

August 7, 2002

The Editor
The Greenwood Commonwealth

Dear Editor:

This is a first for me. I've never written a letter to the editor. I feel compelled to write now after reading Staff Writer Bob Darden's article on August 1st, 2002 about Senator Bunky Huggins vote on the prison bill during the past special session.

Let me say having been involved in this piece of legislation as closely as I was that Sen. Huggins, Sen. David Jordan, Rep. May Whittington, and Rep. Willie Perkins all performed sincerely and passionately as they very adequately represented the people of their districts concerning the Delta Correctional Facility. I don't think anyone would have expected any less.

There are a couple of issues, however, stated in the article with which I must take exception. The article states, "The Governor walked the (Senate) floor. What he did was get with the Senators who had a project in their districts and he said he would cut funding if they opposed him," Huggins said. The statement is simply not true.

The Governor was not on the Senate floor at all. Peyton Prospere, the Governor's Chief Legal Counsel and liaison on prison issues, Richard Davidson, the Governor's Special Assistant, and myself were the only members of the Governor's Staff on the Senate floor. I'm sure that is what Senator Huggins meant by the Governor "walking the floor". The really disturbing part is the accusation that we were making deals by threatening the Senators with denying projects in their districts if they opposed us. I challenge Sen. Huggins or any member of the Senate to come forward and publicly say that the Governor or any staff member tried to make a deal about a project in their district in return for their vote. It is simply not true.

Governor Musgrove is working diligently to reach the best conclusion to the prison-funding crisis for all the people of Mississippi. The safety and security and the quality of life of the citizens of Greenwood and Leflore County is of utmost importance to the Governor. I know this because he tells me this very frequently. On this issue, however, the State of Mississippi finds itself with too many medium security prison beds and more funds appropriated for private prison operations than needed.

The bill before the legislature last week that the Senate passed and the House defeated was a simple appropriation bill that asked for 6 million dollars less of the taxpayers money than was appropriated by the legislature for private prisons in the regular session. That's all. It had nothing to do with the closure of the Delta Correctional Facility.

As things stand today, we have no appropriations at all for private prisons in Mississippi.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to your readers about this very important subject.

Sincerely,

Bill Renick
Chief-of-Staff
Governor's Office
Jackson, Ms.