

## **Education Must Be Priority For Budget**

Education is the priority of this administration. While most Mississippians do not spend every day worrying about the budget bills considered by the Mississippi legislature, they do spend every day concerned about educating their children, paying their bills and building a future or planning for retirement.

Mississippi's families expect us to be disciplined and reasonable in how we spend their hard earned tax dollars. Education not prisons must be our state's priority. The state must ensure that kindergarten through high school is adequately funded to provide an effective education to our students.

Mississippi's state budget is not a battleground for the politics of personality; it is a blueprint for the success of our people. That blueprint cannot be drawn accurately if we fail to take into consideration the slowing of our national and state economies.

Unfortunately, many in the legislature seem to want to ignore the downturn in our economy and ask that we swallow a budget pill that is too big. Mississippi simply will not take in the dollars necessary to fund these bills.

Mississippi is fortunate to have in place a number of safeguards to protect taxpayers from a state government operating in the red. The Mississippi legislature is specifically prohibited from appropriating any more than 98% of projected revenues so that 2% can be set-aside in our working cash stabilization fund for cash flow and emergency use.

In addition, the Governor must by law trim agency budgets in any month when revenues fall below 98% of what has been projected by the legislature. With these safeguards in place, Mississippi state government will never spend more than we take in.

After all is said and done, one simple truth remains. Our state will not have the resources necessary to pay for all that the legislature has funded. Once again our agencies will face budget cuts next year when we do not meet the revenue growth estimates set by the legislature.

Our state's successes begin and end with education. Anytime money is cut from our state's education budgets there is cause for concern because our past investment in education is what has allowed us success in areas such as economic growth.

We must prioritize education from kindergarten through high school. I believe we are going to have to take an honest look at our budget and put our priorities in order. If our state's \$3 billion budget was developed using honest numbers and with education as a priority, then we could meet every education need of our state.

I will continue to work with the state legislature to develop a budget that is fiscally responsible using honest numbers, but I will not agree with a budget that ignores education and is driven by building more private prisons when we have over 2,500 vacant beds. We must focus our resources to meet our people's needs. Education must be our priority.