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# Gov. Bentley calls lottery vote date debate a 'smokescreen', urges action

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By WSFA 12 News Staff [CONNECT](#)

MONTGOMERY, AL (WSFA) - For the second day in a row, Gov. Robert Bentley took the steps down from his capitol office late in the afternoon to address awaiting media outlets about the developments of a lottery amendment he wants to put before the state's voters.

There was **confusion earlier in the day from legislators** about whether or not the House's **failure Tuesday to get a final version out before a deadline** effectively ended any chance of getting the measure on the Nov. 8 general election ballot. Some senators said they believed the deadline could have been as late as Friday, though the secretary of state later weighed in that it's Wednesday.

Regardless, Bentley said the issue of whether or not the lottery amendment makes it onto the Nov. 8 ballot is a "smokescreen".

"This is a smokescreen, folks. That's all it is. It really doesn't make any difference because those people who want to vote for it are going to come out and vote for it. Those who want to vote against are going to come out and vote against it," he said.

When asked about legislators who may waffle on support if it doesn't go on that general election ballot, Bentley warned he's heard of that argument. Bentley said dates are one thing some legislators use when they want to defeat legislation.

Gov. Bentley called it a "step in the right direction", though, following news that the lottery legislation finally passed out of committee Wednesday afternoon, and said the legislature is working to allow people to help other people. Still, he urged citizens to contact their legislators starting at 8 a.m. Thursday to voice their thoughts. The number he provided is to his own office (334-242-7100). Workers there will put those who call in touch with their representatives.

When asked about the cost of a special referendum, Gov. Bentley said the money to pay for it could come from the lottery proceeds via the expected \$225 million it would generate for the General Fund. Sec. of State John Merrill, who addressed the media earlier in the day, said the figure being thrown around - which has been pegged at a cost to taxpayers of around \$3 million - is more than a decade old and could be significantly higher.

Bentley conceded no one really knows the exact cost of putting on a special vote, but said delaying the vote to approve a lottery will cost a lot more money in the long term.

A Republican, Bentley admitted he didn't vote in favor of the 1999 education lottery plan put forth by then Democratic governor Don Siegelman. But Bentley recently floated the idea of a lottery as a way of addressing some of the state's long-held financial issues (specifically a Medicaid funding crisis), though education and mental health are other areas of concern.

Bentley told reporters Georgia, Tennessee, and Florida love Alabama because residents visit those states for their lotteries. He said he personally has to weigh which is worse, buying five lottery tickets or a child not being able to grow up healthy and strong.

The governor called a special session to look at a lottery option for the state's funding issues. **His lottery proposal passed the Senate 21-12 last Friday** before becoming bogged down in the House. Senate legislation called for 10 percent of the lottery revenue to go to education and the remaining 90 percent to the General Fund. \$100 million of the General Fund split would have been required to go straight to Medicaid.

The governor also addressed rumors that he's negotiated a compact with the Creek Band of Poarch Indians, stating the rumors are "blatantly false".

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