



Mississippi House of Representatives Weekly Summary

Week of February 17, 2014

This week, members of the House turned their focus toward budget matters, with both the Appropriations and Ways and Means committees very active. The Appropriations committee deals with spending the state's money and is charged with designing the FY 2015 State Budget, which begins July 1. The Ways and Means Committee focuses on sources of state revenue. This committee crafts bills used as vehicles to fund the government. Early projections suggest the budget for FY2015 will be close to \$5.9 billion.

The Ways and Means Committee passed several bills out of committee and onto the House floor, including:

--[House Bill 1561](#) (HB1561) reduces the insurance premium tax for certain insurance companies participating in health exchanges. Enactment of this measure would allow citizens to have more selection on insurance exchanges. Companies qualify if they write policies on the exchange in all 82 counties of Mississippi. After debate on the House floor, HB1561 was "laid on the table subject to call." This means it may or may not be taken up again at a later date.

--[House Bill 1562](#) (HB1562) exempts income tax on certain physicians, nurses and physician assistants practicing in critical physician shortage areas. Twenty-two counties in Mississippi qualify as shortage areas. The goal of the bill is to have doctors and nurses in all counties. Many questions were raised concerning net versus gross income and exemptions being limited to those with new licenses. However, members overwhelmingly voted to keep the bill alive. HB1562 passed by a vote of 116-3.

--[Senate Bill 2155](#) (SB2155) permits Mississippi State University (MSU) to enter into long-term leases with the Institute of Higher Learning's (IHL) approval. Enactment of this measure would allow the City of Starkville to build a parking garage on the MSU campus and lease it back to MSU. At the same time, MSU would lease an existing building nearby the proposed parking garage to an LLC that has developed plans over the last 10 years to construct a convention center and a hotel which would be used by both MSU and the City of Starkville. MSU would then have a 55-year lease for the 3.3 acres where the hotel and convention center will be located. The bill passed out of committee and onto the House floor, where it passed unanimously.

Members of the House Transportation Committee passed [Senate Bill 2434](#) (SB2434) inserting some of their own language. Should SB2434 become law, it would create a statute of careless driving (for alleged drivers) as a civil violation for reading, writing and sending a text-based message. Those found in violation would be subject to a civil penalty of \$100.



Mississippi House of Representatives Weekly Summary

A spokeswoman for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards presented an informational session to House Education Committee members this week on the importance and educational value of teachers working toward national board certification. The presenter reiterated that Mississippi provides National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) a stipend of \$6,000 a year for the life of the certificate and provides reimbursement of the certification fees upon completion of the process. The districts with the largest number of NBCTs are Rankin County, Desoto County, Jackson Public Schools, Tupelo Public Schools and Madison County.

On the House floor Wednesday and Thursday, House members first addressed Special Funds Appropriations bills and then moved to tackle General Funds Appropriations bills. The amounts appropriated to each agency were determined based on agency needs, not what the agency already had in its coffers. The deadline to address these bills is February 26 at midnight.

Repeatedly, an amendment was offered for the majority of the agencies' budgets to give employees of those agencies a pay raise. Each time the pay raise amendment was brought forward, it was defeated at the request of the Appropriations Chairman, who opined the proposed budget could not support the proposed raise without irresponsibly using non-recurring, "one time" money. Those supporting the amendment argued the state could afford the raises by reducing the debt service budget, necessary to pay the state's bonded indebtedness. However during the explanation of the budget for the Department of Education, an amendment was offered requiring a **plan** to be developed that would provide a \$1,000 pay raise to all state employees. The amendment passed on a voice vote with no opposition.

A special reception occurred Thursday after Session recognizing the three living people who have held the position of Speaker Pro Tempore in the past. The Speaker Pro Tempore is the second highest position in the House of Representatives, with the Speaker being first. Current Speaker Pro Tempore Greg Snowden assembled a framed photo of all five Speakers Pro Tempores, which hangs in the House Management Committee room. C.B. Newman served from 1974-1975, 1975-1976 and passed away in 2002. Those recognized today were Cecil Simmons, 1987-1988, 1988-1992; Robert Clark, 1992-2004; and J.P. Compretta, 2004-2012. Speaker Pro Tempore Greg Snowden has served since 2012.