

Va. Governor Orders Confederate Flag Removed From License Plates

Virginia will phase out vehicle license plates featuring the Confederate battle flag, the state's governor said on Tuesday, following the fatal shootings of nine black worshipers at a historic South Carolina church, allegedly by a white gunman.

The state, which was part of the pro-slavery Confederacy in the U.S. Civil War, will no longer allow specialty license plates for the Sons of Confederate Veterans group that feature the flag, said Governor Terry McAuliffe, a Democrat.

Supporters of the flag describe it as a symbol of the South's history and culture as well a memorial to the roughly 480,000 Confederate Civil War casualties, but detractors see it as a symbol of racism.

"Its display on state issued license tags is, in my view, unnecessarily divisive and hurtful to too many of our people," McAuliffe said in a statement.

On Monday, the governor of South Carolina called for the Confederate flag to be removed from the grounds of the capitol after a racist manifesto apparently written by accused gunman Dylann Roof, 21, emerged online, accompanied by photos of Roof posing with the flag.

McAuliffe noted that a 1999 state law required the state to issue Sons of Confederate Veterans license plates, but that following a U.S. Supreme Court decision last week it was no longer required to issue plates featuring the flag.

The Virginia Flaggers, an activist group known for displaying huge Confederate flags on private property along major

highways, condemned the move, saying their displays had gone on without incident.

“Sadly, this is likely to change almost immediately with Governor McAuliffe’s decision to stir up this controversy,” said Grayson Jennings, a spokesman for the group.

Democratic state Senator Donald McEachin, a prominent member of the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus, praised the decision.

“The Confederate battle flag has become the symbol for numerous hate groups, flown proudly by those who traffic in racism and bigotry,” McEachin said in a statement.

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