

Governor Urges Legislators To Make Teacher Pay Raises Permanent

Raising teacher pay to the southeastern average is the most critical issue facing the people of Mississippi. That is a statement you heard me say time, and time, and time again when I was campaigning for Governor. It became a driving force for my first legislative session of Governor.

On May 1, 2000, I signed the teacher pay raise bill into law. I did so with one reservation. The members of the legislature made the decision to attach a 5% revenue growth rate requirement on the teacher pay raise salaries. I didn't agree with that requirement then, and I don't agree with that requirement now.

I spent a majority of this past legislative session talking with members of the legislature, telling them the 5% must be removed. The 5% requirement is an excuse. Our teachers know it is an excuse. If we say that education is a priority in Mississippi, then let's put our money where our mouth is.

The legislature has said it is their job to appropriate the money for the state. I agree. It is their responsibility to spend our people's money. But they don't want to spend our money on education. They don't want to spend our money on good, quality teachers. Instead they are spending it in on prisons. Their priorities aren't straight. Education vs. Prisons What gets the priority?

On March 30th of this year, I vetoed House Bill 1611, the State Department of Education's Minimum Program Bill. I vetoed it because it was flawed. I vetoed it because it robbed Peter to pay Paul. I vetoed it because it did not make education a priority.

The Minimum Program is the basic funding mechanisms for teacher salaries, transportation costs, health insurance and other school needs. The legislature should have funded the first year of the teacher pay raise plan by amending the salary schedule in order to give teachers the first year pay raise. They did not do that.

By not amending the salary schedule, the teacher pay raise is considered a supplement. I believe our teacher pay raises should be permanent. I said back during this past legislative session that it was flawed and was going to cause this problem. The Legislature's refusal to remove the 5% requirement means the pay raises are not permanent.

Because of their actions, the legislature has forced some school districts to have teachers sign waivers stating that they understood the money was not being appropriated as a salary pay raise, but instead as a state supplement. Because of the legislators' actions, our teachers are not guaranteed a pay raise in the future.

The legislature has played games with our teachers. They've played games with our children's education. They are playing games with all of us.

I have told our teachers that I would continue to fight for the removal of the 5% growth rate provision and make their pay raises permanent. And I will. I will continue to fight on behalf of education. I will continue to fight on behalf of our children. I will continue to fight on behalf of our teachers.

If you believe our teacher pay raises should be permanent, we encourage you to talk with your local legislator. It will take all of us working together to ensure that education is a top priority of all Mississippi leaders. Our teachers and our children need our support and our commitment to education in Mississippi.

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