

Baker ADO bill changes name

BY HALEY GIBSON

SPECIAL TO THE STANDARD

A bill to change the name of the Alabama Development Office — a move supporters said would make it more recognizable for economic developers — has passed the Senate and now goes to Gov. Robert Bentley for his signature.

Rep. Alan Baker's House Bill 151 passed the Senate on March 20.

House Bill 151 is part of a package of bills intended to stimulate job growth in Alabama.

"The governor has been very supportive of the bill, and I very much expect him to sign quickly," said Baker, R-Brewton.

In the 2011 legislative session, Baker's bill passed the House but died in the Senate on the final day. In this year's session, Baker's bill was the first one placed before the House and was also the first bill passed by the House during the opening week in February. The House passed the bill 94-1.

This bill will rename the Alabama Development Office as the Department of Commerce and the state's director of development will become the secretary of commerce. Currently, Greg Canfield is the director.

"The initiation of the ADO thinking this would better enhance them brought on my sponsorship

of this bill," Baker said.

"The main reason for the change is that international investors seeking development opportunities tend to look for a state's Department of Commerce for assistance with site selection."

The Alabama Department of Commerce will continue the ADO's mission of pursuing industries and more jobs for Alabamians by working with local, county and regional development agencies.

The ADO is the state agency most responsible for the recruitment of jobs to Alabama through the expansion of existing industries and new industries.

"The name change will better reflect the mission and operations of the office," Baker said.

"The former name, ADO, was a bit confusing to many outside of our state," Baker said. "This simple change will facilitate and better communicate a more clear identity, thereby enhancing our state's strong efforts to new-job recruitment, especially on the international level."

The proposed law will also authorize the secretary of commerce to employ people outside the state Merit System. Specifically, this bill will create three assistant secretaries, increasing personnel costs

by an estimated \$140,350 per additional secretary.

Rep. Patricia Todd, D-Birmingham, said she opposes the bill. Because the hires would be made outside the Merit System, she said, would be left to the discretion of the director. She called this a "slippery slope."

Rep. Alan Harper, R-Aliceville, said the office lost three to four recruiters last year, and he would like to see those people replaced.

"The only way to increase the Education Trust Fund is to increase jobs," Harper said.

Troy University journalism student Haley Gibson of Brewton wrote this story as part of a project partly funded by the Alabama Press Association Journalism Foundation.

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