

# Gov. Bentley: Lottery less immoral than 'allowing a child to die'



Gov. Robert Bentley (r.) makes the case for his lottery proposal as Children's Hospital of Alabama CEO Mike Warren looks on. (Howard Koplowitz)



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Either institute a lottery or let sick children die.

During a visit to Children's Hospital of Alabama, Gov. Robert Bentley explained his lottery proposal as the least "immoral" choice address the state's Medicaid budget shortfall.

Bentley said he understands those who believe a lottery is immoral, noting that he voted against the 1999 lottery plan. But he said there is no other alternative to come up with Medicaid funding. He said a lottery would provide long-term funding "for at least several years."

"When you look at this you say: 'Which is the most immoral: Buying five lottery tickets with money you earned or allowing a child to die?' I don't think there's even a choice there, so we must fund Medicaid, we must take care of our sick children, our disabled people, those in nursing homes, those with mental illness," the governor said after touring the cardiac unit at Children's. "Because you know what? They didn't choose any of that. Nobody did, and that's one of the big functions of government is to take care of

those that can't take care of themselves."

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## What we know about Bentley's proposal for Alabama lottery

After the legislature didn't improve tax increases last year, Bentley said a lottery is the "one best option" left.

"We have proposed a very clean, simple lottery with a good oversight," the governor said, adding that the proceeds would go to "essential services," including Medicaid, the Department of Human Resources, mental health and law enforcement.

Last year, the legislature didn't adequately fund Medicaid, coming up \$85 million short, according to the governor.

Bentley acknowledged that another lottery bill is being planned by state Sen. Jim McClendon, R-Springville, but the governor said he believes his bill has more of a chance of passing in the upcoming special legislative session.

**McClendon's bill** would allow for a \$75 million bond issue against future lottery proceeds, meaning funds would reach state coffers sooner than Bentley's plan. The senator's proposal also includes allowing electronic lottery terminals -- devices similar to slot machines -- to be installed in the state, among other differences.

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