



**MISSISSIPPI
HEALTH ADVOCACY
PROGRAM**

A Member of
Sisters of Mercy Ministries

Health Advocacy NEWS

First Quarter Issue

www.mhap.org

February 2006

Mississippi Legislative Summary *“All politics is local.”*



Tip O’Neill, former U.S. Speaker of the House, once famously made this statement and the 2006 Mississippi Legislature is a testament to its accuracy. Hurricane Katrina recovery, taxes, health care, and education all loom large on the landscape of this year’s legislative session. Mississippi is at a pivotal time in its history. The physical displacement of many residents on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the enormous task of rebuilding the economic infrastructure, and the increase in health care costs and decrease in coverage and access have left many people looking to Mississippi’s legislative and executive branches as their last resort. The legislation passed or not passed this year will definitely have tangible, immediate effects on the citizens of Mississippi. We have seen bold legislation introduced very early in the session and even bolder attempts to thwart more controversial bills. The bill that has emerged this session as the one to watch is SB 2310. It proposes to raise the cigarette tax from .18 per pack to \$1.00 per pack, in addition to phasing out the grocery tax by 2014. Currently, it has been vetoed by the Governor and now is on the Senate calendar awaiting an attempted override. One thing is certain this year, Mississippi’s elected officials are in a rare position to pass bills that have real impact in the

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Jacquelyn Weatherspoon Joins MHAP Staff

Jacquelyn Weatherspoon is currently serving as the Program Manager for the Mississippi Health Advocacy Program as of January 9, 2006. Prior to her selection for this position, she served in many different arenas of public health and health advocacy. Weatherspoon honed her skills in health advocacy with agencies such as the Mississippi Women's Resource Center, Jefferson County Department of Health, and AmeriCorps.

Weatherspoon is a native of Pike County and is a graduate of Jackson State University with a Bachelor of Science in Healthcare Administration and the University of Alabama at Birmingham with a Master of Public Health. She last held a position as a Special Projects Officer with the Mississippi Division of Medicaid in their Bureau of Long Term Care. Jacquelyn joins Roy Mitchell, Program Director and Keri Abernathy, Communications Assistant.

everyday life of Mississippians and if not capitalized on, many may pay a heavy political price. The list below details other bills that the Mississippi Health Advocacy Program is closely monitoring.

- HB 1034: Establishment of a task force to develop a strategic plan for the revitalization of the Delta
- HB 1140: Increase of the amount of tobacco tax revenue deposited into the Municipal Tobacco Tax Diversion Fund
- HB 1318: Establishment of a Hurricane Katrina Response and Recovery Oversight Act
- HB 1379: Nursing home funds may be used to fund some Medicaid Home and Community Based Services
- SB 2475: Deletion of the payback requirement on Tobacco Settlement Health Care Trust Fund

WHAT YOU CAN DO

For more information on these and other bills, and how you can get involved, see our website at www.mhap.org. You have the power this legislative session to make your voice heard.

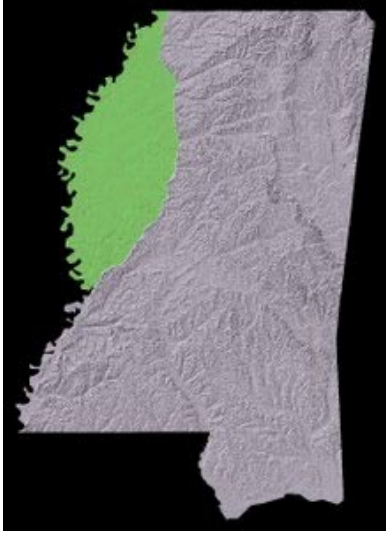


TAKE ACTION

**Please Visit the CCBH
Legislative Action Today**

www.ccbh.cc

Mississippi Delta Revitalization



The Mississippi Delta has long been considered an area that seemed to be forgotten by time. The continual erosion of the economic base, lack of quality educational resources, and the need for greater workforce development have all contributed to the decay of the Delta Region. House Bill 1034, “The Mississippi Delta Region Revitalization Act of 2006”, seeks to address these and other problems plaguing the region. Representative John Mayo, of the 25th District Coahoma, Tunica, and Desoto Counties, authored this bill.

The bill focuses on the counties of: Bolivar, Carroll, Coahoma, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Leflore, Quitman, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Tunica, Warren, Washington, and Yazoo and proposes to develop a task force consisting of members from all sectors of the State. The members include: Mississippi legislators who reside in the Delta, representatives of the state’s public universities and junior colleges, representatives of the five (5) planning and development districts that serve the above listed counties, members of the business and entrepreneurial communities in the Delta, and the Executive Director of the Mississippi Development Authority. The desired result of this bill is the development of a workable, long-range, strategic plan for the Mississippi Delta. This plan, if passed, would be completed on December 1, 2006. At present, House Bill 1034 has passed in the House of Representatives.

New Congressional Budget Office Estimates Indicate Millions of Low-Income Beneficiaries Would Be Harmed By Medicaid Provisions In Budget Bill

On January 27, the Congressional Budget Office issued a new analysis of the Medicaid provisions of the budget reconciliation conference agreement, on which the House of Representatives is expected to vote February 1. The conference agreement, which the Senate passed 51-50 in late December with Vice President Cheney breaking the tie, includes significant changes in the Medicaid program that will affect millions of low-income beneficiaries. The just-released CBO analysis finds that the bill’s Medicaid changes would have the following effects.

- 1. Higher Co-payments and Premiums.** Under the conference agreement, states would be permitted to increase co-payments substantially and to impose premiums on many beneficiaries, including some children. CBO estimates these co-payment and premium increases would reduce Medicaid expenditures by \$1.9 billion over five years and \$9.9 billion over ten years. Some 70 percent of these savings would be due to higher co-payment changes, with the remainder resulting from higher premiums. According to CBO:
- 2. Reduced Benefits:** The conference agreement would allow states to reduce the health care services that Medicaid covers for various beneficiaries, including many non-disabled working-poor parents. CBO estimates these provisions would result in \$1.3 billion in reduced Medicaid expenditures over five years and \$6.1 billion over ten years. According to CBO:
- 3. Asset Transfer Rules:** The conference agreement establishes highly restrictive asset-transfer rules for people needing nursing home care. These provisions produce savings of \$2.4 billion over five years and \$6.4 billion over ten years. According to CBO:

To read this report in its entirety please visit Center on Budget and Policy Priorities at <http://www.cbpp.org/1>

SAVE THE DATE(S)

Citizen Health Group Created by Congress Returns to Mississippi

Is health cost a major concern for you and your family? Do you have access to quality health care? If you have thought about these questions and still don't have the answers, join the Citizens Health Care Working Group for a community meeting on Wednesday, February 22, 2006 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Jackson Medical Mall Thad Cochran Center, 350 West Woodrow Wilson Drive. The meeting is open to the public, but registration is requested. Online registration is available at www.citizenshealthcare.gov/register, or call (601) 982-0673.

The community meeting will feature a multimedia presentation that provides information on the nation's health care system including problems related to cost, quality, and access to care. This will be followed by more focused discussions in small groups. Participants will share their ideas about how to improve the health care system.

Locations include:

Starkville March 21 from 8:30 - 12:30 and again from 6 until 9 p.m. at MSU's Bost Extension Center

Verona/Tupelo March 27 from 1 - 5 p.m. and again from 6 until 9 p.m. at the North Mississippi Research and Extension Center

Wesson March 29 from 1 - 5 p.m. at the Thames Conference Center at Copiah-Lincoln Community College

Hattiesburg March 30 from 1 - 5 p.m. and again from 6 until 9 p.m. at the Forrest County Multi-Purpose Building

Clarksdale April 11 from 1 - 5 p.m. and again from 6 until 9 p.m. at the Clarksdale Station Depot

Greenville April 18 from 1 - 5 p.m. and again from 6 until 9 p.m. at the Medical Center

Newton April 20 from 1 - 5 p.m. at the Newton Regional Hospital.

Communities for A Clean Bill of Health Legislative Update

The Senate has not voted to override Governor Barbour's veto of the grocery/cigarette tax bill. We still have time to override the veto of SB2310.

A telephone poll of more than 500 registered voters in five of the senatorial districts was conducted in early february. These five districts are represented by Senators Chaney, Carmichael, Huggins, Lee and Wilemon. Senators Chaney, Carmichael, Huggins and Lee voted for the grocery/ cigarette tax bill. Newspaper reports have them on record as stating they will switch their vote or are leaning toward switching. Senator Wilemon voted against the cigarette/grocery tax.

The respondents of the telephone poll were informed of their senator's vote and asked if their senator should vote to eliminate the grocery/cigarette tax and increase the cigarette tax by overriding the governor's veto.

The telephone poll results:

Over 65% of the respondents in Senate District 51 (Itawamba, Prentiss, Tishomingo counties) represented by Sen. J. P. Wilemon, Jr. of Belmont favored a vote to override the Governor's veto.

Over 64% of the respondents in Senate District 23 (Warren, Issaquena, Yazoo counties) represented by Sen. Mike Chaney of Vicksburg favored a vote to override the Governor's veto.

Over 55% of the respondents in Senate District 14 (Attala, Carroll, Grenada, Leflore, Montgomery, Tallahatchie counties) represented by Sen. Robert "Bunky" Huggins of Greenwood favored a vote to override the Governor's veto.

Over 53% of the respondents in Senate District 35 (Copiah, Covington, Rankin, Simpson counties) represented by Sen. Perry Lee of Mendenhall favored a vote to override the Governor's veto.

Over 59% of the respondents in Senate District 33 (Clarke, Lauderdale counties) represented by Sen. Videt Carmichael of Meridian favored a vote to override the Governor's veto.

UPDATE

Governor Signs Dialysis Patient Transportation Bill for Medicaid Recipients

Gov. Haley Barbour has signed a bill authorizing Mississippi's Medicaid program to develop a temporary program to provide transportation for dialysis patients. The bill became law when Barbour signed it Tuesday February 14, 2006. Effective January 1, 2006, the Poverty Level Aged and Disabled (PLAD) Category was eliminated from the Medicaid rolls. Many of these approximately 65,000 recipients were transferred into another category of eligibility, however there were some that fell through the cracks. The recipients that could not be transferred included some who relied on Medicaid for transportation to their dialysis treatments. When this change took place, those recipients were left to pick up where Medicaid left off. House Bill 229 proposes the implementation of a temporary program to provide nonemergency transportation to this population. The bill allows for the use of faith-based organizations, public and private entities, and the patient's relatives to provide this service.

The bill authored by Steve Holland, of the 16th District Lee County, will allow these entities to be reimbursed by the Division of Medicaid until October 31, 2006.

Join the Mississippi Health Advocacy Program List Serve

Join the Mississippi Health Advocacy Program's Legislative List Serve and be involved in the advancement of Health Policy in Mississippi. You will receive updates on health care issues and pending legislation in the State of Mississippi.

Just send an e-mail to mhap@mhap.org requesting to be added to the MHAP list Serve. You will be given the information and tools needed to assist you in contacting your legislators and drawing their attention to bills that will affect the health status for all Mississippians.

e-mail us at mhap@mhap.org

- Established in 1992 by the Sisters of Mercy Health System, the Mississippi Health Advocacy Program is a nonprofit, public interest advocacy organization.
- Through research and grass-roots community organizing, our mission is to improve health policies, practices, and funding for children and families in Mississippi.
- You receive this publication because of your civic activities, social services work or religious leadership.
- You can receive our quarterly newsletter and legislative alerts by fax, email and the Program's website. Call 1-877-982-2990 for more information.

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