

Robbery at Sonic Drive-In

Holmes County Consolidated School District appoints Dr. Debra Powell as Superintendent

Staff Report

At about 10:30 p.m. on May 4, a man disguised in dark clothes and wearing a mask entered Sonic through the front door as if he were a customer. The suspect pointed a gun at the workers who were in the process of closing, since they close at 11:00 p.m.

He demanded cash and immediately left on foot with an undisclosed amount of money.

Earlier in the evening, the workers noted that there

were several people riding on bicycles around Sonic. At this time, Chief Newton said that he cannot tie the bicycles to the robbery. The suspect remains unidentified. Chief Newton of the Lexington Police Department is asking the public for assistance in identifying the suspect. Chief Newton says that if you have any knowledge of the suspect or the robbery to call the Lexington Police Department at 834-3508 or Crime Stoppers at 834-0099 to report any information.

News Release

Lexington, MS — The board members of the Holmes County Consolidated School District today announced the appointment of Debra Powell, Ph.D. as the new Superintendent.

"The Board is very satisfied with the decision of hiring Dr. Debra Powell as our next Superintendent," said

cations the people of Holmes County say they want in a Superintendent. Three of our main focuses are finances, academics, and bringing our community together as one. We need everyone on board working with the same goal in mind: Making sure our children are successful! We believe Dr. Powell can lead the way to move us out of



DR. DEBRA POWELL

Louise Winters, Board President, Holmes County Consolidated School District. "She meets all of the qualifi-

this 'F' status. She has the full support of the Board and now the reins are in her hands."

Dr. Powell has 16 years of experience in the field of education. Her prior experience includes serving as assistant principal and principal in St. Louis, MO, Kansas, MO, and Lexington, MS. She currently serves as managing partner for VoiceSpeaks, LLC in Nashville, TN. Dr. Powell's experience outside of education includes

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Reeves to end \$300 unemployment stipend after Gunn calls for crack down

Mississippi Today by Geoff Pender and Bobby Harrison

Gov. Tate Reeves said Mississippi in early June will opt out of a federal pandemic program that has been providing an extra \$300 a week in unemployment benefits to Mississippians since last year.

Reeves' announcement came just hours after fellow Republican, House Speaker Philip Gunn, called on Reeves to either start enforcing job-search requirements for unemployment benefits or end the federal stipend. Gunn said small businesses are reporting they cannot hire people because of the extra benefits, and that the state is not enforcing the rule that people search for work while receiving them.

"The purpose of unemployment benefits is to temporarily assist Mississippians who are unemployed through no fault of their own," Reeves posted on social media on Monday. "After many conversations over the last several weeks with Mississippi small business owners and their employees, it has become clear that the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and other like

programs passed by the Congress may have been necessary in May of last year but are no longer so in May of this year. Therefore, I have informed the Department of Employment Security to direct the Biden Administration that Mississippi will be opting out of the additional federal unemployment benefits as early as federal law allows – June 12, 2021."

Gunn said he's heard reports that unemployment claimants are not following requirements that they earnestly search for jobs, and that "MDES is not effectively enforcing that requirement."

Gunn in his letter Monday said he received a report from one small-business owner that over a short time, 18 people had applied for job interviews, but only three showed up. He said the owner believed they were trying to game the system with MDES and "he reported these individuals to MDES to no avail."

"I and other House members are continually being contacted by increasingly desperate small business-people who inform us their businesses are at risk," Gunn wrote to Reeves, and cop-

ied the letter to all House members. "They report that they cannot get employees to return to work because they can earn more from combined federal and state unemployment benefits than their normal wages."

Gunn noted that the governors of Montana and South Carolina last week announced they were ending their states' participation in the \$300 a week federal COVID-19 benefits. Politicos and pundits nationwide have surmised increased pandemic unemployment benefits and stimulus payments have incentivized many people to not return to work.

Reeves on Monday said, "I have also directed MDES to prioritize pre-pandemic enforcement of all eligibility requirements for any individual to receive unemployment benefits under state law. Mississippi is open for business!"

Last August, Reeves announced the state would participate in a federal COVID-19 unemployment stipend created by an order of the Trump administration that would provide unemployed Mississippians an extra \$300 a week. In Mississippi, state benefits are a

maximum \$235 a week, with the average payment at less than \$200, compared to the national average of \$308 a week.

House Ways and Means Chairman Trey Lamar, R-Senatobia, said he has heard from numerous employers in his district that they can't find workers because of increased pandemic benefits.

"Not just one or two (employers)," Lamar said, "but a substantial number of businesses just here in my little

hometown of Senatobia — restaurants, other businesses. The place where I used to get coffee in the mornings can't open in the mornings because they don't have enough workers ... I think it's past the point for this. People can safely go back to work."

But Mississippi has suffered from low wages, lack of jobs, high unemployment and low workforce participation long before the pan-

demic.

House Democratic Leader Rep. Robert Johnson of Natchez said, "let's raise the minimum wage first," before ending the pandemic unemployment stipend.

Johnson said "people have been working in poverty" because of the state's \$7.25 an hour minimum wage and should not be blamed for taking advantage of an opportunity to earn more

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Gas Shortage: Commissioner Gipson Encourages Public to Refrain from Panic Buying Fuel

News Release

JACKSON, Miss. – Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson encourages the public across Mississippi to refrain from "panic buying" fuel due to the halted operations of the Colonial Pipeline. Colonial Pipeline expects to restore operations by the end of this week.

"In the meantime," Commissioner Gipson suggests, "the best things we can do

are: 1) limit unnecessary travel; and 2) purchase fuel only as needed."

"I want to encourage the public across the state to purchase the fuel they need, but not over buy or panic purchase fuel. Mississippi does not face a gas shortage due to the pipeline disruption, but panic buying could exhaust, and in some cases has already exhausted some local station supplies. The Department's Regulatory Services

Bureau is closely monitoring this situation," said Commissioner Gipson.

Commissioner Gipson continued, "The East Coast and landlocked states without refineries may see disruptions. You'll see it on the news, I'm sure. But the Colonial Pipeline supplies less than 30 percent of the fuel in Mississippi. Our river terminals at Vicksburg, Greenville and Aberdeen are continuing

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