

A full-page background image of a warehouse worker. The worker is seen from behind, wearing a white hard hat, a blue and white plaid shirt, and a bright orange safety vest with reflective silver stripes. They are holding the handle of a yellow pallet jack. The background shows tall industrial shelving units filled with cardboard boxes, creating a sense of depth and scale.

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ALABAMA'S NEW ERA OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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ALABAMA'S NEW ERA OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

As the push to bring manufacturing back to American soil gains momentum, Alabama is positioning itself to lead — not just with incentives and infrastructure, but with something even more essential: a skilled workforce.

With the transition of the Alabama Department of Labor into the newly established Department of Workforce, the state is entering a new era of workforce development.

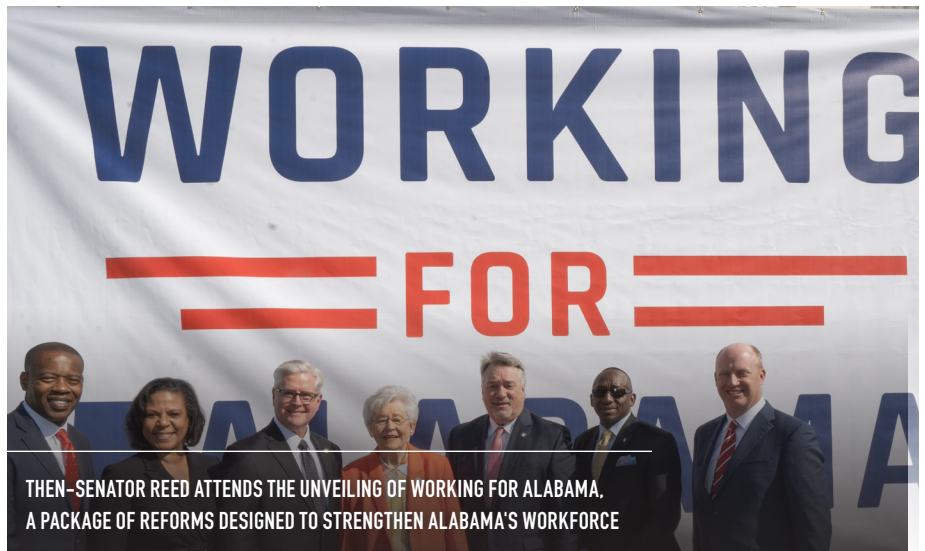
Former Alabama Senate President Pro Tem Greg Reed has been appointed by Governor Ivey to lead the transition as Alabama's first Secretary of Workforce.

As the name implies, Reed's mission will focus on transforming one of Alabama's most persistent economic challenges - the need for qualified workers.

"You can have great plans, programs, incentives, and packages, but if you don't have a person that's well trained to be able to get the job done, then you're not going to be able to grow our economy," Reed said.

While Alabama continues to attract record-breaking business investment and maintains a low unemployment rate, its labor force participation still lags behind the national average.

Despite "We're Hiring" signs posted across the state, many Alabamians are



not engaged in the workforce—often due to real-world barriers like gaps in education, limited transportation, unaffordable childcare, and lack of access to healthcare.

"Some of these issues are complex and longstanding, but we can address them," Reed said. "We've made real progress through legislative efforts, and now it's time to connect the dots—between business, education, and government—to get more people into the workforce and on a path to long-term opportunity."

The department's structure is built on a model of public-private collaboration. A 40-member workforce board—comprised of business leaders from across the state and chaired by businessman Phil Webb—and an executive committee chaired by Alabama Power CEO Jeff Peoples are helping shape the agency's strategy.

"What is important in Huntsville may look different than what's needed in Dothan or Mobile. That's why business

leaders, educators, and policymakers all have a role to play," Reed said. "Collaboration is how we better prepare Alabamians for the jobs that exist and the careers that are coming."

New initiatives include a career pathways diploma for high school students, expanded veteran employment programs, and a network of career centers serving communities across the state.

"If we give Alabamians the tools and opportunity, whether that's a certificate at 19 years old or an apprenticeship that leads to a degree later, they'll be ready to work and build a career," Reed said. "Whether it's a high school student, a veteran, or someone looking to re-enter the workforce, we want to create pathways for everyone to succeed in Alabama's economy."

The new department sits atop a foundation laid by years of legislative victories—all advocated for by The Business Council of Alabama.



REED IS SWORN IN AS ALABAMA'S FIRST SECRETARY OF WORKFORCE FOLLOWING HIS APPOINTMENT BY GOVERNOR KAY IVEY.

MartinFed

Reed says those wins came in phases, each building on the last.

Phase One included Rebuild Alabama to fund road and bridge improvements, The Game Plan to renew economic incentives and support site development, and efforts to expand broadband access, especially in rural Alabama.

Phase Two included Innovate Alabama, which focused on entrepreneurship and technology, and Working for Alabama, which expanded access to housing, child care, and workforce development programs and continuing plans for Alabama's economic development strategy.

"The Legislature and Governor Ivey have done the work, we've built the partnerships, and now we've got a blueprint. The job now is execution," he said.

Looking nationally, Reed sees opportunity on the horizon—especially with a renewed push to bring manufacturing

back to the United States.

"With the Trump administration and the idea of reshoring jobs from overseas, Alabama is well poised to be a

Cordova in Walker County and later settling in Jasper with his wife Mitsy to raise their family, he experienced firsthand the sweeping economic shift

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-GREG REED, SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE

shining star of success," he said. "If our workforce is trained and ready, we'll be in the best possible position to take advantage of these opportunities as they come."

Economic and workforce changes are nothing new to Reed. Growing up in

brought on by the decline of the coal industry. That experience sparked a deep interest in economic development and ultimately drew him to public service.

"Having lived through that, during my childhood and early adult years, it made an impact," Reed said. "So, when



SECRETARY REED VISITS BIRMINGHAM'S ACADEMY OF CRAFT TRAINING,
WHERE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS LEARN TRADES FROM INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS.

I got the opportunity to serve in public office, those areas became really important to me—economic development, workforce development—the idea of helping my community recover and grow.”

That experience informed the many policies he helped shape in the Legislature—policies that positioned Alabama to be named the most improved state for doing business in 2023.

As he steps into his new role, Reed brings perspective and purpose. In addition to driving workforce participation, the department will continue its traditional responsibilities, such as unemployment insurance,

workplace safety, and inspections. The department is preparing to complete its full implementation phase this summer with a move to the Gordon Persons Building in Montgomery while also gearing up to launch a statewide rebranding and outreach initiative.

“No matter who gets the credit,” Reed said. “We want to promote what’s working, learn from what isn’t, and pull together the best ideas—no matter where they come from. That’s how we ensure our success.”

And for business leaders across the state, Reed has a clear message:

“We’re here to be a partner,” he said. “We want to understand what you need and help make it happen. That’s how we grow Alabama’s economy—together.”

The Business Advocate is published by the Business Council of Alabama, a non-partisan, statewide business association representing the interests and concerns of nearly 1 million working Alabamians through its member companies and its partnership with the Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama. For more information on the Business Council of Alabama, please contact us at (334) 834-6000 or visit us online at bcatoday.org.