

Gov. Bentley promises funding for Holocaust program

Bentley pledges \$25K in funding for education program

Gov. Robert Bentley vowed Tuesday to find \$25,000 to help fund educational programs that teach the horrors of the Holocaust to students around Alabama.

Bentley sought to fund an equal amount last year, but the Legislature cut it from the budget, leaving the Alabama Holocaust Commission searching once again for financial help.



Holocaust survivors, Max Steinmetz, left, and Max Hertz meet St. James school student Hannah Yost and her teacher Venna Everett after Tuesday's memorial service at the state Capitol. Photo: Alvin Benn/Special to the Advertiser.

After thanking the panel for inviting him to this year's event, Bentley pledged to commission Chairwoman Phyllis Weinstein that he would do more than just try this year.

He recalled how he and Weinstein discussed funding last year and when he asked her how much she'd need, he thought she'd ask for "\$500,000" but she came up with \$25,000 instead.

Bentley received loud applause when he said: "I just spoke to my finance director and he told me that we will find the \$25,000, we will find it somewhere."

"Next year we'll again put it in the budget so that we can use it in our public schools," said Bentley, who mentioned the six million Jews "who perished during the Holocaust because of the faith they practiced — they were robbed of their lives."

Weinstein said the governor's pledge was a welcomed surprise at the event where Bentley was only expected to present a proclamation.

"The governor did his homework, and I was very pleased," she said. "He knew that the funds were not approved by the Legislature, and I was impressed by that along with the fact that he was here today because of weather problems he was faced with."

Held each year at the Old House Chamber in the state Capitol, the program usually has had sparse crowds, but Tuesday was different because 92 students at Saint James School were in attendance.

Venna Everett said her students study the Holocaust during a two-week period and then go to Washington, D.C., to visit the National Holocaust Museum.

"This is a way for them to put faces on the facts and learn about people other than themselves," Everett said. "They also need to learn to show compassion, mercy and be kind to each other."

Rabbi Elliot Stevens, of Temple Beth Or, delivered the main address at the program. He said Yom HaShoah — the name for the remembrance ceremony, means "conflagration" in Hebrew.

He said the Holocaust, in his opinion, was not pre-ordained by God and did not have to happen because "it emerged from human choices and human decisions."

"Those facts mean that nothing human, natural or divine guarantees respect for the ethical values and commitments that are most needed in contemporary human existence," he said.

He also said he is concerned that the passage of time "will trivialize the Holocaust" and saluted the Holocaust Commission "to see that this doesn't happen."

The program was attended by several Holocaust survivors and their children and it featured Birmingham violinist Marilyn Pipkin.

Scott Kramer, rabbi at Agudath Israel-Etz Ahayem Synagogue, said the memorial prayer.