



Mississippi House of Representatives Weekly Summary

Week of March 11, 2013

House members faced another major deadline this week as they continued to address Senate bills on the House floor. By Wednesday, House members needed to address all general, nonrevenue bills received from the Senate. If a Senate bill was not taken up and passed by Wednesday, it died on the Calendar. Thursday was the last day for reconsidering Senate bills, and Friday was the deadline for tabling Motions to Reconsider.

To start off the week, the House Medicaid Committee held a hearing Monday to discuss Medicaid expansion. Because there is no longer a Medicaid technical bill alive in the Legislature, committee members requested the hearing to have the opportunity to discuss the issue. The committee members and a packed audience heard from Lucien Smith, Deputy Chief of Staff and Policy Director for Governor Phil Bryant; Theresa Hanna, Executive Director for the Center for Mississippi Health Policy; Christie Herrera, Vice President of Policy at the Foundation for Government Accountability; Gary Marchand, Chief Executive Officer Memorial Hospital at Gulfport; Dr. Bob Neal, Senior Economist; and Dr. David Dzielak, Executive Director for the Division of Medicaid. After the presentations, members took the opportunity to question the presenters.

On the House floor, members jumped in to tackle education bills that prompted numerous questions from both sides of the aisle. [Senate bill 2199](#) (SB2199) requires that all local school superintendents should be appointed beginning January 1, 2016. However, House members amended the bill to require a direct referendum to be held in 2014 in conjunction with midterm congressional elections. This would allow local constituents the opportunity to vote in favor of elected or appointed superintendents. Supporters of appointed superintendents believe appointed superintendents typically represent successful school districts with higher quality distribution indexes (QDIs). In districts where a qualified candidate does not exist to run for election, supporters affirm that appointing a superintendent promotes a higher chance of district success. Opponents believe that elections are the trusted method of keeping officials accountable. They also support local control over local schools. The bill initially failed by a vote of 52-65 but was held on a Motion to Reconsider. After being reconsidered Wednesday, the bill passed by a vote of 62-55.

Governor Phil Bryant's Education Works Program was taken up again in [Senate Bill 2658](#) (SB2658). This bill has been commonly referred to throughout the session as the "omnibus bill" because it is comprised of so many different elements: establishing a universal, statewide



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literacy screener for lower elementary students; creating a statewide literacy coaching program; requiring third graders to meet basic proficiency standards in reading before advancing to the fourth grade; instilling intensive reading instruction for children who fall behind in grades K-3; offering a certain number of scholarships to students who have a 3.5 GPA and a 28 ACT score to become teachers in Mississippi for at least five years; offering those same scholars incentives to teach in D & F districts; and creating a pilot program in four Mississippi school districts to implement the performance-based compensation program for teachers. Amendments passed requiring high schools with graduation rates below 90 percent (changed from 80 percent) to submit plans on how they propose to increase graduation rates, and requiring prospective teachers to have a 3.0 grade average in order to gain admission to the schools of education at our state's colleges and universities. The bill's initial requirement to make at least a 21 on the ACT was eliminated through a floor amendment. The amended bill passed by a vote of 82-38.

Members also discussed and passed a bill addressing school security. [Senate Bill 2659](#) (SB2659) authorizes local school districts/boards to determine their own security plans. The Department of Public Safety and the Department of Education ultimately must approve proposed security policies. Furthermore, any employee authorized to carry a concealed weapon on a school campus would be required to take and pass a firearms safety course. The bill passed 75-41.

Wednesday, House members addressed and passed 53 Appropriation bills from the Senate. At the beginning of the Session, the chairmen from both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees meet to divide the 106 Appropriation and Revenue bills. The House takes 53, and the Senate takes 53. Once each chamber votes on the measures, they go to the other chamber for approval. All bills must pass both chambers in identical form before they can be signed into law by the Governor.

The Department of Mental Health budget bill ([SB2874](#)) caused the most floor discussion Wednesday. House members voted to cut \$6 million or 2.8 percent of the nearly \$577 million budget. The bill passed 74-43. Chairman Herb Frierson said that although any cuts in such a high priority agency are regrettable, the fiscal realities are such that some cuts are necessary.

On Thursday afternoon, Governor Bryant signed [Senate Bill 2633](#), the Mississippi Student Religious Liberties Act of 2013, into law. The measure protects students from being discriminated against in a public school for expressing their religious viewpoints or engaging in religious activities.



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Other bills that passed the House floor this week included:

--[Senate bill 2244](#) (SB2244) exempts sales tax on food items school children sell during fundraisers. Passage of this bill allows schools to keep more of the money from fundraisers.

--[Senate bill 2816](#) (SB2816) allows elderly and/or physically or mentally handicapped residents of institutions to file for homestead exemption on their homes (should they still own one) and not on the facility where they reside.

--[Senate bill 2833](#) (SB2833) affords a \$2,500 tax credit to parents who adopt a child during the year the adoption takes place.

--[Senate bill 2625](#) (SB2625) states that if any public official is convicted of embezzling they cannot be rehired by any state, county or municipality government.

-- [Senate bill 2553](#) (SB2553) exempts cottage food operations from certain licensing requirements. It exempts non-potentially hazardous foods like jams, jellies, baked goods, tea and dry herbs. Such items still must be labeled with the cottage food organization's name, address, ingredients and any allergy information. This bill also permits the group to sell at farmers' markets.

Visitors to the Capitol this week included Miss Mississippi Marie Elizabeth Wicks. House members presented the Ocean Springs native and the University of Mississippi alumna with House Concurrent Resolution 82 that commended her on her many achievements. Also, Dr. Rodney Bennett visited the House Thursday, where he was commended with House Concurrent Resolution 88 on being named the 10th president of the University of Southern Mississippi.