



Week of March 27, 2017

Legislators completed the last day of the 2017 legislative session on Wednesday, March 29, after working through the weekend to finalize the state budget.

Several pieces of notable legislation were passed this session covering topics ranging from campaign finance reform to protection for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.

New campaign finance reform legislation clarifies situations in which campaign funds would not be appropriate for use, namely personal expenses. It also transfers more authority to the Mississippi Ethics Commission to deal with these types of situations.

A Capitol Complex Improvement District has been created in order to improve infrastructure and the appearance of the area surrounding the State Capitol by using a percentage of the sales tax collected in Jackson.

A new sexual assault protection order will give victims of sexual assault an added measure of protection from their offenders. Another piece of legislation clarifies the “habitual cruel and inhuman treatment” divorce statute to specify that this includes any type of domestic violence, threatened or attempted.

Penalties for crimes committed against law enforcement officers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians were doubled with the passage of the Back the Badge Act. Death penalty options were expanded to include gas chamber, electrocution and a firing squad if lethal injection is blocked or appealed by a higher court.

Anti-bullying legislation will require schools to implement policies and procedures to prevent bullying and suicide. The Rivers McGraw Act, named in honor of a college student who took his life after being released from an arrest for substance abuse, will create a mental health diversion pilot program for people in similar situations to access treatment and counseling.

A number of budget cuts presented legislators with a challenge when crafting the state budget. This year, the governor has cut the budget four times, resulting in approximately \$155 million worth of cuts, and drawn another \$50 million from the state’s rainy day fund. This resulted in budget cuts for most state agencies; however, the Department of Finance and Administration, the Department of Public Safety, the Department of Child Protective Services and the Department of Corrections did not receive cuts.

While a special session was already being considered, it will now be necessary in order to come to an agreement on budgets for the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT), State Aid roads and

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the attorney general's office. House members made multiple bipartisan attempts throughout the session to create adequate funding for roads and bridges, with all efforts being stopped by the Senate. All 121 present House members voted to recommit the Senate's proposed budget for transportation and infrastructure in order to have further discussion that would lead to a better solution during special session.