years after the planes are delivered. One of the sponsors, Republican Sen. Cam Ward of Alabaster, said Alabama currently has no limit. The bill applies only to commercial planes with at least 100 seats.

The bill originally had a 10-year limit and was opposed by plaintiff lawyers. But state officials agreed Tuesday to extend it to 12, and the plaintiff lawyers dropped their opposition. That led to the unanimous votes in the Senate Judiciary Committee and House Commerce and Small Business Committee.

"After negotiations with representatives of the governor's office, Airbus and members of the Legislature, we reached an agreement that includes additional protection for all Alabamians," said Ginger Avery, executive director of the Alabama Association for Justice.

William Canary, president of the Business Council of Alabama, said it was critical to get the bill moving through the Legislature. "It's all about J-O-B-S," he said.

So far, one supplier has announced plans to locate in Mobile and create about 50 jobs. Bentley said none have announced plans to locate outside Alabama.

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The chairman of Airbus America said the company is helping Alabama with recruitment. "We've become one of the cheerleaders of Alabama," McArtor said.

Alabama's agreement with Airbus for the Mobile plant requires state officials to do their best to pass the legislation.

In addition to limiting lawsuits to 12 years after a plane is delivered, the legislation requires a person to file a suit within two years after a cause of action arises. That two-year period extends from the last day of the 12-year limit. The bill also makes it harder for out-of-state residents to sue Airbus and the suppliers in Alabama if the issue that triggered the lawsuit occurred elsewhere.

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