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## **Governor Musgrove Focuses on “Schools First” in FY2004 Executive Budget Recommendation**

(Jackson, MS) – Governor Ronnie Musgrove discussed his executive budget recommendation for the 2004 fiscal year today, stressing the need to set priorities for the budget and naming education as the main priority in his recommendations.

“We’ve made great progress in education. It’s time to step up our commitment and continue to make a difference for the future of this state, and the future of our children,” Musgrove said. “My budget recommendation fully funds the third year of the teacher pay raise, it fully funds the Mississippi Adequate Education Program to support classrooms, teachers and supplies, and addresses the exodus of our talented professors and teachers from our universities and colleges.”

In Musgrove’s budget recommendations, education is funded at a level of \$2.4 billion, which is 62 percent of the total budget. Musgrove said one method for focusing on education was to slash nearly 13 percent in administrative costs from the budget.

School officials around the state praised Musgrove’s call for full funding of the MAEP.

“We feel it (MAEP) was a commitment and a promise to assure every child in this state receives the adequate education they need and deserve,” said Dr. Sam Bounds, superintendent of the Brookhaven School District. “Without full funding, neither adequacy nor commitment to this promise exist. All kids need and deserve it. No child deserves less.”

Dr. Earl Watkins, superintendent of Jackson Public Schools, also spoke to the consequences of not fully funding the MAEP.

“We will continue to lose teachers and continue to be unable to fill vacancies. Our ability to provide the proper expansion and support of our technology will be hampered greatly,” Watkins said. “Funds that could be used for supporting the achievement of our students will be depleted due to a need to shift funds in other areas, just to keep the district afloat.”

Musgrove also spoke to the importance of supporting homeland security measures, calling for \$20 million to improve emergency crisis response, strengthen the National Guard, and increase protection from biological and hazardous threats.

Economic development efforts would also receive increased funding to continue the work of creating quality, high-paying jobs in the state. Musgrove cited the creation of 47,000

new jobs and investment of \$12.9 billion in Mississippi since January 2000 as evidence of economic development growth and said now was the time to build on these successes.

“There are challenges ahead of us in the coming year, but that’s nothing new,” Musgrove said. “What is new is the manner in which I am proposing to take on those challenges and turn them into opportunities for our people. The people of Mississippi want bold and decisive action, and this plan fits the bill.”

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