

Mississippi could help long-neglected poor with Rescue Plan payments

Mississippi Today
by Bobby Harrison

The state’s political leaders who are cutting off federal coronavirus-related federal unemployment benefits could provide needy Mississippians cash assistance through another federal program.

Apparently, a portion of the \$1.8 billion the state is receiving from the American Rescue Plan, signed into law earlier this year by President Joe Biden, could be paid to Mississippians in direct payments.

The law provides for “direct assistance to households and populations facing negative economic impacts due to COVID-19.”

The payments would be similar to the federal benefits sent out over the past year. Those federal checks have totaled \$3,200 for most Mississippians. U.S. Treasury Department regulations, released last week, specified that the cash payments could not be significantly larger than the checks sent out by the federal government, but with more limitations to narrowly target those who need help the most. The language in the law appears to allow benefits to be paid to the families of people who died from COVID-19.

The Legislature cannot use the \$1.8 billion in federal funds for recurring expenses, such as for pay raises, since the money must be spent by the end of 2024. And the funds are not needed to fill budget shortfalls caused by a decline in tax collections, as some states have experienced, because of COVID-19. With two months left in the fiscal year, Mississippi has a surplus of \$804 million.

Presumably, the Mississippi Legislature could craft a program to provide the cash assistance to the needy during the 2022 session that begins in January. Of course, Gov. Tate Reeves could call a special session to immediately consider the program.

Just last week Reeves, after strong urging from state House Speaker Philip Gunn, opted out of a federal program that provides unemployed Mississippians an additional \$300 weekly in jobless benefits, thanks to the American Rescue Plan. The federal assistance is in addition to the normal state unemployment benefit of up to \$235 per week.

Gunn wrote in a letter to Reeves that businesses “are suffering from a labor shortage caused by unemployment benefits that exceed

MS COVID-19 vaccination rate tumbles 65% since peak

Mississippi Today
by Will Stribling

In the first week of May, 46,440 Mississippians received COVID-19 vaccines, a drop of over 16% from the week prior. The state’s weekly vaccination rate has dropped 65% from its peak in late February. Mississippi continues to rank last in the nation for the share of its population that is partially or fully vaccinated.

Allison Cox, executive director of the Jackson Housing Authority, said she’s surprised more people are not

getting vaccinated in Mississippi. Her organization even had difficulties in early March to fill the 240 vaccination slots per day they had through a partnership with Walmart. Still, Cox is proud that they were able to get around 2,000 Mississippians vaccinated over a six-week period.

“Our northeast partners, like up in Maine, when they talk to us, they just can’t believe that it’s so accessible to us and that people aren’t taking advantage of it,” Cox said.

The Mississippi State De-

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-Holmes County Herald Staff



sion the Mississippi Legislature agreed to increase those federal funds \$90 per month for a family of three to \$260 per month, meaning while still low nationally, it is not the lowest.

Mississippi is among the 20 states that have not increased the minimum wage above the federally mandated base level of \$7.25 per hour, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The maximum compensation paid by the state to workers who lose their job through no fault of their own also is the lowest in the nation at \$235 per week.

And to top it off, Mississippi has one of the nation’s

Spark Scientific Discovery at Home

(Family Features) Science influences many aspects of daily life in countless ways. It also helps shape the development of life skills from an early age. As children learn to communicate, think critically, make predictions and form opinions based on their observations, they are developing science skills that will last a lifetime.

Through its “Wonder of Science” initiative celebrating bringing innovation to kitchen tables for 100 years, Wonder Bread is helping to support ongoing scientific learning for students across America. In partnership with AdoptAClassroom.org and Emily Calandrelli, an American science communicator, MIT engineer and co-executive producer and host of “Emily’s Wonder Lab” on Netflix, the bread manufacturer is donating \$100,000 to provide U.S. middle and high schools with supplies and equipment for science education and presenting an online series of science experiments for students.

Allowing children to put those science-based skills to the test at home can be both simple and fun. Whether you head outside to identify clouds and species of animals or work on crafts indoors, there are plenty of everyday learning scenarios that allow parents to get hands-on with their children’s education.

Bake Together

Baking can be a fun (and tasty) way to introduce scientific experimentation by following a recipe to see how the ingredients react together - or with too much or too little of a certain ingredient - and testing the end product against the desired results. As recipes are mixed, heated and cooled, baking introduces a variety of chemical reactions, including water evaporation, caramelization, browning and more.

Conduct Experiments with Everyday Supplies

Special tools and equip-

ment aren’t necessary for discovering and fostering a love of science or conducting your own experiments. By using household items you may already have on hand and following a few simple instructions from Calandrelli, you can create your own homemade rockets or inflate a balloon.

“Getting kids excited about science and interested in how it affects our lives every day is the best part of what I do,” Calandrelli said. “Joining Wonder Bread to spread that message of wonder not just through my show but directly into classrooms is a fantastic opportunity. I can’t wait to share my love of science.”

Start a Garden

One of the best ways to introduce children to a variety of plant species and the process through which they grow is to grow your own garden. Start by letting the kids pick some plants or veg-

etables that germinate and produce a crop quickly such as carrots or petunias then choose a location to plant. Test and prepare the soil then plant your seeds and water as needed.

Balloon on a Bottle

Courtesy of Emily Calandrelli on behalf of Wonder Bread

2 tablespoons dry yeast
1 tablespoon sugar
2-3 tablespoons lukewarm water
1 large mouth, glass pint bottle
1 party balloon
In cup, stir yeast, sugar and water. Using funnel, pour mixture into bottle. Add more water as needed to push mixture through bottle-neck. Quickly stretch balloon over mouth of bottle. Observe bubbles in yeast mixture and watch balloon inflate. Inflation can take 10-30 minutes, depending on mixture.



BALLOON ON A BOTTLE