

March 30, 2001

TO THE MISSISSIPPI STATE SENATE:

GOVERNOR'S VETO MESSAGE FOR SENATE BILL 3202

I am returning Senate Bill No. 3202: "AN ACT TO AUTHORIZE THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF CHICKASAW COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI, TO CONSTRUCT A CORRECTIONAL FACILITY LOCATED IN THE COUNTY TO HOUSE MALE AND FEMALE OFFENDERS; TO AUTHORIZE THE COUNTY TO CONTRACT WITH THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, THE UNITED STATES AND ANY STATE OR POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS FOR THE HOUSING OF OFFENDERS IN THE CUSTODY OF THOSE JURISDICTIONS; TO AUTHORIZE THE COUNTY TO CONTRACT WITH A PERSON OR A PRIVATE ENTITY FOR THE OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY; TO PRESCRIBE OTHER POWERS AND DUTIES OF THE COUNTY; TO PRESCRIBE RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR THE OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE FACILITY; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES" without my approval, and assign the following reasons for my veto.

I am vetoing Senate Bill No. 3202 today because it compounds the problem of committing State dollars to private prisons for inmates we do not have. I vetoed earlier House Bill No. 1652 which would have obligated the State to subsidize a 750 bed private prison when the State has 2500 empty beds. This approach was wrong in House Bill No. 1652 and is wrong with Senate Bill No. 3202.

This bill calls for a 25-year State guarantee to fill 85% of 250 new beds with a 3% annual increase in the per diem rate. Again, as in House Bill No. 1652, the State would absorb all medical costs incurred by the inmates. Contracts with the other private prisons are for five years with shared medical expenses. Senate Bill No. 3202, like House Bill No. 1652, would provide an exorbitant subsidy to a private prison corporation when we should be funding public education.

Again, the bill is bad public policy because it did not receive the scrutiny of the legislative committees charged with the oversight of corrections. Nor was it considered by the respective appropriations committees. This was also the case with House Bill No. 1652. Both bills passed out of the Local and Private Committees that ordinarily deals with matters of local concern and local resources. Senate Bill No. 3202 is a general bill in nature and commits the State Department of Corrections and the State taxpayers to a built-in 25 year obligation of escalating costs for unneeded services.

We remain in the fortunate position of having more prison beds than inmates and of being in compliance with court orders. Before the State constructs any more prisons, public officials responsible for corrections must develop a plan of action based on need. In the meantime we must invest in our teachers and students, not in private prison corporations.

I urge the members to sustain the veto and reject Senate Bill No. 3202.

Respectfully submitted,

RONNIE MUSGROVE  
GOVERNOR