



Week of January 2, 2017

On January 3, 2017, the 132nd Mississippi State Legislature began the second session in the four-year term.

This was a familiar week for many, but some newcomers joined the House of Representatives as a result of special elections. Abe Hudson, D-Shelby; Debra Gibbs, D-Jackson; Donnie Scoggin, R-Ellisville and John Glen Corley, R-Lumberton joined the ranks of representatives for the 2017 Regular Session.

The year promises to be a special one for the state as Mississippi celebrates its 200th year of statehood on December 10, 2017. The Speaker of the House and Lieutenant Governor held a joint press conference on Tuesday to kick off Mississippi's Bicentennial Celebration, which will occur throughout the year with events held in different areas of the state. Grants from the Mississippi Humanities Council are available for communities planning to recognize the bicentennial.

The Mississippi Department of Education provided an overview of the education reform results to the House Education Committee members this week. The Mississippi Board of Education, which heads the department, touched on its six primary strategic goals regarding increasing proficiency in assessed areas, increasing graduation rates, access to quality early-childhood programs, hiring effective teachers, an improved data system and improved school and district ratings.

While the department recognizes that there is still work to be done, its report on achievements to date was encouraging. This year the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reported Mississippi was the only state in the nation with a significant increase in scores for fourth-grade reading and math. High school ACT scores have also improved, with 19 districts reporting an average composite score of 20 or higher compared to only nine districts in 2015. High school graduation rates have jumped from 73.7 percent in 2011 to 80.8 percent in 2015, while the percentage of students with disabilities who graduate has also improved by 10 percent since 2011. The emphasis on National Board Certified Teachers has Mississippi ranked fourth in the nation for percent of teachers who are certified.

The annual Mississippi Economic Council Capitol Day was held in downtown Jackson and at the Capitol. This event provides a setting for business leaders around the state to gather and meet with legislators and hear from state leaders about the legislative agenda for the upcoming session.

A new phase of renovation to the Capitol began last month and is expected to last one year. The Capitol's North Entrance will be closed for the duration of the project. Visitors may use the building's south entrance and handicapped access parking is available on the south side of the Capitol during the renovation as well.