

JEWISH HERITAGE WEEK

WHEREAS: The spring provides an opportunity for rebirth, when we not only remember our heritage, but also grow from it. As we enter the spring, Jews from all over the world celebrate Passover, when the story of the Exodus from Egypt after generations of slavery is told, and celebrate Shavuot to commemorate the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. During this time, Jewish people can affirm their belief that Passover freed them from their physical bondage, and the Torah freed them from their spiritual bondage; and

WHEREAS: American Jews also join their brethren throughout the world in observance of the National Days of Remembrance. During these days, we remember and honor the victims and survivors of the Holocaust, the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and Solidarity Day for Soviet Jews; and

WHEREAS: As we remember joyous occasions such as Israel's Independence Day, we can look back at the roles of Jewish people in our own struggle for independence. Gershom Mendes Seixas, the first native-born Jewish hazzan in the United States, was one of many who risked all in support of the American cause. In 1776, when the British were approaching New York, Gershom Mendes Seixas of Congregation Shearith Israel closed the synagogue rather than keep it open under British rule, and he did not reopen it until America was both victorious and free. Years later, he would be one of fourteen clergymen participating in George Washington's first inauguration; and

WHEREAS: Gershom Mendes Seixas not only supported America, but he supported American ideals as well. In 1783, his distaste for intolerance urged him to successfully seek a change in a Pennsylvania constitutional clause that required a religious examination for office seekers. We can all learn from this great Jewish American the importance of tolerance and freedom, ideals that have brought millions of Jews to America since her founding. In coming to America, these Jews have fled persecution and the horrors of deadly prejudice to begin new lives where they could worship freely and prosper. America has been made greater and stronger through the presence and lasting contributions of Jewish Americans. In their countless callings, Jewish Americans have provided wisdom, energy and leadership wherever they settled; and

WHEREAS: During this week we remember our lost Jewish friends, including Colonel Ilan Ramon, who perished in the crash of the Columbia space shuttle. We also recognize the many Jewish Americans serving in our armed forces to rid the world of brutality and terror, and we stand with our President George W. Bush when he says, "We will speak up for our principles, and we will stand up for our friends in the world. And one of our most important friends is the State of Israel;" now

THEREFORE: I, SONNY PERDUE, Governor of the State of Georgia, do hereby proclaim May 4 through May 11, 2003, as JEWISH HERITAGE WEEK in Georgia.

In witness thereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the Executive Department to be affixed this sixth day of May in the year of our Lord two thousand three.

