

HOUSE BILL 776

Education is the priority of this administration. The state must ensure that K-12 education is adequately funded to provide an effective education to our students. Rather than providing secure and responsible funding sources for K-12 education, House Bill No. 776 simply shuffles existing revenue sources to address Fiscal Year 2001 deficits and Fiscal Year 2002 expenses. The Legislature's diversion of existing resources for our teachers, our classrooms and our students does not ensure adequate funding.

House Bill No. 776 compromises education funding by diverting \$16.4 million in Education Enhancement Funds designated for textbooks and \$14.1 million in Education Enhancement funds allocated for classroom supplies to the support of educational programs through July 1, 2002. HB 776 also allows state general obligation bonds to be issued to provide funds for the payment of allocations of Adequate Education Program funds to school districts for capital expenditures which have not been pledged for debt. Additionally, HB 776 deletes the "House Bill 400" provision that requires 50% of the unencumbered year-end cash balance to be transferred into the Education Enhancement Fund, leaving the unencumbered year-end cash in the State General Fund.

SB 3055

Senate Bill No. 3055 attempts to restore Fiscal Year 2001 school district deficits, but districts will still face a \$14.4 million Fiscal Year 2001 shortfall. House Bill No. 776 allows districts to use any remaining unobligated Education Enhancement Fund textbook and classroom supply funds to offset the remaining shortfall. Some districts will not be able to offset these shortfalls with reserves and could be faced with going to local taxing authorities to increase millage. This is unfortunate and unnecessary.

HOUSE BILL 1609: MDE General Program

The state must ensure that K-12 education is adequately funded. House Bill No. 1609 provides for an \$11.1 million increase in general funds to the Department of Education's general program, but only at the expense of a \$17.1 million cut in general funds to the Department of Education's Minimum Program in House Bill No. 1611. Many of our students participate in Mississippi's Vocational Technical Programs. House Bill No. 1609's Fiscal Year 2002 funding for the Vocational Education program remains at the Fiscal Year 2001 level.

Additionally, House Bill No. 1609 also provides \$800,000 for the Walnut Grove Youth Correction Facility, a facility which is not governed by the Department of Education. If funds are allocated from the Department of Education, administration and supervision should follow.

HOUSE BILL 1611: MDE Minimum Program

House Bill No. 1611 provides for a \$17.1 million cut in general funds to the Department of Education's Minimum Program and only funds the Minimum Program by utilizing \$30.5 million in Education Enhancement textbook and classroom supply funds as authorized by House Bill No. 776. In other words, the Legislature has funded the minimum program by reducing the resources for textbooks and classroom supplies, both of which are critical to our teachers being able to teach effectively and our students being able to learn. This is not the way to build a sound foundation for education in our state.

Mississippi's teachers deserve our support. While we are giving teachers a \$23 million raise with one hand, we are taking away \$14.1 million with the other hand by drastically reducing funding for classroom supplies. This does not send a vote of confidence to our teachers.

HOUSE BILL 1471

I reaffirm my strong commitment to full implementation of the terms of the Ayers Settlement Agreement and underscore my support for those provisions of House Bill No. 1471 that address the funding of the Public Endowment Fund. However, there are elements of House Bill No. 1471 unrelated to the Ayers Settlement to which I have principal objection.

House Bill No. 1471 compromises education funding by deleting the “House Bill 400” provision that requires 50% of the unencumbered year-end cash balance to be transferred into the Education Enhancement Fund, leaving the unencumbered year-end cash in the State General Fund. We must ensure adequate funding for education. It is a choice of priorities and education must be a priority for the advancement of Mississippi.

HOUSE BILL 1596

The Mississippi Department of Transportation has a responsibility to manage our state roads efficiently and effectively. The infrastructure and transportation needs of our people must be met in a much more efficient, cost effective manner.

The quality and location of our highways has a direct effect on the image of our state and our ability to attract business and industry to Mississippi. Transportation is a major component of job growth and location and must be included in the overall economic development plan for our state.