

## Broadband and human trafficking focus of first two legislative weeks

By Speaker of the House Philip Gunn

On January 8, 2019, the 134th Mississippi State Legislature began the fourth and final session in its four-year term.



Special to The Clinton Courier

Within the first two weeks of session, the full House floor passed two major pieces of legislation: the "Mississippi Broadband Enabling Act" and House Bill 571, which strengthens the state's human trafficking laws.

The "Mississippi Broadband Enabling Act" passed by a vote of 115-3 and was signed into law by the Governor this past week. The House put in a lot of work on this issue and had numerous meetings with all parties affected. The lack of access to broadband is a serious issue that touches all people in all corners of our state. The legislation includes provisions designed to protect the rate payer and provide transparency.

**Highlights of the legislation are below:**

1. Every Electric Cooperative of Mississippi (ECM) is authorized to provide broadband services via an affiliate company.
2. ECMs cannot use revenue from energy sales to subsidize broadband ventures.
3. Before broadband may be offered,

each ECM must conduct an economic feasibility study and develop a plan showing how the ECM proposes to provide broadband service to its customer.

4. ECMs cannot require any person to purchase broadband services, and the purchase of broadband services cannot be a condition to continuing to receive electric power service.

5. ECMs must conduct an annual audit to ensure compliance with the law.

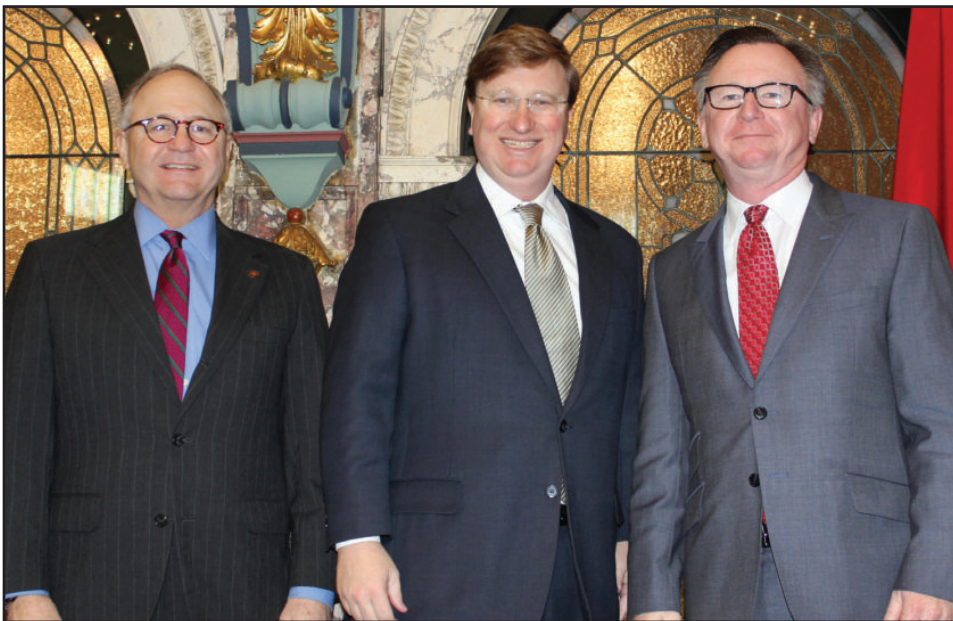
The Human Trafficking legislation passed unanimously. Human trafficking is compelling someone to do any type of work against their will. It is any labor with a commercial exchange with some type of force, fraud or other course of nature.

**The House proposal outlines:**

- Providing blanket immunity to minors: clarification that a child under the age of 18 cannot be charged with the crime of prostitution;
- Developing required pathways to specialized services for youth survivors of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation;
- Requiring specialized training to law enforcement to recognize, identify, respond to and support victims of human trafficking and child prostitution.

This problem exists all around us, and I'm proud of House members for recognizing the severity of this issue in Mississippi. We are working together to strengthen our laws to help some of our most vulnerable citizens.

## Pouncey delivers Senate opening prayer



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The Reverend Dr. Greg Pouncey, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Clinton, delivered an opening prayer to the State Senate on Thursday, January 24, at the invitation of Lt. Governor Tate Reeves, who led lawmakers into the day's business after Senator Buck Clarke led the Pledge of Allegiance. Pictured (l to r) are Clarke, Reeves and Pouncey.

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