

April 22, 1999

TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

GOVERNOR'S VETO MESSAGE FOR HOUSE BILL 1713

I am returning House Bill 1713, "AN ACT TO RESTORE THE RIGHT OF SUFFRAGE TO WARREN SLATER OF WALTHALL COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI," without my approval and respectfully present the following reasons for my veto:

When the people of Walthall County elected Warren Slater as their sheriff, they trusted him to obey the law. He violated that trust, and so I must veto this bill to restore his privilege to vote.

In September 1997 a Walthall county jury convicted their sheriff, Warren Slater, of two felonies--wire fraud and filing a false document with the intent to defraud--and two misdemeanors--obtaining an unauthorized appropriation from the Walthall County Board of Supervisors and neglect of duty. The judge removed Slater from office, sentenced him to three years in prison, suspended the prison term for five years, and placed him on probation. Just one year later on November 18, 1998, the judge terminated Slater's probation.

Slater violated his sacred oath of office by defrauding the taxpayers of Walthall County, but now--before the end of the suspension and only five months after the end of his one-year probation--Slater seeks to regain his ability to vote. I do not believe that we should act with such unseemly haste to restore the privilege to vote to a former sheriff who was convicted of corruption in office.

I must add that House Bill 1713 refers to only one of Slater's misdemeanor convictions. Because Slater was also convicted of two disenfranchising felonies, it is at least questionable whether this bill would lawfully restore his suffrage.

For all of those reasons I must veto this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRK FORDICE
GOVERNOR