

Highlights of the 2021 Session of the Mississippi Legislature

By Mississippi Speaker of the House Philip Gunn

The 2021 session of the Mississippi Legislature officially adjourned Sine Die on Thursday, April 1, after working through the previous weekend to finalize the state budget. While many significant pieces of legislation did not make it through the process this year, several important ones did, and they will now be sent to the Governor to be signed into law.

Firstly, I'd like to say how grateful I am that we could complete this session with no significant COVID-19 outbreaks. By following the guidelines set out, we were able to conduct our business safely and without delay. We felt like it was the right thing to do for the state's citizens and to make sure that we got the work done. As we are moving forward into what I hope to be a post-pandemic world with more normalcy and as more people are vaccinated, we felt it was our job to be here, showing up as an example of how to approach gathering together responsibly in the way in which we are accustomed.

I believe the main highlight of this session to be the budget. Revenues continued to be good, allowing us to fund all of our state agencies and restore cuts that were made last year during the pandemic. We brought state agencies back to the same level at which they were before last year, and the rainy day fund is full.

The approximately \$6 billion state budget included an increase of \$102 million to the Department of Education, which provides for teacher pay raises and a total of \$16 million going to pre-school education. With revenues being better than previously anticipated, this enabled us to give our teachers and teachers'



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assistants a pay raise. I have always said that we will never be able to pay teachers what they are worth, but we can strive to pay them what we as a state can afford. We can never thank our teachers enough, and this pay raise is an effort on our part to show them how much we appreciate what they do.

Other highlights of note:

The Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act will elevate the level of care for female inmates by limiting the use of restraints on inmates giving birth, by providing feminine hygiene products for inmates who are in need, and placing incarcerated mothers within a certain distance to their minor children.

The Mississippi Computer Science and Cyber Education Equality Act requires the Department of Education to implement a computer science curriculum in all K-12 public schools. Currently, more than half of Mississippi high schools do not teach a computer science course.

Veterans are now authorized to establish proof of military service for a Veteran Driver's License Designation in person at DPS's driver's license stations across the state.

Under Christian's Law, photographs and recordings of autopsies around the state will remain confidential. The law is named in honor of Christian Andreacchio, a Meridian native who passed away in 2014.

Mississippians will be able to once again purchase common cold and allergy medications with pseudoephedrine and ephedrine from pharmacies without a prescription.

With the Fairness Act, Mississippi schools are now required to designate sports teams based on biological sex rather than gender identification.

The Mississippi House of Representatives adjourned on Thursday, three days before the April 4 deadline. This concluded the 2021 Legislative Session, which was the second session in the four-year term.



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