

# Elections chief 'a bit concerned' about USPS returning ballots in time for general election

By Bobby Harrison  
Mississippi Today

Secretary of State Michael Watson, the state's chief elections officer, says he is "a bit concerned" with the ability of the U.S. Postal Service to ensure absentee ballots are mailed out and returned in time to be counted for the November general election.

"But our office can only control what our office controls, and the USPS isn't on our list," said Watson, a first term Republican, in prepared responses to questions from Mississippi Today. "I recently spoke to a circuit clerk who just this week received a mail-in absentee ballot that was postmarked last October, so everyone should be concerned about mail-in ballots, especially the states that have and are moving to vote by mail elections."

USPS delays are expected to play a huge role in the 2020 election, and the issue has become the subject of partisan debate. The Postal Service recently sent memos to many states, including Mississippi, saying it might not be able to deliver the ballots in a timely fashion. More people are expected to vote via mail this November to prevent crowded polling places in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. At one point, President



SECRETARY OF STATE  
MICHAEL WATSON

Donald Trump, who opposes voting by mail though he does it himself, said he opposed federal funding to ensure the Post Office can carry out its functions, especially delivering and returning election ballots. The Post Office has been negatively impacted because of a slowdown in the volume of mail caused by the pandemic.

"Now they need that money in order to make the Post Office work so it can take all of these millions and millions of ballots," Trump said, adding if federal funds were not appropriated for the Post Office, "you can't have universal mail-in voting because they're not equipped to have it."

The Democratic-controlled U.S. House has approved \$25 billion to boost the Postal Service. The Republican-controlled Senate has thus far refused to take up any legislation.

In 2016, 28,716 ballots were mailed out in Mississippi. Watson said people eligible to vote absentee should request a ballot as soon as possible. The ballots should be available no later than Sept. 21.

Mississippi is the only state to require both a ballot application request and the ballot to be notarized. Many states, particularly during the pandemic, are either sending out ballots to all registered voters or at least are mailing out ballot applications.

Mississippi opted to do neither. Mississippi is also among a minority of states that do not have no excuse early voting.

"We have the most restrictive, onerous, difficult vote by mail laws in the nation," said Sen. David Blount of Jackson. "We needed to change the laws before the coronavirus. We certainly need to change them now."

Still, Gov. Tate Reeves said he believes all "legal" votes cast in the state will be counted despite the coronavirus.

"I am comfortable that Mississippi election laws that have allowed us to execute elections over so many years are adequate at this time in the middle of a pandemic," Reeves said. "I think we can have a safe and fair election in November."

In Mississippi, to vote early

curity tax deferral may apply to payments of taxable wages to an employee that are less than \$4,000 during a bi-weekly pay period, with each pay period considered separately. No deferral is available for any payment to an employee of taxable wages of \$4,000 or above for a bi-weekly pay period.

Today's notice postpones the time for employers to withhold and pay employee Social Security taxes.

Additional tax relief related to the COVID-19 pandemic can be found on IRS.gov.

ing license, which includes the following: a Mississippi Sportsman License, All-Game Hunting/Fishing License, Small Game Hunting/Fishing License, Apprentice Sportsman License, Apprentice All Game License, Apprentice Small Game License, Senior Exempt License, or Disabled Exempt License. Licenses are available on-line at www.mdwfp.com or at any point-of-sale location where Mississippi hunting and fishing licenses are sold, or by calling 1-800-5GO-HUNT.

For more information regarding alligator hunting rules and regulations, visit our website at www.mdwfp.com/alligator or call us at 601-432-2199. Follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/mdwfp or on Twitter at www.twitter.com/MDWF-Ponline.

in person or by mail a person must be over the age of 65, be disabled or be away from home on election day. Earlier this year the Legislature did pass a bill to allow a person under a physician-imposed quarantine because of the coronavirus to vote absentee. Some question whether the change in law allowing people to vote early under a quarantine order actually could make it more difficult for people to vote early during the pandemic. Some believe existing language in the law – without any changes this year by the Legislature – would have given circuit

clerks the authority to allow people to vote early under a provision saying people with a temporary disability could vote early.

A lawsuit, filed by the Mississippi Center for Justice, the American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Mississippi on behalf of a group of Mississippians, is asking for a judicial ruling allowing all people to vote early because of concerns about voter safety.

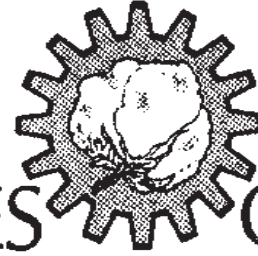
The Legislature also has changed the law to allow mail-in ballots to be counted as long as they are postmarked by election day and

received at the local county circuit clerk's office within five days of the election. Under the old law, the ballots had to be received at the circuit clerk's office the day before the election.

In Mississippi, the law does not prevent a notary from charging to notarize a ballot or ballot application though, the Secretary of State's office does have a regulation preventing it. But the office concedes the law would trump the regulation. It is not clear whether out of state notaries can charge for Mississippians who are sending in a ballot from out of state.

## Notice of Legal Holiday

We will be closed all day  
**Monday, Sept. 7, 2020**  
in observance of Labor Day



**HOLMES COUNTY BANK AND TRUST COMPANY**

Lexington, Goodman, Vaiden, and West

# Guidance issued on memorandum deferring some employee Social Security tax withholding

Press Release

The Department of Treasury and Internal Revenue Service issued guidance on Friday, August 28, implementing the Presidential Memorandum issued on August 8, 2020, allowing employers to defer withholding and payment of the employee's portion of the

Social Security tax if the employee's wages are below a certain amount.

Notice 2020-65, posted on IRS.gov, makes relief available for employers and generally applies to wages paid starting September 1, 2020, through December 31, 2020.

The employee Social Se-

# Mississippi's alligator hunting season closes Sept. 7

Press Release

The 2020 Public Waters Alligator Hunting Season opened on Friday, August 28. The season will be open for 10 days and will close at 12 p.m. on Monday, September 7.

A total of 986 permits in seven hunting zones across the state were offered in two random drawings. During the June application period, MDWFP received 5,548 requests for alligator hunting permits.

This is the 16th year of public waterway alligator hunting in Mississippi and wildlife officials expect over 3,000 people will participate with permitted hunters. 922 alligators were harvested during the 2019 season.

"Mississippi is anticipating possible tropical weather impacts during the opening weekend, but forecasts are for more favorable weather to follow during the 10-day hunting season," MDWFP Alligator Program Coordinator Ricky Flynt said. "Permitted hunters should always remain weather aware and not take unnecessary risks." MDWFP encourages all participants to maintain proper boating safety and wear PFDs when boats are underway.

All persons 16 years of age or older who are in a vessel with, or assisting a permit holder, must possess a Lifetime Hunting License or an Alligator Hunting License and a valid prerequisite hunt-

**SPECIAL ELECTION - HOLMES COUNTY CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT NOVEMBER 3, 2020 QUALIFIED ELECTORS OF DISTRICT 3 PICKENS, GOODMAN, EBENEZER & COXBURG**

**AUGUST 5, 2020 QUALIFYING PERIOD BEGINS FOR HOLMES COUNTY CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT 3 - SPECIAL ELECTION**

*The first day qualifying period begins for Office of School Board is August 5. The first day August 5 - candidates may file petitions and/or qualifying statements for the Office of District 3 Holmes County Consolidated School District 3. (MS Code Annotated 37-5-9, 37-J-211J 37-7-225, 37-7-711).*

**SEPTEMBER 4, 2020 QUALIFYING DEADLINE, 5:00PM FOR HOLMES COUNTY CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT 3 - SPECIAL ELECTION**

*The candidates qualifying deadline for the Office of School Board - District 3, Holmes County Consolidated School District. is September 4, @ 5PM. (MS Code Ann 37-5-9, 37-7-211, 37-7-225, 37-7-711).*

**IF QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT THE CIRCUIT CLERK'S OFFICE @ Telephone:834-5028.**

**Submitted by,  
Earline Wright-Hart, Circuit Clerk**