

Clarion Ledger Article 5-27-01

Make A Commitment To Teachers – A Commitment To Education

Making sure that our teachers' pay raises are permanent – Making sure our teachers don't have to pay for classroom supplies out of their own pockets - Some people say that it is much to do about nothing. I disagree.

Our teachers have been told that they would receive a salary increase, but instead the legislature made it a one-time supplement. The legislature is taking \$14.4 million from teachers' classroom supplies next year. Once again, our teachers are left to the whim of the legislature for their security. I believe you will find teachers who aren't comfortable with the situation.

I was speaking to a large group of people last week about my priorities of education and teacher pay. A man stood up and said, "Governor, my daughter and her husband are teachers. They are moving to Texas this summer because they can make a better living in that state than they can in Mississippi." The man then got a little choked up and continued by saying, "you know the worst part is, they are taking my grandsons with them." Every person in that room nodded their heads. They understood just how that man felt.

We should not lose our teachers to other states because games are being played with them by our legislators. Business people know that in order to get good employees, sometimes they have to pay more. They understand that concept. We need to be paying our teachers a professional salary to do their jobs. Their jobs are important. Their responsibilities are great, and we need to pay them accordingly.

Why would the Legislature play games with the teachers? The education of our children is not something to play games with. If the Legislature is serious about raising teacher pay, and I believe many of them are, then why not put the pay raise in the salary schedule and make it a priority. That does not seem to be an issue on which to debate.

If the leadership is saying they won't take away the teachers' pay raises next year, then why won't they make a commitment to our teachers and remove the 5% condition on raises.

You may remember hearing it said before that once the legislature started giving our teachers school supply money, it would never be taken away. This year, $\frac{3}{4}$ of our teachers' school supply money is being taken away by the legislature. The legislature is making empty promises to our teachers.

If you say that education is important, why play this game with numbers? If the leadership of the legislature is going to fund the pay raise, regardless of the rate of growth, then why not take out the 5% condition on growth and give our teachers the

assurance that it is going to happen. If education is a priority then why not give our teachers the resources they need to teach our children.

Economic Development begins and ends with education. If our education system is strong, our students are strong when they enter the workforce. If our education system is weak, then our students don't stand a chance in this competitive job market.

A good teacher in the classroom can make all the difference in the world. I firmly believe that our teachers pay raises are important enough to continue to fight for, and I will. I think that full funding for education programs are important enough to continue to fight for, and I will.

If you believe our teacher pay raises should be permanent – If you believe we should fully fund our education programs, we encourage you to talk with your local legislator. It will take all of us working together to ensure that education is a top priority of all Mississippi leaders. Our teachers and our children need our support and our commitment to education in Mississippi.