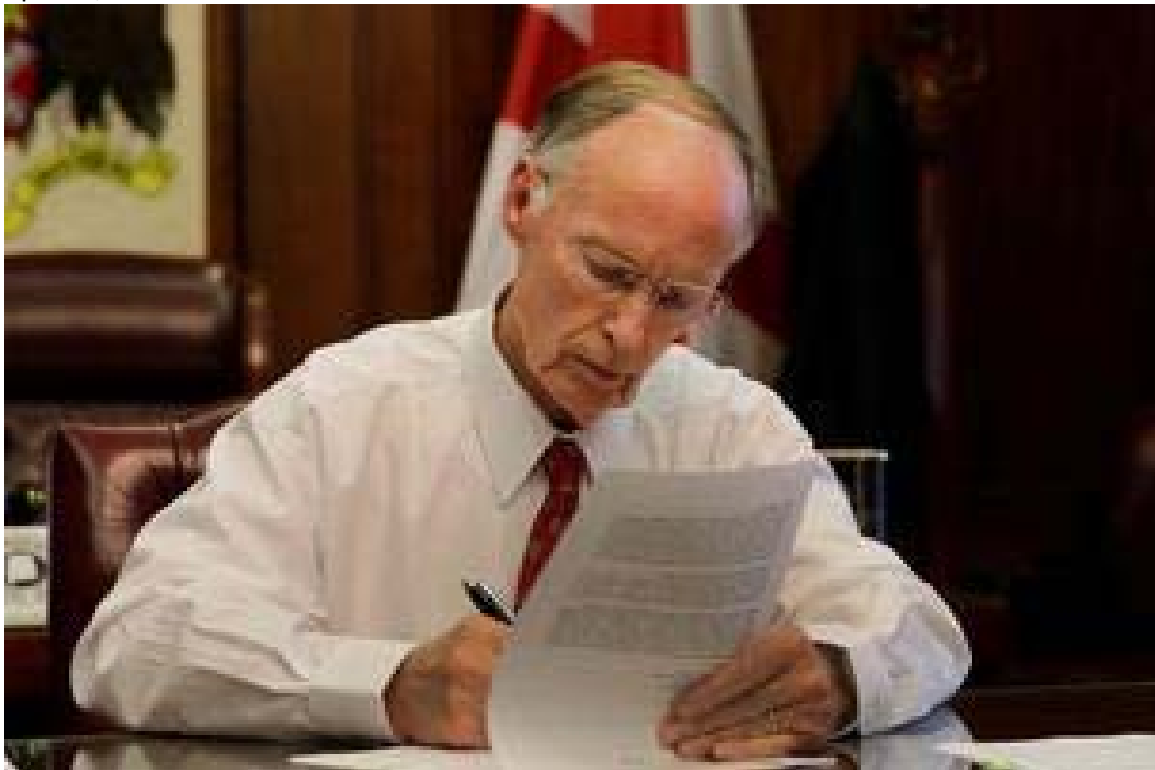


What would a Bentley resignation mean for Alabama economic development?

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Gov. Robert Bentley continues to deny an affair with former advisor Rebekah Caldwell Mason, along with any illegal wrongdoing.

When Alabama's push to impeach Gov. Robert Bentley began a little over a year ago, we spoke to several site selection and development experts who agreed on one thing: the scandal surrounding Bentley and the state likely won't have an effect on the state's chances to land major corporate projects.

But that was before the Alabama Ethics Commission found probable cause to refer four charges to Montgomery County prosecutors and prior to the release of a damning 131-page report

detailing Bentley's affair with his former top advisor Rebekah Caldwell Mason and their use of state power to conceal their romantic relationship.

Still, experts aren't sure impeachment hearings and Bentley's impending resignation will do much to alter the conclusions set forth last year.

"Companies want transparency and predictability and you don't typically replace governors in this fashion, but this is a unique situation and (Bentley) becomes an albatross on the state's image," said John Boyd, head of the independent site selection firm The Boyd Group. "This is a cloud over the state and (removing Bentley) could be a positive for the state's industry attraction efforts."

As we noted in a recent Cover Story, companies typically look for the right combination of factors in deciding where to locate major operations, including corporate tax environments, access to infrastructure and a skilled workforce, among other items.

For the most part, Alabama excels in those categories. The state finished ninth in Site Selection magazine's 2016 rankings for the best state-by-state business climate.

And the state recently unveiled its new Accelerate Alabama 2.0 plan, which aims to address gaps within the state's workforce development program.

"(Accelerate Alabama) has allowed us to really focus on developing the types of industry corps and foundational base that are helping us launch the economy and career opportunities that are taking us into the next century," Alabama Secretary of Commerce Greg Canfield said in a recent interview with the BBJ. "We're redefining Alabama as a more technology-based state. All of that rolls in together to create the perfect environment for Alabama to move forward into the next century."

And while the state is currently in legislative gridlock of sorts with Bentley's status in question, moving past the state's tainted image should be lawmakers' priority, Boyd said.

"Alabama continues to be one of the most attractive places in the country and it has quality advantages in the Port of Mobile, the workforce training program and the requisite skill sets in the state," he said. "The quicker this gets behind the state, the better. One could argue this could be good from the state, in removing Bentley who's been a divisive individual."



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