

# Coronavirus and marijuana initiative discussed by House

By Speaker of the House Philip Gunn

## Coronavirus Update and Precautions

Last Thursday, we passed another major deadline in the legislative session. This deadline was for both the House and Senate to complete floor action on bills in their respective chambers. After convening for a short morning session, we recessed briefly on Thursday in order for me and the Lieutenant Governor to attend a press conference with State Health Officer, Dr. Thomas Dobbs, on the status of the coronavirus in Mississippi.

Dr. Dobbs and his team at the Mississippi Department of Health are doing an outstanding job of keeping this contained and the public informed. We, as state leaders, are engaged with him and getting daily updates on any new developments – and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

As of Friday morning, Mississippi had two confirmed cases of coronavirus.



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Dr. Dobbs communicated some important information during the press conference. Most importantly, don't panic. People will get sick, but most people will recover. Those 65 years of age and older need to be careful and exercise caution. For those of us not at a higher risk of infection, we just need to use common sense – wash your hands; avoid large crowds; if you don't have to get out, don't, for the time being.

As summer and warmer weather approaches, we hope the threat of coronavirus will dissipate, it will be contained and pass on over. My office is working now with Delbert and the Lieutenant Governor's office to establish protocol for how to proceed with work at our state Capitol during the remainder of this busy legislative session. As of Friday afternoon, we are not implementing any sort of ban; but, based on Dr. Dobbs advice of avoiding crowds of 250 or great-

er, we are recommending keeping your visits to the Capitol limited. At working capacity, with legislators and staff, we are beyond that threshold already in our daily operations. It would be wise for people who don't have business at the Capitol to wait and come after this threat has passed.

At this point, we have no plans to suspend or postpone the 2020 Session, but if it does come to that – and I sincerely hope it does not – we will have options.

Passage of House Concurrent Resolution 39 – Medical Marijuana Initiative Alternative Another much talked about topic at the Capitol has been the issue of medical marijuana. On March 10, the House passed HCR 39 as a legislative alternative to Initiative 65, which will appear on Mississippi ballots in November under Initiative as 65A.

The legislative alternative, Initiative 65A, gives people who are in

favor of medical marijuana a responsible pathway to having it. The alternative allows the public to vote for medical marijuana without consenting to legalizing recreational marijuana.

Anyone who has read the proposed Initiative 65 and listened to the debate on the House floor can see that there are tremendous problems with the initiative. It goes way beyond what it has been represented to be and comes extremely close to legalizing recreational use of marijuana.

Another important issue with Initiative 65 is that it does not allow the tax revenue from marijuana sales to be used by the State. It essentially exempts the sale of marijuana from local zoning ordinances. It totally removes the taxing and appropriation authority from the legislative branch and gives it to an executive branch, which is a complete violation of the separation of powers.

Ultimately, it is not what most people mean when they say that they are for medical marijuana. Initiative 65 is not good public policy. The alternative passed by the House gives Mississippians the opportunity to vote for a legitimate, reasonable medical marijuana program that would meet the needs of those who could benefit from the program.



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