

Auditor returned over \$1.3 mil to taxpayers in February

Press Release

State Auditor Shad White's office returned over \$1.3 million back to Mississippi taxpayers last month in stolen or misused funds. Significant amounts were returned in cases involving several town officials in Pelahatchie; the mayor of Aberdeen, Maurice Howard; the former Chancery Clerk of Humphreys County, Lawrence Browder; the former town clerk of Raleigh, Helen Bounds; and the commissioners of the Town Creek Master Water Management Board:

- In May 2018 Special Agents from the Auditor's office issued demand letters to 10 current and former town officials in Pelahatchie after they used restricted law enforcement bank accounts to operate the town. After the Attorney General's office litigated the case to recover additional damages, \$543,038.04 was returned to the town in February. The case has now been paid in full.

- Special Agents arrested Maurice Howard for em-

bezzlement in October 2019 after he was accused of stealing from the City of Aberdeen by taking travel advance checks from the city and failing to attend the corresponding out-of-town meeting. The \$11,649.34 demand issued to him has now been paid in full by a surety bond company, and Howard remains liable in criminal proceedings.

- Former Humphreys County Chancery Clerk Lawrence Browder was arrested in January 2019 after he falsified court records to steal over \$30,000 from Humphreys County residents. He also overpaid himself by more than \$200,000 during his time in office. Browder entered a guilty plea to the charges against him and must complete his court-ordered sentence. The Auditor recovered \$92,521.94 last month from a surety bond company and returned it to the Humphreys County Board of Supervisors. Browder remains liable for over \$187,000 of the demand issued to him.

- Helen Bounds was arrested in November 2019 after she was indicted for embezzling from the Town of Raleigh by issuing extra payroll checks to herself. The Auditor's office collected the full amount of Bounds's demand letter from a surety bond company and returned it to the Town of Raleigh. Bounds still faces criminal charges in a Smith County trial currently scheduled for next month.

- During a press conference at the Lee County courthouse in March 2019, Auditor White announced the commissioners of the Town Creek Master Water Management District had been issued demand letters worth a total of over \$520,000. The commissioners voted to reimburse and pay themselves in excess of the allowable amount. In February, the Auditor recovered \$298,050.83 from a surety bond company and returned it to the affected taxpayers in Lee, Pontotoc, Prentiss, and Union Counties.

"Since coming into office in July 2018, the Auditor's

*Funds Shortfall

(Continued from page 1.) inmates, those inmates will have to be relocated.

"There are guards that have been here eight or nine years, they haven't had a raise," said March. "At ten dollars (an hour), that's poverty level, they can go down and apply for an EBT (Electronic Benefit Trans-

ferred card." office has identified over \$5 million in stolen or mis-spent public money and has now recovered and returned over \$4 million back to the taxpayers where it belongs," said White. "February was our most successful month yet for returning money to the public during my tenure, and I look forward to more months like this in the future."

Suspected fraud can be reported to the Auditor's office online any time by clicking the red button at www.osa.ms.gov or via telephone during normal business hours at 1-(800)-321-1275.

When the Auditor's office successfully concludes cases and money is recovered, that money is returned to the government office from which the money was originally taken.

every 15 minutes, you will not have access to detailed energy usage information, or be eligible to participate in some future programs that might be helpful in further managing your electric bill. Mississippi Power Company customers who choose to opt-out must pay an up-front fee of \$286 as well as an additional monthly fee of \$44. The up-front fee will cover programming costs, opt-out processing costs, and other expenses and the monthly fee will cover the employee labor and vehicle costs for the manual meter reads.

"I pledge to continue monitoring the rollout of the AMI systems and the deployment of smart meters. My office will also be working to ensure consumers can take full advantage of smart meter functions. Furthermore, customers can be confident that our office will make every effort to confirm the data generated by these meters is protected," Commissioner Bailey added.

Entergy Mississippi and Mississippi Power Company provide detailed FAQs on their website for customers to learn more about the smart meters installed at their homes.

To report a problem with your utility, call the customer service department of the utility and report your problem with them first. To file a complaint with the Mississippi Public Service Commission Central District about a utility problem, call one of our Consumer Complaint Specialists at 601-961-5430 or 1-800-356-6430.

Medical care for inmates is also outsourced, said March. He plans to appeal to area medical care providers and pharmacists for the bill's support.

The current MDOC health care contract, valued at \$149,274,700.00 with Centurion of Mississippi is scheduled to end on June 30, 2020.

"Centurion is a subsidiary of the Centene Corporation with national headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri," according to the prepared argu-

ment. "This contract should not be renewed for the Regional Jails. Regional Jails should be allowed to provide their own health care by utilizing local hospitals, pharmacies and health care professionals in the community. This will stimulate local economies and help save our rural hospitals."

While waiting to be seen and heard by Governor Tate Reeves and other corrections officials, March said he will continue to keep morale up among security personnel.

State senate approves death benefit increase for first responders

Press Release

Beneficiaries of a law enforcement officer or fire fighter killed in the line of duty would receive a \$200,000 payment under a bill unanimously approved by the Mississippi Senate on Wednesday, March 4.

Senate Bill 2523 doubles the State's current death benefit payment of \$100,000. Benefits are paid from a Trust Fund receiving vehicle

tag and renewal fees honoring law enforcement officers.

"Because of the nature of their jobs, our law enforcement officers and fire fighters are in harm's way every day," Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hosemann said. "First, we need to respect them and keep them as safe as possible, and second, we need to take care of their families — just like they take care of ours."

To track Senate Bill 2523's progress, visit: <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/2020/pdf/history/SB/SB2523.xml>. To learn more about Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hosemann, visit www.ltgovhosemann.ms.gov.

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Commissioner Bailey reports on status of installing smart meters in Mississippi

Press Release

Mississippi Public Service Commissioner for the Central District Brent Bailey informs electric utility customers of the status of advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) deployment in Central Mississippi. Commissioner Bailey also shares resources and information from the utility companies with customers on how the AMI meters - also known as smart meters - operate and how the companies claim customers benefit from the installation of these meters.

AMI is an integrated system of meters, data management systems and communications networks that allow two-way interaction between a utility and its customers. AMI allows a utility company to capture real-time or near real-time consumption, usage patterns, demand and other related information.

In May 2017, the Mississippi Public Service Commission approved Entergy Mississippi's filed application to authorize the company to install smart meters at customers' homes. The Commission also approved Mississippi Power Company's filed request in April 2018. The final orders require each of the companies to submit quarterly reports to the Mississippi Public Utility Staff. Entergy Mississippi and Mississippi Power Company are currently conducting switch-outs of their elec-

tric use meters and replacing old technology with the AMI smart meters.

"So far Entergy Mississippi and Mississippi Power Company are both well into their programs and each are working in the Central District," Commissioner Bailey said. "Entergy is approximately 1/3 of the way through their change out according to the data we have collected. Nearly 188,000 AMI meters have been installed as of February 2020 and Entergy estimates their 455,000 customers will ultimately have a smart meter installed by the later part of 2021. Mississippi Power should have complete deployment of AMI meters to its 180,000 customers by the end of April 2020."

Entergy tells us the majority of utilities across the United States have installed advanced meters and says these advanced meters provide the following benefits:

- New online tools to help you better manage your energy usage and potentially save money on your bills;
- Improved customer service due to the deeper level of insight into your energy usage;
- Quicker and more accurate detection of outages;
- Reduced costs due to the elimination of on-site meter reading;
- Faster detection of electricity theft;
- Faster connection and disconnection of service.

Mississippi Power also shares similar benefits with their customers:

- Because AMI allows for real-time reporting, customers will be able to see their usage online and clearly understand how the energy is being used in their homes;
- AMI will allow Mississippi Power to offer more payment options and pricing structures to its customers;
- AMI also enhances reliability and reduces operating costs, which helps the company operate more efficiently.

"I encourage customers to educate themselves on whether they have a smart meter, and how they can utilize the AMI system tools to maximize their energy efficiency and reduce the operational costs of their home," Commissioner Bailey said. "However, if they choose to do so, residential customers of both companies do have the right to opt-out of receiving a meter upgrade on their home."

Entergy Mississippi residential customers who choose to opt-out will incur a one-time service and administration fee in the amount of \$91.78 (or \$98.60 if you choose to opt-out after your advanced meter has already been installed), in addition to a monthly manual meter-reading fee of \$26.73, which will be added to your monthly bill. Because the older, analog meters do not capture your electric usage

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