MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE

By: Representatives Gunn, White, Johnson, Anderson (110th), Karriem, Williams-Barnes, Hines, Banks, Paden, Brown (70th), Porter, Mickens, McCray, Foster, Summers, Burnett, Clark, Crudup, Evans (91st), Denton, Reynolds, Scott, Anthony, Gibbs (72nd), Holloway, Ford (73rd), Osborne, Rosebud, Bell (65th), Harness, Walker, Hudson, Taylor, McGee, Faulkner

To: Rules

HOUSE BILL NO. 1796

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE COMMISSION TO REDESIGN THE MISSISSIPPI STATE FLAG; TO PRESCRIBE THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION AND TO PROVIDE FOR ITS ORGANIZATION AND MEETINGS; TO PROVIDE THAT THE NEW DESIGN FOR THE MISSISSIPPI STATE FLAG RECOMMENDED BY THE COMMISSION SHALL NOT INCLUDE THE DESIGN OF THE CONFEDERATE BATTLE FLAG, BUT SHALL INCLUDE THE WORDS "IN GOD WE TRUST"; TO PROVIDE THAT THE COMMISSION SHALL MAKE ITS RECOMMENDATION FOR THE NEW DESIGN FOR THE MISSISSIPPI STATE FLAG BY SEPTEMBER 14, 2020; TO PROVIDE THAT THE NEW DESIGN FOR THE MISSISSIPPI STATE FLAG RECOMMENDED BY THE COMMISSION SHALL BE PLACED ON THE BALLOT IN A SPECIAL ELECTION TO BE HELD ON NOVEMBER 3, 2020; TO PROVIDE THAT IF A MAJORITY OF THE QUALIFIED ELECTORS VOTE FOR THE NEW DESIGN, THEN THE LEGISLATURE SHALL ENACT INTO LAW THE NEW DESIGN AS THE OFFICIAL MISSISSIPPI STATE FLAG; TO PROVIDE THAT IF A MAJORITY OF THE QUALIFIED ELECTORS VOTE AGAINST THE NEW DESIGN, THEN THE COMMISSION SHALL RECONVENE TO RECOMMEND ANOTHER NEW DESIGN FOR THE MISSISSIPPI STATE FLAG TO BE PRESENTED TO THE LEGISLATURE DURING THE 2021 REGULAR SESSION; TO REQUIRE THAT THE SPECIAL ELECTION BE ADMINISTERED BY MEANS OF BALLOTS CONTAINING A COLOR PICTURE OR DRAWING OF THE NEW DESIGN FOR THE MISSISSIPPI STATE FLAG; TO REQUIRE THE SECRETARY OF STATE TO PROVIDE THOSE BALLOTS TO THE ELECTION COMMISSIONERS OF EACH COUNTY; TO AMEND SECTIONS 23-15-351 AND 23-15-355, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO CONFORM TO THE PRECEDING PROVISIONS; TO REPEAL SECTION 3-3-16, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, WHICH PROVIDES THE DESIGN FOR THE OFFICIAL FLAG OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. (1) There is established the Commission to Redesign the Mississippi State Flag (commission) for the sole
purpose of developing, designing and reporting to the Governor and the Legislature its recommendation for the new design for the official Mississippi State Flag not later than September 14, 2020. The new design for the Mississippi State Flag recommended by the commission shall be placed on the ballot in a statewide special election as provided for in Section 2 of this act. The new design for the Mississippi State Flag recommended by the commission shall not include the design of the Confederate Battle Flag, but shall include the words "In God We Trust." The commission is charged with a sensitive and responsible task that it shall conduct in an objective manner. The new design for the Mississippi State Flag shall honor the past while embracing the promise of the future.

(2) The Commission to Redesign the Mississippi State Flag shall consist of nine (9) members, to be appointed as follows:

(a) Three (3) members appointed by the Speaker of the House;
(b) Three (3) members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor;
(c) Three (3) members appointed by the Governor, to include:
   (i) A representative from the Mississippi Economic Council;
   (ii) A representative from the Mississippi Arts Commission;
(iii) A representative from the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

All appointments to the commission shall be made not later than July 15, 2020. The chair of the commission shall be chosen by majority vote of the members of the commission. The commission shall meet as soon as practicable after the appointments have been made upon the joint call of the Speaker and the Lieutenant Governor, and shall organize for business. A majority vote of the members of the commission shall be required for the adoption of any reports and recommendations. The Mississippi Department of Archives and History shall provide meeting space and clerical support for the operation of the commission.

(3) The commission shall have the following functions and duties:

(a) To hold regular public meetings when and where it sees fit;

(b) To receive written public comments in a manner and under the terms and conditions as it sees fit;

(c) To collect, examine and consider all information that it determines may be helpful in making a recommendation for the new design for the Mississippi State Flag;

(d) To consult with experts, representatives of organizations and associations, and others, as it sees fit, whose knowledge or expertise may assist the commission in making its recommendation;
(e) To make any inquiries and conduct any business that may assist the commission in developing the new design for the Mississippi State Flag; however, the new design for the Mississippi State Flag recommended by the commission shall not include the design of the Confederate Battle Flag, but shall include the words "In God We Trust";

(f) Keep minutes of its meetings, and make those minutes available to the public; and

(g) To make a written recommendation for the new design for the official Mississippi State Flag, which shall be presented to the Governor and the Legislature not later than September 14, 2020.

(4) Members of the commission shall receive no compensation for their service on the commission, but may receive reimbursement for mileage and actual expenses as provided in Section 25-3-41, to the extent that funds are available for that purpose.

SECTION 2. (1) There shall be a statewide special election for the purpose of determining whether the new design for the Mississippi State Flag recommended by the commission shall be the design for the official Mississippi State Flag. The special election shall be held on Tuesday, November 3, 2020, and shall be conducted in the same manner as general elections are held. The question put before the voters at the special election shall read on the ballots as follows:
"PLEASE VOTE 'YES' OR 'NO' ON WHETHER THE FOLLOWING DESIGN SHALL

BE THE OFFICIAL MISSISSIPPI STATE FLAG

'YES':_________ 'NO':_________

The qualified electors may indicate their preference on the line following the answer that they prefer.

If a majority of the qualified electors voting on the question in the special election vote "Yes," then the Legislature shall enact into law the new design as the official Mississippi State Flag during the next regular session of the Legislature after the election.

(2) If a majority of the qualified electors voting on the question in the special election vote "No," then the commission shall reconvene to perform the functions described in Section 1 of this act. The commission shall make its recommendation for another new design for the official Mississippi State Flag, which shall be presented to the Governor and the Legislature during the next regular session of the Legislature after the election. The new design for the Mississippi State Flag recommended by the commission shall be placed on the ballot in a statewide special election for the purpose of allowing the qualified electors to determine whether the new design recommended by the commission shall be the design for the official Mississippi State Flag. The special election shall be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of the year in which the commission presents its recommendation to the Legislature, and shall be
conducted in the same manner as general elections are held. The
question on the ballot shall be the same question as provided in
subsection (1) of this section, and the results of the election
shall determine which of the procedures described in this section
shall be followed in the future in determining the new design for
the official Mississippi State Flag.

(3) The statewide special election for voting on the new
design for the official Mississippi State Flag shall be
administered by means of ballots containing a uniform
representation of the new design for the Mississippi State Flag
recommended by the commission, which shall be provided by the
Secretary of State to the election commissioners of each county.
The Secretary of State shall determine whether, in each county, it
would be more efficient to administer the election by paper
ballots, voting machines, electronic voting systems, optical mark
reading equipment or other mechanized equipment. The method used
in each county shall be as uniform as practicable when compared to
any other county in which the same method is used. In any event,
the Secretary of State shall include a color picture or drawing of
the new design for the Mississippi State Flag on all ballots
provided for in this section. The Secretary of State is
authorized to enter into any necessary contracts for providing the
required color picture or drawing of the new design for the
Mississippi State Flag on all ballots in all counties of this
state. The costs incurred in providing the ballots that are
required to include a color picture or drawing of the new design for the Mississippi State Flag shall be borne by the State of Mississippi, and the Legislature shall appropriate the funds necessary for this purpose. All other costs associated with the holding of the statewide special election shall be borne by each individual county.

(4) The county election commissioners shall transmit to the Secretary of State, in the same manner as the vote for state officers is transmitted, a statement of the total number of votes cast in the statewide special election for voting on the new design for the official Mississippi State Flag. The Secretary of State shall tabulate those returns and certify the results to the Governor and to each house of the Legislature.

SECTION 3. Section 23-15-351, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

23-15-351. It shall be the duty of the chair of the election commission of each county to have printed all necessary ballots for use in elections, except ballots in municipal elections which shall be printed as herein provided by the authorities of the respective municipalities; and the election commissioner shall cause the official ballot to be printed by a printer sworn to keep the ballots secret under the penalties prescribed by law. The printer shall deliver to the election commissioners for holding elections, a certificate of the number of ballots printed for each precinct, and shall not print any additional ballots, except on
instruction of proper election commissioners; and failure to
observe either of these requirements shall be a misdemeanor.

In the case of a statewide special election on the new design
for the official Mississippi State Flag provided for in Section 2
of this act, the provisions of this article regarding the printing
and distribution of the official ballots shall be governed by the
provisions of Section 2(3) of this act.

SECTION 4. Section 23-15-355, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
amended as follows:

23-15-355. Ballots in all elections shall be printed and
distributed at public expense and shall be known as "official
ballots." The expense of printing the ballots shall be paid out
of the county treasury, except that in municipal elections such
expenses shall be paid by the respective cities, towns and
villages.

In the case of a statewide special election on the new design
for the official Mississippi State Flag provided for in Section 2
of this act, the provisions of this section regarding payment of
the expenses of printing the official ballots shall be governed by
the provisions of Section 2(3) of this act.

SECTION 5. Section 3-3-16, Mississippi Code of 1972, which
provides the design for the official flag of the State of
Mississippi, is repealed.

SECTION 6. Upon the effective date of this act, the
Department of Archives and History shall immediately develop a
plan for the prompt, dignified and respectful removal of the
former official Mississippi State Flag described in
Section 3-3-16, Mississippi Code of 1972, and the removal of the
flag shall take place not later than fifteen (15) days from the
effective date of this act.

SECTION 7. This act shall take effect and be in force from
and after its passage.