

February 27, 2006

TO THE MISSISSIPPI STATE SENATE:

GOVERNOR'S VETO MESSAGE FOR SENATE BILL 2418

I am returning Senate Bill 2418: "AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 63-1-46, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO INCREASE REINSTATEMENT FEES FOR SUSPENDED DRIVERS' LICENSES; TO PROVIDE FOR THE DISPOSITION OF THE ADDITIONAL REVENUE; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES" without my approval, and assign the following reasons for my veto.

After full consideration, I am vetoing Senate Bill 2418, which increases the fees to reinstate suspended drivers licenses and directs a portion of the increases to fund overtime pay for some highway patrol officers. I respect the Legislatures attempt to address the serious problem of insufficient pay for law enforcement officers, but this legislation is the wrong solution.

State law enforcement officers, whether they are highway patrol officers, members of the Bureau of Investigations, or narcotics agents, need and deserve a pay raise. These men and women risk their lives day and night to protect our families and our communities, yet many have not had a pay raise in six years. I have proposed that these law enforcement officers, along with the rest of our state employees, receive a pay raise in the coming fiscal year through the normal appropriations process. I am pleased the vast majority of both the House and Senate seem to agree with that proposal.

However, Senate Bill 2418 relies on increased fees generated by traffic tickets to fund additional pay for highway patrol officers. The legislation doubles from \$25 to \$50 the fee required to reinstate a driver's license which has been suspended, revoked, or cancelled. The bill also increases from \$75 to \$200 the additional fee required to reinstate a driver's license which has been suspended, revoked under the provisions of the Mississippi Implied Consent Law or as a result of a conviction of a violation of the Uniform Controlled Substances Law. For these situations to occur, a law enforcement officer must first issue a citation.

It is inappropriate for law enforcement salaries to be dependant upon fees resulting from traffic tickets. Such a salary system creates a perception among the public that highway patrol officers stop motorists and write tickets for the purpose of increasing their own pay. This perception would not be fair to the Highway Patrol and neither would the salary structure.

To add insult to injury, state and local law enforcement who issue thousands of citations that result in driver license revocations would not be treated the same as highway patrol officers, but the fees resulting from their work would be paid exclusively to highway patrol officers. That's not fair, and it would be bad for morale and hurt the working relationships among various state and local law enforcement organizations.

The policy of my Administration is for all state law enforcement to work together in support of local law enforcement efforts. The Legislature's goal of getting other law enforcement officers paid for overtime is laudable. I am pleased state law enforcement officers received several millions of dollars for overtime worked during and after Katrina (\$3.7 million to Department of Public Safety officers and staff alone). The federal government is reimbursing that amount to the state. When federal funds aren't available, as is often the case, money appropriated out of the General Fund should pay our state law enforcement officers for their overtime work.

For these reasons, I urge the members of the Legislature to sustain the veto and reject Senate Bill 2418.

Respectfully submitted,

Haley Barbour
Governor