

We can turn \$100 million into \$400 million for health care issues in the state through the Division of Medicaid. That's really the basis of my health care proposal - making our money work for the people. The tobacco settlement has provided an income stream for health care needs, and I believe we should be using it in a manner that allows us to have a definite impact on those needs.

This proposal would divert a portion of the future payments from the tobacco settlement, targeted for health care needs in the state. And, as I mentioned last week, the tobacco trust fund would continue to grow and the principal of the fund would not be touched, as mandated by law.

Do we use it for health care, or put it all in the bank drawing low interest? Here's what we can do:

- ELIMINATE DEDUCTIBLES FOR STATE EMPLOYEES ON DOCTOR VISITS;
- REDUCE THE COST OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS;
- PUT SCHOOL NURSES INTO PLACE AROUND THE STATE;
- ADDRESS HEALTH CARE NEEDS SUCH AS DIABETES AND HEART DISEASE;
- FREE UP MONEY FROM THE GENERAL FUND FOR STATE EMPLOYEE PAY RAISES, AND JUNIOR AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PAY RAISES.

The State Board of Health has endorsed components of the health care proposal unveiled by Governor Ronnie Musgrove at the Neshoba County Fair in July. Musgrove's proposal recommends using revenue from the tobacco settlement to maximize federal dollars for health care needs in the state.

"The support of the State Board of Health affirms this proposal will address health care needs in Mississippi," Musgrove said. "We can and we will make the changes necessary to improve the overall health of the people of this state."

Musgrove presented his proposal to the State Board of Health in a meeting on Wednesday, October 24.

"With all the health care issues facing Mississippi today, we have to be creative in how those issues are addressed," said Dr. Ed Thompson, Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Health. "Governor Musgrove's proposal offers options that can provide dramatic improvements, and these options should be considered."

Following Governor Musgrove's presentation, the Board of Health adopted a resolution stating that "1) there are major health care needs in the state that are unmet; 2) the Board feels we can use the money wisely for Medicaid waivers; 3) this can save state money in the long term in terms of treating chronic diseases; 4) these health care expenditures should be prioritized utilizing the state health plan and monitored to ensure the state is getting its money's worth."

Teresa Heinz, Chairman of the Heinz Family Philanthropies, announced a new, prescription drug coverage plan for senior citizens called HOPE (the Heinz plan to Overcome Prescription drug Expenses) for Mississippi.

The HOPE for Mississippi plan was unveiled this morning at Governor Ronnie Musgrove's Health Care Summit, by Jeffrey R. Lewis, the Executive Director of the Heinz Family Philanthropies.

"Today we offer HOPE to senior citizens by giving them better coverage at a better price. In the richest nation on earth, nothing could be more tragic than not coming to the aid of our fellow citizens most in need," said Teresa Heinz, Chairman of the Heinz Family Philanthropies, in a

statement read by Mr. Lewis. "Mississippi is at an historic crossroad. The choice we have to make today to help senior citizens is far easier than the choices they are confronted with every day. The plan is ready. The need is great. The time is now," she added.

"We can and we must lower prescription drug costs for our seniors," said Governor Ronnie Musgrove. "By taking action now we can make a difference, and the HOPE plan will play a major role in our efforts."

The bottom line is this: The people of Mississippi are facing serious issues regarding health care and insurance costs. Diabetes, heart disease, cancer - these illnesses affect so many people across the state and we must work to bring them under control. We can do it; it's just a matter of dedication and commitment.

This is not a time to allow politics to negatively impact something that can be positive for the people. Too much is at stake here, and I don't want to see the health of our people and our state diminished; that is something we truly can't afford.