

Commissioner Andy Gipson details events of 161st Mississippi State Fair

Press Release

On Monday, September 21, Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson announced the details of the 161st Mississippi State Fair, which runs Wednesday, October 7, through Saturday, October 18. The fair, an agricultural event featuring Mississippi's youth livestock exhibitions, will officially begin with a ceremonial ribbon cutting at 5:00 p.m. on October 7.

"The show must go on," said Commissioner Gipson, "but for the show to go on in 2020, we're going to have to do it social distance style. The State Fair is a tradition for many families, and we have gone to great lengths to make sure this year's fair provides fun-filled activities, while keeping our visitors safe. We are implementing CDC guidelines by limiting the number of attendees as well as observing mask and social distancing requirements. I am looking forward to welcoming everyone to this year's 161st Mississippi State Fair."

It is advised that any guests who feel unwell or may have underlying medical conditions stay home. The entire complex has limited the number of guests, and each indoor building has posted building limits. Face masks will be required for entry to

the Mississippi State Fairgrounds and social distancing is encouraged in accordance with state guidelines for outdoor events. In addition, fair rides will be sanitized between each ride and hand sanitizing stations will be available throughout the grounds.

"The safety and security of our guests is our top priority, and our staff has worked tirelessly to implement safety precautions with that goal in mind," said Michael Lasseter, Acting Director of the Mississippi Fairgrounds Complex. "The Mississippi State Fair is a family event that we all look forward to each year. I remember coming to the State Fair myself as a young man and the wonderful memories that I made with my family. I am excited and grateful to give that same opportunity to other families."

Additional activities and events to note:

- First Responders Appreciation Day will be held on Wednesday, October 7, and as a special thank you, the Mississippi Fairgrounds will be offering free admission to all law enforcement officers, first responders, firefighters, healthcare workers and medical professionals. Identification will be required at the gate.

- For the first time ever,

the Fairgrounds will host the Genuine MS® Store, which will be open to the public and exhibit a variety of Genuine MS® items for purchase.

- Musical acts performing on the Budweiser Stage located on the Midway include Mustache the Band, Roots and Boots 90's Electric Throwdown with Sammy Kershaw, Aaron Tippin and Collin Raye, Epic Funk Brass Band, Dirt Road Cadillac, Paul Porter and the Christianaires, U.S., Great White/Slaughter, Big Blues Explosion, Sean Kingston, Southern Komfort Brass Band, 601 Live and the Tophers Brown Band. In addition, local acts will perform at the State Fair on the Trustmark Stage located on the Midway. All musical entertainment is free with regular fair admission.

- The 2020 State Fair will include the annual Horse, Mule and Pony Pulls in the Kirk Fordice Equine Center. The Horse Pull will begin at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, October 17, with the Mule Pull immediately following. The Pony Pull will begin at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 18.

- All American Day will be held on Wednesday, October 14, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and will include musical entertainment by Jared Vardaman and Ed Meadows, as well as a speech by Com-

missioner Andy Gipson. As a special thank you to the military for their service, the Mississippi Fairgrounds will be offering free admission on All American Day to any active military. Identification will be required at the gate.

- This year, a new feature of the mile-long Midway will be the Timberworks Lumberjack Show featuring axe throwing, underhand and chopping, cross cut and hot sawing along with chainsaw carving. The Lumberjack Shows will take place daily throughout the duration of the Fair.

- Daily activities will take place throughout the 105 acres of the Mississippi Fairgrounds Complex. Children, and adults alike, will enjoy the Farm Bureau Petting Zoo Area and Pig Races, the 4-H

and FFA Livestock Shows and will be wowed by the circus performers of the Great American Thrill Show brought to you by Clarion Ledger located at the Kid Zone. LOCALiQ's Fetch-N-Fish will perform and dozens of vendors and exhibits will be available to the public, including an arts & crafts competition, food preservation, floral exhibits and an antique tractor show.

Commissioner Gipson continued, "The Fair is essentially an outdoor, transitory event which helps mitigate the risk of the coronavirus transmission. But the risk is still there. I encourage everyone to use the sanitizing stations, respect the social distancing guidelines, and when unable to be socially distant to wear a mask, which will be required at entry. Also, I ask for patience, we've changed where the lines go to rides to take them away from midway walkers

and will have six-foot space markers for those in line. It won't be the normal Fair but using our safety plan and with the cooperation of our guests, the show will go on!"

The safe fair plan was created using CDC guidelines, guidance from State Health Officer Dr. Thomas Dobbs and best practices from other similar events. The plan has been reviewed by Governor Tate Reeves.

The Mississippi State Fair runs Wednesday, October 7, through Sunday, October 18, with a gate admission price of \$5.00 per person and parking \$5.00 per car. Children under the age of 6 are admitted free of charge. Enjoy free admission weekdays 11:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.

For more information, download the Mississippi State Fair mobile app, visit www.MsStateFair.com online or follow the Mississippi State Fairgrounds page on Facebook.

Mississippi justices: No broad absentee voting during COVID

Associated Press

Mississippi law does not allow absentee voting by all people who have health conditions that might make them vulnerable to COVID-19, the state Supreme Court ruled Friday, September 18.

A majority of justices reversed a Sept. 2 decision by Hinds County Chancery Judge Denise Owens, saying she too broadly interpreted some changes that legislators made to state law this year.

"Having a preexisting condition that puts a voter at a higher risk does not automatically create a temporary disability for absentee-voting purposes," justices wrote.

The Mississippi decision contrasts with one handed down Wednesday, September 16, in a neighboring state, where a federal judge ruled that Louisiana must allow mail-in voting for people with conditions that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has listed as making people more vulnerable to COVID-19, their caretakers and three other groups.

Mississippi does not allow widespread early voting. Instead, state law says absentee

voting is available to anyone 65 or older, or for voters of any age who are permanently disabled or will be out of their home county on Election Day.

People who have to work on Election Day when polls are open also are allowed to vote absentee.

Legislators tweaked the law this year with provisions that expire at the end of 2020. Those allow absentee voting by someone with a temporary or permanent disability that may include "a physician-imposed quarantine due to COVID-19" or by a person who is "caring for a dependent that is under a physician-imposed quarantine due to COVID-19."

People with health conditions including lupus and asthma filed a lawsuit Aug. 11 in Hinds County Chancery Court. Their attorneys from the American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi and the Mississippi Center for Justice argued that any voter with a preexisting condition should be able to vote absentee because the state health officer, who is a physician, has advised that people with such conditions should avoid

large public gatherings. The attorneys said such voters should not need individual quarantine orders from another physician, and Owens agreed.

Secretary of State Michael Watson, a Republican, appealed Owens' order to the state Supreme Court.

Attorneys for Watson wrote in the appeal that the state law's "narrow absentee excuse does not stretch to voters without an underlying 'physical disability' just because they have a fear of contracting COVID-19 at the polls, or the voters are voluntarily following public health guidance."

Other groups filed a similar lawsuit Aug. 27 in federal court, arguing that Mississippi's absentee voting restrictions put people at risk during the coronavirus pandemic. They filed additional papers Thursday asking a judge to block two requirements — that a voter have absentee ballot forms notarized and that people have an excuse to vote absentee, such as being out of town on Election Day. Waiving the excuse would open absentee voting to many more people.

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