

2003 Session Strategy

Saturday:

1. Statement

Throughout the session, we have worked hard with the legislature to craft a budget that fully funds education, jobs creation and health care.

We have accomplished this goal without resorting to the drastic measures of many of our sister states of raising taxes, drastically cutting services or letting prisoners out on the streets.

I would like to thank the legislature for their hard work over the past three months. They have recognized that one of the best resources we have are our state employees. By giving agencies greater flexibility, we will be able to provide services more efficiently and effectively.

We will spend the next couple of days reviewing the budget as a whole. However, beginning with the education bill at the first of the session, all the way through, we have seen an unparalleled level of cooperation and teamwork. I feel very good about the work we have done this session.

2. To the question of specifically of your involvement with the budget:

Starting at the beginning of the session with the passage of the education bill, and throughout the entire session, we have worked with the legislature to ensure we can provide the critical services to the people of Mississippi.

3. Third person statement (LAM or JS or BR)

Through the Governor's leadership, ... see statement above.

4. Question about shortfall in MDOC, DHS and DOM

With the additional flexibility that the legislature has given these agencies, as well as their commitment to fund any shortfalls next session we believe that these agencies are fully funded. We have worked with the legislature and they have recognized the advantage of our agencies having flexibility. We appreciate the confidence that they have placed in our agencies.

5. Rural Jobs Program

The rural areas of Mississippi have been the hardest hit by the national recession and NAFTA. That's why we proposed and the legislature has passed our rural jobs program to help improve the quality of life in our state. I am proud to say that the Mississippi Rural Economic Impact Authority is now a reality.

Next week (Tuesday or Wednesday):

1. Press conference to recap session and set tone for accomplishments

The last three years have been tough on Mississippi and every state across the country. The national recession and NAFTA have hit our rural areas the hardest.

From Tubby: “We got everything we wanted.” (When they ask about Medicaid, etc.)
Response – Yes, we recognize that we did not fully fund those agencies. We have the commitment from the leadership and we added the flexibility. If we need more, they will give it to us. This is a testament to the leadership believing in us and what we have accomplished together.

2. Issues:

Budget In General:

- In the face of a National Recession, Mississippi has set the standard for other states
- We provided the leadership by putting our schools first and eliminating forever the practice of our schools competing with other agencies.
- We passed a historic jobs program target at rural Mississippi. Rural areas have been hardest hit by the national recession and NAFTA.
- We now have flexibility for our agencies, so they can do their jobs. During tough economic times this is especially important to allow the agencies to provide critical services.
- We did these things without resorting to the drastic measure used by other states:
 - Did not raise taxes.
 - Did not slash services
 - Did not let prisoners out of prison.
 - Did not cut school week to four days
 - Did not have mass layoff of employees

Specific Budgets:

- While some agencies did not get as much money as they needed, they did get the flexibility to manage their resources.
- As we saw with Medicaid last year, allowing the agencies to do their jobs and not tying their hands can work to reduce the amount of money needed.
- Last year Medicaid reduced its shortfall by over 50%.
- Medicaid, DHS and DOC will continue to work to provide critical services to the people of Mississippi in the most efficient and effective manner.

2% Holdback

- During this time of slowing revenue collection brought on by the national recession we are faced with tough decisions.
- As a state senator I voted for the bill to create the rainy day fund.
- Just like families all across Mississippi, we put money aside during the good times.
- However, just like families, when times are tough you take advantage of the resources you have.
- I believe that it is better to use the tax revenues that are already coming into the state for our schools and in our efforts to create jobs.
- The alternative is to shortchange our schools, cut services, or raise taxes.