

# Mississippi's first wind farm planned for Tunica

**Mississippi Today**  
Two major renewable energy projects are planned for Mississippi, including the state's first wind-power farm.

Lawmakers said Wednesday that a \$250-million wind farm is planned for Tunica County and a \$140-million to \$160-million solar farm for Chickasaw County. The state Senate approved allowing the local counties to provide tax breaks for the projects.

The Tunica project, Tunica Wind Power LLC, would be the state's first wind farm, state Public Service Commissioner Brandon Presley said. The Chickasaw solar farm would be that area's third one, and several others are operating across the state.

With recent wind-power debate from widespread power outages in Texas, Presley pointed out that the projects would only sell power wholesale to the Tennessee Valley Authority or nationally, not directly to



**Lawmakers said Wednesday that a \$250 million wind farm is planned for Tunica County.**  
**(Photo from Mississippi Today)**

any customers. Presley said the Tunica project has applied for PSC approval, but the Chickasaw solar project has not.

“(The wind farm) will have 100 wind turbines on 13,000 acres in Tunica, be a 200-megawatt facility, able to power at max capacity 7,000 homes,” Presley said.

“In light of what we’ve seen in Texas, we will be asking them about their winterization efforts,” Presley said.

Presley said he knows few

details about the Chickasaw County solar project. Lawmakers provided few specific details about the projects on Wednesday before the Senate approved the tax breaks.

The state Senate approved SB 2895, which would allow the two counties’ boards of supervisors to reduce the ad valorem tax assessment on property for the projects from 15% to 8%. Senate Finance Chairman Josh Harkins said this would allow the counties to be “competitive” with

areas in other states and help finalize the projects.

Sen. Barbara Blackmon, D-Canton, questioned the tax break: “Have they said they will not come with the existing (tax valuation)?”

Harkins said: “(Not reducing the tax values) would be about an extra \$1 million in taxes compared to other surrounding states. We are competing within the Tennessee Valley Authority.”

The measure passed unanimously, with one “present” vote by Sen. Angela Burks Hill, R-Picayune.

Sen. Benjamin Suber, R-Bruce, who represents the area for the Chickasaw project, said that the 1,100-acre property now only generates about \$5,000 a year in ad valorem taxes for the county. Even with the approved tax value reduction, he said it is expected to generate more than \$800,000 a year for the county. He noted no state or other taxes would be affected by the bill the Senate passed.

The bill would allow such an ad valorem value reduction only for “transformative” projects investing \$100 million or more, Harkins said.

# Columbus CFO guilty of embezzlement, ordered to serve maximum prison sentence

## Press Release

On Tuesday, February 23, State Auditor Shad White announced former City of Columbus Chief Financial Officer Milton Rawle, Jr. was convicted of embezzlement in Lowndes County Circuit Court. The case was prosecuted by District Attorney Scott Colom in Judge Lee Coleman’s court chambers. The guilty plea and sentencing were recorded Monday, February 22.

Rawle was arrested by Special Agents from the state auditor’s office in August 2020 after being indicted. He embezzled nearly \$300,000 by transferring public money to his own bank account. A \$354,896.27 demand letter was issued to him upon arrest.

Judge Coleman sentenced Rawle to spend twenty years in prison – the maximum sentence. The auditor’s office has already recovered nearly \$250,000 of Rawle’s demand by filing a claim against his surety bond, and the court ordered him to repay what is still owed to Columbus taxpayers.

“Another investigation—



**MILTON RAWLE, JR.**

this time into one of the largest municipal embezzlements in recent memory in Mississippi—and another guilty plea,” said Auditor White. “With this prison sentence, law enforcement and the courts have sent the message that stealing taxpayer dollars is not a victimless crime. There are serious consequences for embezzlers in Mississippi. Anyone else thinking of stealing is now on notice.”

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

# Teachers and first responders now eligible for COVID-19 vaccination

## Mississippi State Department of Health

Starting Monday, March 1, COVID-19 vaccination eligibility will be expanded to include teachers, staff and employees in K-12, pre-school or childcare settings as well as to first responders and public safety personnel (including law enforcement, public safety, fire services and emergency management officials).

Persons in these groups can make appointments now for vaccinations taking place on or after March 1. To find an available appointment, visit the online scheduler, or call (877) 978-6453, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. A large group of new

appointments are added each week on Mondays or Tuesdays, and a smaller number are added daily.

## Second Dose Appointments

You can make your second-dose appointment as soon as you schedule your first vaccination at one of our drive-through sites. Look for scheduling information in your first dose confirmation e-mail. Remember that your second dose appointment should be made 3-5 weeks (for Pfizer vaccine) or 4-6 weeks (Moderna) from your first vaccination.

## Eligibility

Adults 65 and over, and those ages 18-64 with certain chronic health conditions are also still eligible for vaccination in addition to health-care personnel and EMTs/paramedics. Vaccinations are provided to Mississippi residents or to out-of-state residents who work in Mississippi.

After you are vaccinated please continue to observe social distancing, mask use, and other protective steps. This helps prevent the possible transmission of COVID-19 to those who have not yet been vaccinated.

# When Southerners go North

Ok, Punxsutawey Phil, how much would we have to pay you to go back into your burrow and come out again and this time, PLEASE don’t see your shadow. Just look what you’re seeing it just did to us. We have been cooped

up like a bunch of Leghorns, unable to venture outside my front door, my garage had so much ice build-up my car could not climb the mound, and we were slipping and sliding like John Travolta in Grease each



**Peggy's Take**

time I tried to go to the mailbox, by the way which had no mail for several days, I looked as if I might have been doing the chicken dance. Our children’s electricity was down for the week and they enjoyed our “Meme Bed and Breakfast”, even though they had to sleep on the floor downstairs as our heat upstairs took this particular time to go on the fritz.

How in the world would a gang of Mississippians handle living in, say Utah? We would not add too much to the economy of the state as we would all be Leghorns all the time, and unable to go to the places that sold commodities. The residents there have chains on their tires, all houses probably

have the full house generators, snowplows, tons of salt and knowledge to know how to handle such weather. We born and bred Southerners, I doubt we would ever learn how to handle the cold let alone all the ice and

snow. We are so used to dressing in our shorts, t-shirts, shoes with no socks, and bill caps in cold mornings and then covering everything with a big camo jacket or those full camo overalls until it warms up, which it will, and then strip off all the outer clothes down to our “Mississippi” clothes again.

Now, let’s sit back and just wait until the trees begin to bud, the daffodils bloom, (some at our farm are blooming right along with the snow and Ice), the fish start jumping, and we turn on our air conditioners, even though it’s only fifty degrees outside. At this time, we can totally come out of our chicken houses and enjoy all the great southern warm weather.

As I was the cook at the bed and breakfast, I made up some recipes and believe me, those big boys will eat just about anything. I made this chicken dish, and it was really good.

Place chicken breast in the bottom of a 13x9 baking

# Auditor's Office Arrests Municipal Court Clerk in Chickasaw County

## Press Release

On Friday, February 26, State Auditor Shad White announced Special Agents from his office have arrested Kathy Smith after she was indicted for embezzlement. Smith is a former municipal court clerk for the City of Houston in Chickasaw County. A demand letter showing she owes \$131,697.00 was presented to her upon arrest. The demand amount includes interest and investigative expenses.

Smith is accused of embezzling cash and money orders meant to pay fines levied in Houston Municipal Court. To conceal the embezzlement, she allegedly manipulated records in computer software used to track court-ordered fines. Smith purportedly manipulated records to show payments made by “public works” although no fines were actually paid by public works from January 2013 to April 2018, the timeframe of the alleged embezzlement.

Smith surrendered to Spe-

dish. Mix two cans of cream of chicken and a package of onion soup mix, and 1 cup of sour cream and spread over the chicken. Crumble a stick of Ritz Crackers and 1 cup of cheddar cheese and spread on top. Bake at 350\* for 45 – 50 minutes.

*\* Peggy Sims is a life-long resident of Attala County and columnist.*



**KATY SMITH**

cial Agents at the Chickasaw County Sheriff’s Office. Her bond amount was set at \$25,000 by the court.

“It’s been a busy month for the Office of the State Auditor, and I’m grateful for the diligent work of our investigators during that time,” said Auditor White. “Every local government office needs to take a lesson from this case. Do not put one person in charge of too much. And call us if you suspect embezzlement. We will continue to identify theft and recover taxpayer dollars.”

If convicted, Smith faces up to 20 years in prison and \$5,000 in fines. All persons arrested by the Mississippi Office of the State Auditor are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. The case will be prosecuted by the office of District Attorney Benjamin Creekmore.

A \$50,000 surety bond covers Smith’s employment as municipal court clerk