

Bentley defends decision to close Partlow

By Patrick Rupinski Staff Writer

Published: Saturday, March 26, 2011 at 3:30 a.m.

TUSCALOOSA | Gov. Robert Bentley said Friday that his decision to close W.D. Partlow Development Center in Tuscaloosa is in the best interest of its residents, who have mental developmental disabilities.

He said he knows the closing will result in job losses, but the decision has been made, and Partlow patients will be better off living in community-based settings such as group homes.



Dusty Compton / Tuscaloosa News

Gov. Robert Bentley, above, spoke to the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama at Indian Hills Country Club on Friday.

“We made the decision based on one thing — what is best for the patients and that is it,” Bentley said during his first official appearance before a hometown audience since becoming governor in January.

Partlow residents will be moved to communities around the state, with many going to group homes. Partlow, which has about 150 residents and more than 400 employees, is slated to be closed by Sept. 30.

Bentley told several hundred people at a Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama luncheon at Indian Hills Country Club that throughout the country group homes have become the preferred method to care for people with mental developmental disabilities.

“We need to have mental health treatment that’s 21st century,” he said noting that some instances it is more at the 19th-century level with patients kept in a prisonlike setting.

He said Partlow residents who will be moved to community-based group homes are not dangerous.

Across the country, states have moved to using group homes for caring for people mental developmental disabilities, and Bentley said the results show almost all who move to group homes are happier and better off.

Partlow is the last developmental center run by the state Department of Mental Health. Other similar state centers have been closed over the years.

Bentley said the cost of keeping Partlow open was a secondary factor during a time when the state faces major financial problems. He noted it costs about \$278,000 yearly to keep a patient at Partlow.

State officials said previously the cost of treating a person with mental disabilities in a group home setting is about \$75,000.