



CAPITOL Comments

“The Voice of Agriculture®”

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Week 2

This Week at the Capitol

This week started with the inauguration of Mississippi’s 64th Governor, Phil Bryant on Tuesday, January 10. The inauguration ceremony was moved into the Mississippi House chamber of the Capitol due to inclement weather and the parade has been postponed until Saturday, January 21. Governor Bryant’s theme for his administration is “Rising Together”. During his speech, he defined four key objectives:

- Creating jobs through expanding Mississippi’s health care and energy sectors;
- Improving the state’s education system;
- Reducing the teenage pregnancy rate;
- Responsibly restructuring Mississippi’s budget system.

On Wednesday, the House passed an amendment to the rules. This amendment will change the way members are appointed to the Appropriation and the Ways and Means Committees. The new rule would keep each committee at 33 members and would not allow a person to sit on both committees. This new rule will be based on the current four congressional districts, instead of the previous five districts. Appointments to each of these committees will be based on seniority. In the rule change, they also renamed some of the following committees:

- Labor Committee became Youth and Family Affairs;
- Oil and Gas Committee became the Energy Committee;
- Juvenile Justice Committee became Youth and Family Affairs Committee.

Speaker Philip Gunn announced that committee assignments would not be released until next week. With the recent rule change, Speaker Gunn will need time to assign the 122 House members to the 32 committees.

The Senate started to work this week and began releasing bills on Thursday. Some of these bills relate to prohibiting smoking within a car that is carrying a child as a passenger, school vaccines, and increasing the penalty for providing cell phones to inmates. These bills are being assigned to Senate committees. These committees will convene in the near future to go over legislation.

Farmers in the Legislature

The Senate has 7 farmers or members related to farming, 13% of the Senate. The House has 24 farmers or members related to farming, 20% of the House.

2012 MFBF Legislative Priorities

Production Agriculture—Much of Mississippi’s economy is derived from farming or farm-related activities. Agriculture is Mississippi’s largest industry worth \$6.9 billion dollars a year. In addition, agriculture makes up 29% of the workforce in Mississippi.

Taxation—The taxes farmers pay should be used to aid the citizens of Mississippi, but taxation must not be allowed to increase to a point that economic development is hindered.

Environment—In order to further conservation efforts in agriculture, attention should be focused toward economic approaches to land management.

Energy—The depletion of fossil fuels and the increasing energy prices have caused an emphasis to be placed on renewable fuels. Farmers have the resources through general farm practices to generate energy.



FSA and USDA Office Closings

Secretary Vilsack announced his plan to trim the USDA earlier this week in response to the call from President Obama to cut waste from government agencies and make services more efficient for the American people. Secretary Vilsack's plan, the Blueprint for Stronger Service, will bring some changes to various agency offices throughout the country, including a few in Mississippi. The following offices will be closed and consolidated with neighboring offices:

Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices:

- Benton County
- Choctaw County
- DeSoto County
- Itawamba County
- Lamar County
- Lawrence County
- Smith County
- Yalobusha County

Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNCC) office:

- Hinds County

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) office:

- Harrison County

Rural Development (RD) office:

- DeSoto County

Hearings regarding FSA office closings will be held in the next 30 days. Affected farmers will receive postcards with hearing information. Files will be moved to neighboring counties; however, affected farmers can choose to use the services of any county office.

Hearing Times and Locations

Benton County: Jan. 24 at 9:00 a.m. at the Benton County AgriCenter, Highway 5 N., Ashland;

Choctaw County: Jan. 23 at 1:30 p.m. at the Choctaw County Courthouse, Ackerman;

DeSoto County: Jan. 25 at 2:00 p.m. at the Gale Community Center, 2601 Elm Street, Hernando;

Itawamba County: Jan. 24 at 3:00 p.m. at the Woodmen of the World building, Peppertown exit off Highway 78, three miles west of Fulton;

Lamar County: Jan. 20 at 10:00 a.m. at the Purvis City Voting Station in Purvis;

Lawrence County: Jan. 19 at 10:00 a.m. at the Lawrence County Civic Center, 125 East Broad Street, Monticello;

Smith County: Jan. 19 at 2:00 p.m. at the Smith County office building auditorium, 212 Sylvarena Ave., Raleigh (across from the Tax Collector's office).

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