

Governor's Budget Meets The Needs of Mississippians

Strong schools, quality health care options and safe communities and homes are top priorities for the people of Mississippi. Your priorities are our priorities. Good education, quality health care and public safety top the list of funding priorities in the executive budget recommendations presented by the Governor to the Legislative Budget Committee.

A progressive approach to budgeting that is more accountable with fewer excuses – those are the budget recommendations we have presented. It is time for us to make some basic changes to the way we develop the budget for the State. For the first time, we presented our budget to the Committee at the beginning of the budget process. Former Governors have presented their budgets to the Legislature after the budget had been set.

We have given the Committee a complete budget that is accountable and meets the needs of our people. They have our recommendations as they develop the budget for our state. We have shared with them our priorities for funding, and we have given them a plan of action to implement the budget.

We were disciplined in forming our budget, focusing on the greatest areas of need in our state. Our priorities for the budget are, ensuring quality education for our children, addressing health care needs and promoting public safety.

Education is one of the top priorities of our administration, and one of the most important issues in the future of our state. The budget recommendations submitted are pro-education. We recommend teacher pay raises, fully funding the adequate education program and scholarship funds for teachers.

We recommend that \$5 million be spent to offset health insurance costs for public school and state employees. It is crucial that our people don't experience a reduction in their medical coverage. Funds are also recommended to replace money used for Medicaid services.

Making our cities and counties safe is vital to the quality of life our people have. We recommend money be made available in the Municipal Crime Prevention Fund to help our city police forces fight crime. Cities across our state can apply for this grant money to be used for law enforcement, crime prevention programs, equipment, technology etc. Funding for the building of new corrections facilities is also important to the safety of our people.

To make the most of taxpayer dollars we must put more responsibility on our agency directors, and we must give them the flexibility to evaluate programs, question procedures and make tough decisions. The budget, in its current form, ties the hands of the people who manage the departments. We ask the Legislature to look at giving agency

directors the authority to shift money within the department according to the needs of our people. Agency Directors know best what programs are the most effective and help the greatest number of Mississippians.

Does this mean less accountability? Absolutely not. In fact, just the opposite is true. It means more accountability and fewer excuses. Agency directors, working with the Governor's Office and with each other, must find every available way to acquire federal dollars, streamline government, be aware of advancing technology, be serious about reducing bureaucracy and be focused on increasing services for our people.

We were disciplined as we developed our budget. We will be disciplined in our spending. We are committed to providing quality services while operating efficiently. Your voice is heard, and we intend on meeting the needs of our people so you can enjoy a better quality of life right here in Mississippi.