AL Legislature Limits Aircraft Lawsuits

Phillip Rawls, Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — The state Legislature passed a bill Thursday designed to make sure Alabama lands Airbus aircraft suppliers rather than its neighboring states.

The Senate gave final approval to the bill 27-0 Thursday and sent it to the governor, who endorsed it and promised to sign it into law. The bill limits lawsuits against a plane's manufacturer and suppliers to causes of action arising within 12 years after a plane is delivered. Proponents said the time had been unlimited.

The bill is tailored for the new Airbus plant in Mobile because it applies only to commercial planes with at least 100 seats. Gov. Robert Bentley recruited Airbus last year with $158 million in cash, tax breaks and other incentives. The groundbreaking is set for Monday. The $600 million plant is supposed to employ 1,000.

Bentley said 3,700 more jobs could be created by companies supplying products to the plant. The governor visited Europe four months ago to talk to potential suppliers about locating plants in Alabama. After that visit, he said Mississippi and Florida had stricter litigation laws than Alabama, and they were using that to recruit suppliers because both states are near Mobile.

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.

Alabama's agreement with Airbus for the Mobile plant required state officials to do their best to pass the legislation. The bill was a compromise worked out with plaintiff lawyers, and it moved through the House and Senate without a negative vote. Bentley's press secretary, Jennifer Ardis, said it had broad support because "it's a job creation bill."

So far, Alabama has landed one Airbus supplier, Safran Engineering Services, which plans to employ 30 to 50 people in an engineering supporting facility in Mobile.

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