

Education Must Be Priority For Budget

Education is the priority of this administration. The state must ensure that kindergarten through graduate level is adequately funded to provide an effective education to our students.

While most Mississippians do not spend every day worrying about the budget bills considered by the Mississippi legislature, they do spend every day concerned about educating their children, paying their bills and building a future or planning for retirement.

Mississippi's state budget is a blueprint for the success of our people, not a battle plan for the politics of personality. That blueprint cannot be drawn accurately if we fail to take into consideration the slowing of our national and state economy.

We are fortunate to have in place a number of safeguards to protect Mississippi taxpayers from a state government operating in the red. The Mississippi legislature is specifically prohibited from appropriating any more than 98% of projected revenues so that 2% can be set aside in our working cash stabilization fund for cash flow and emergency use.

In addition, the Governor must by law put scissors to agency budgets in any month when revenues fall below 98% of what has been projected by the legislature. With these safeguards in place, Mississippi state government will never spend more than we take in.

However, this year's legislature seems to want to ignore the downturn in our economy and asks that we swallow a budget pill that is too big. We simply will not take in the dollars necessary to fund these bills.

When all the fancy words and all the big numbers are set aside, one simple truth remains. We will not have the resources necessary to pay for all that the legislature has funded. Each of our agencies face potential budget cuts next year if we do not meet the revenue growth estimates set by the legislature.

And anytime money is cut from our state's education budgets there is cause for concern because our past investment in education is what has allowed us success in areas such as economic growth. Our state's successes begin and end with education.

We must prioritize education from kindergarten through graduate level. I believe we are going to have to take an honest look at our budget and put our priorities in order. If our state's \$3 billion budget was developed using honest numbers and with education as a priority, then we could meet every education need of our state.

I will continue to work with the state legislature to develop a budget that is fiscally responsible using honest numbers, but I will not agree with a budget that ignores

education. We must focus our resources to meet our people's needs. Education must be our priority.