

Governor and lieutenant gov. call for teacher pay raises

Associated Press Mississippi’s governor and lieutenant governor said Thursday, September 6, that they will support teacher pay raises in the 2019 legislative session, months before state elections, although they didn’t provide a specific proposal.

The Republicans expressed support in a series of tweets, saying a reduced deficit in the state-federal Medicaid program allows breathing room in the state budget. Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves also proposed raises for state Child Protection Services workers.

“I believe we can invest those resources in Mississippi’s future, our children. It’s time to raise salaries again for teachers and boost pay for CPS caseworkers next year!” said a tweet from Reeves’ account.

“Great idea, Lieutenant Governor. I’m all in,” Gov. Phil Bryant’s account replied two minutes later.

Spokespersons for both Bryant and Reeves said no plan has been finalized and they expect to work something out once lawmakers convene for the 2019 regular session in January.

Mississippi lawmakers last approved a \$2,500 pay raise for teachers in 2014, taking effect over two years. That cost the state roughly \$100 million a year once fully in effect. Some teachers and other school employees are also getting bonus payments under a program that sends money to schools that score an A or B on the state’s grading scale or improve a letter grade. Including payments going out this fall, the state is spending \$46 million on

that program over two years. Still, the National Education Association rates Mississippi last among states in teacher salary. The Mississippi Department of Education says teachers made an average of \$44,659 in the 2016-2017 school year, including local salary add-ons. The state mandates teacher pay begin at \$34,390 for a new college graduate. Mandated pay reaches above \$67,000 for someone with a doctorate and more than 35 years of experience.

Brad Johns teaches high school math at McLaurin Attendance Center in Rankin County. He’s nationally board certified and holds a doctorate with 25 years of experience. With a \$2,800-a-

year boost from Rankin County’s local supplement and \$6,000-a-year bump from the state’s board certification bonus, he makes more than \$65,000 a year. Still, Johns said the discrepancy between what he makes as a teacher and what he could make in other fields is “huge.”

“It could definitely be better,” Johns, a past president of the Mississippi Professional Educators group, said of pay. “We have a lot of teachers that leave over various factors, but pay is one of them.”

States including Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, Oklahoma and West Virginia saw teacher strikes in the last year demanding higher pay. There has been little visible evidence of gathering militancy in Mississippi. Some teachers and advocates on Thursday welcomed the proposal but were dubious of the timing, since Reeves is widely expected to run for governor next year.

“Our teachers deserve a pay raise because of the job they’re doing, not because we’re about to be in a campaign year,” said Mississippi Professional Educators Executive Director Kelly Riley.

Joyce Helmick, president of the Mississippi Association of Educators, said teachers wouldn’t be pacified by a “symbolic” raise.

“Of course the governor and lieutenant governor should support a teacher pay raise, and of course our educators are deserving of a raise,” she said in a statement. “They also deserve for education to be invested in and prioritized by their state’s leadership.”

Attorney General Jim Hood, mulling a run for governor as a Democrat, declined comment. Petal Mayor Hal Marx, undertaking a Republican gubernatorial run, said lawmakers need to address overtesting, discipline and bad school leaders.

“Raising pay every four years in an election cycle is not the way to solve our problems in education,” Marx said. “I am a ‘Yes, but.’ I think there’s a lot more that needs to be done.”

Finances could still be a challenge. Lawmakers will be asked to contribute \$75 million more to employee pension funds because of projected shortfalls. House Appropriations Committee Chairman John Read, a Gautier Republican, also said he fears being “blind-sided” by agencies that could overspend this year’s budgets, as well as the impact from tax cuts.

“It’s possible, but I’m not going out on this limb right now,” Read said of a potential raise, saying lawmakers would know more in January.

“NOTICE OF A PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROPOSED BUDGET AND PROPOSED TAX LEVIES FOR THE UPCOMING FISCAL YEAR FOR THE CITY OF DURANT”

The City of Durant will hold a public hearing on its proposed budget and proposed tax levies for the fiscal year 2019 on Thursday, September 14, 2018, 12:00 p.m., at the Durant City Hall located at Mulberry Street, Durant, MS.

The City of Durant is now operating with projected total budget revenue of \$5,189,696. \$433,435, or 8.35% of such revenue is obtained through Ad Valorem Taxes. For the next fiscal year, the proposed budget has total projected revenue of \$ 3,941,400. Of that amount, 11% or \$435,000 is to be financed through a total ad valorem tax levy.

The decision to not increase the ad valorem tax millage rate for the fiscal year 2019 above the current fiscal year’s ad valorem tax millage rate means you will not pay more in ad valorem taxes on your home, automobile tag, utilities, business fixtures and equipment, rental or real property, unless the assessed value of your property has increased for the fiscal year 2018.

The City of Durant millage rate remains the same as last year at 47.81.

Any citizen of the City of Durant is invited to attend this public hearing on the proposed budget and tax levies for the fiscal year 2019 and will be allowed to speak for a reasonable amount of time and offer tangible evidence before any vote is taken.



EE bond dilemma

Dear Dave,

I have about \$36,000 in debt, not including my house. Of that amount, \$30,000 is a truck that’s worth about what I owe on it, and the other \$6,000 is student loan debt. I make \$50,000 a year. I also have 24 EE bonds that were gifted to me that haven’t fully matured. Right now, they’re worth a combined \$12,500. Should I cash those in, and use the money to pay off some of my debt, or let them fully mature before cashing them in? Also, are there any tax ramifications from cashing them in?

Patrick

Dear Patrick,

They might be taxed, but it won’t be much to worry about. EE bonds make less than one percent, so you haven’t really earned much. Never buy those things, man. They’re a horrible investment, with an even worse rate of return.

I’m glad you’re working out a plan and moving toward getting out of debt. A \$30,000 truck doesn’t work with a \$50,000 income. So, cash in the bonds immediately, sell the truck, and use some of the money from the EE bonds to pay off the school loans. Then, find yourself a cheap, little truck that will get you around for a few years.

You can do this, Patrick. I

want you to have a nice truck one day, but I don’t want that truck to be a burden. This one’s got you by the throat, and you’re feeling it, aren’t you?

Drive like no one else for a little while now, so that later you can really drive like no one else!

ID theft protection in the baby steps?

Dear Dave,

Where in the Baby Steps does identity theft protection fall? Should we cover the kids, too, or only the adults in our household?

Laura

Dear Laura,

Everyone needs identity theft protection. Unless you’re one of these folks who have gone completely off the grid, someone out there probably has a few of your numbers. Between sloppiness on the part of consumers, and the massive data breaches that have occurred in the last few years, almost everyone has experienced, or will experience, some sort of identity theft. Unfortunately, this is today’s world.

I don’t really consider identity theft protection part of the Baby Steps. It’s like life insurance or car insurance, in that it’s something almost everyone needs. Things like that should just be part of your budget every month. —Dave