

Mississippi Governor Refuses To Go Against Voters Over Confederate Flag

Mississippi politicians on Tuesday joined a chorus of disapproval over official display of the Confederate flag and state flags containing components of it in the wake of last week's deadly shooting in a Charleston, South Carolina, church.

At least two Republicans and one Democratic leader have decried the bars and stars symbol that prominently occupies a corner of the Mississippi state flag.

The battle flag of the Confederacy has become a lightning rod for outrage over the killings at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston. The accused gunman is said to have posed with the Confederate flag in photos posted online.

Mississippi Speaker of the House Philip Gunn became the first Republican in state history on Monday to publicly support a flag change when he called the Confederate emblem "a point of offense that needs to be removed."

Republican Governor Phil Bryant said on Monday that he would not go against voters in the state who backed the current flag in 2001 by a 2 to 1 margin.

"I don't believe the Mississippi Legislature will act to supersede the will of the people on this issue," Bryant said in a statement.

On Monday, South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley called for the flag to be removed from the State House grounds in Columbia, the state capital.

In Tennessee some politicians have called for the state to

remove the bust of Confederate general and slave trader Nathan Bedford Forrest from its state capital.

Statues of three Confederate leaders standing for decades at the University of Texas have been vandalized with red paint amid calls for their removal, university officials said on Tuesday.

Opponents of the Confederate flag consider it a symbol of slavery and racism, while supporters see it is an historic emblem of the South's history and culture.

Mississippi's Gunn was joined on Tuesday by Republican state Senator David Parker and Democratic state Senator Derrick Simmons, who issued a joint statement calling for removal of the Confederate emblem.

This is an election year in Mississippi, and the flag is likely to become a hot-button issue for those seeking to win or retain office.

Parker said the reaction to last week's shooting made him look differently at the flag. "It makes you think, well, maybe that symbol on our state flag means something to people in a way that you really hadn't considered before," Parker said.

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