

April 26, 2011

TO THE MISSISSIPPI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

GOVERNOR'S VETO MESSAGE FOR HOUSE BILL 924:

I am returning House Bill 924: "AN ACT TO CREATE THE COUNCIL ON COMBATING OBESITY IN MISSISSIPPI AND PROVIDE FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL; TO DIRECT THE COUNCIL TO DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE, STRATEGIC PLAN TO COMBAT OBESITY IN MISSISSIPPI, WHICH MUST ADDRESS CERTAIN ISSUES; TO PROVIDE THAT MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL WILL SERVE WITHOUT COMPENSATION FOR THEIR SERVICES, AND THE COUNCIL WILL PERFORM ITS DUTIES WITHOUT LEGISLATIVE APPROPRIATION OR THE USE OF ANY STATE FUNDS; TO REQUIRE THE COUNCIL TO PREPARE AND PRESENT AN ANNUAL REPORT OF ITS WORK TO THE LEGISLATURE AND THE GOVERNOR; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES," not approved and assign the following reasons for my veto.

After full consideration, I am vetoing House Bill 924, which sets up a 34-member council to combat obesity in Mississippi. This bill is, at best, duplicative considering the numerous private and public efforts to address this issue in Mississippi; at worst, this bill simply adds to the fat of state government.

The Legislature has commissioned various entities to address this issue, including:

- A Statewide Council for Obesity Prevention and Management, which was passed in 2001 but dissolved in 2006;
- A Governor's Commission on Physical and Fitness was passed in 1992 and still exists;
- A 2007 mandate for every public school district to establish a local school health and physical education council; this same law requires every school district to adopt a wellness program governing students' lifestyles; and
- A 2002 mandate for the Department of Education to employ a physical activity coordinator, whose job is to monitor every elementary and middle school to make sure it provides at least 150 minutes of physical education per week during grades K-8.

Some of the programs and services currently available to address overweight children and adults include the State Health Department's Office of Preventative Health, which oversees a Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity; the Central Mississippi Medical Center, which offers free seminars on weight management; Baptist Health Systems, which provides nutrition counseling and weight management consultation to individuals and groups; and the Mississippi Against Obesity Foundation, a non-profit charity established in 2007 to raise awareness about obesity in the state.

While I appreciate the legislative efforts to address this problem, I do not believe that another bureaucratic entity is the way to successfully change the culture of obesity in our state. Government officials, including legislators, have already made significant strides by setting a good example for their constituents by engaging in an intensive diet and exercise fitness challenge for the past two years.

For these reasons, I am vetoing House Bill 924.

Respectfully submitted,

Haley Barbour
GOVERNOR