



Mississippi House of Representatives Weekly Summary

Week of February 8, 2016

At the beginning of the week, Governor Bryant signed into law the economic package that the House and Senate passed last week during the Special Session.

The Continental Tire project would be a \$1.45 billion company investment, bringing 2,500 jobs to the Central Mississippi area. The project with Edison Chouest Offshore, Topship, would be a \$68 million company investment, slated to bring 1,000 jobs to the Port of Gulfport.

Midnight on Monday, February 8, was the filing deadline for all general bills and constitutional amendments to be submitted to the Clerk's Office. Attorneys for the House drafted 2,046 requests, which include resolutions, general bills and bills that never get dropped in or filed. They are still drafting bills for revenue committees, Appropriations, Local and Private and numerous resolutions and proclamations that have yet to be requested. By the time of this report, 1,419 pieces of legislation had been introduced so far.

Many committees, therefore, began conducting full committee meetings.

The Appropriations Committee hears from major state agencies each year as they bring forth their requests for the next budget cycle. Several agencies presented their budget requests this week.

Members from the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), Mississippi's Community and Junior Colleges and the Mississippi Institutions for Higher Learning (IHL) made their Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 budget requests.

MDE's priorities remain fairly unchanged this year. They'd like to see all students proficient and showing growth in assessed areas, while having the ultimate goal of graduating all students college and career ready. Furthermore, MDE would like to see every child have access to a high-quality early childhood program, every school have effective teachers and leaders and every community effectively using a world-class data system to improve student outcomes. MDE requested an 8.54 percent increase over FY 2016 funding.

Mississippi's Community and Junior Colleges system ranks number one in the nation. Representatives from the agency emphasized the importance of the community and junior college system to the workforce development of the State. They reminded Appropriations members of the 40,000 job vacancies at the start of 2016 that are a direct result of the widening skill gap among Mississippians of



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working age. Their request comes in around \$82 million and would go toward keeping tuition costs down, offering competitive salaries for faculty and expanding technical programs.

IHL representatives reported many positive features of the agency as they broke down their budget request of \$17 million. In 2015, 16,813 degrees were awarded, the largest number yet. The system has approximately 93,833 students, with 72.4 percent Mississippians. The agency maintains eight main university campuses, the University of Mississippi Medical center and 17 satellite centers.

During the Mississippi Department of Corrections presentation, Commissioner Marshall Fisher highlighted his goals for the agency. Realigning the organization is one of his main interests. He stressed his concerns about employee retention. The agency sees a high turnover rate due to the very low salaries and the dangers associated with the positions. He believes a livable wage would go a long way to improve moral. He remarked that since last appearing before the committee in September, they now have approximately 200 fewer employees. He requested \$374 million, which is the same request as last year, for the agency that would go toward security enhancements, infrastructure repairs, realignment of salaries, food costs and debt services.

Judiciary B passed several bills out of committee, including [House Bill 786](#) that creates the Mississippi Church Protection Act. This bill was crafted as a direct result of the tragedy that occurred in a South Carolina church during the summer of 2015. This law gives the option, not a mandate, that the governing body of a church or place of worship (as defined in the Mississippi tax code) may establish a security program in which designated members may carry firearms to protect the congregation. Enactment of this measure would allow those members the same protection as the Castle Doctrine.

Activity on the House floor picked up speed, as well.

[House Bill 112](#) permits that when Mississippi has a national disaster, credentialed medical responders, who come to Mississippi to assist, will be covered under workers' compensation and death benefits should they incur injury or death while assisting with disaster recovery.

[House Bill 425](#) would authorize tax collectors to conduct sales through an online auction. This measure provides another option for those who perform most of their business online.

[House Bill 461](#) provides that the filing date for state tax returns is the same as the filing date for federal returns.

Committees will continue to be extremely busy during the next week as they work in anticipation of the February 23 deadline to report bills out of committee.