

Mississippi Economic Council Named America’s #1 State Chamber of Commerce

Successes in pandemic recovery, legislative influence elevated Mississippi’s Voice of Business

JACKSON, Miss. – The Mississippi Economic Council (MEC) has been honored as the State Chamber of the Year for 2022 by the National Association of State Chambers (NASC). Each year NASC honors a state chamber that has distinguished itself by providing exceptional services and outstanding results for its members.

“As the state chamber, MEC connects businesses from all regions of Mississippi with a shared goal of growing our state’s economic competitiveness,” said Scott Waller, president and CEO of MEC. “The tremendous support of members from all business sectors is the driving force for initiating and effectively advocating proactive public policy, helping create opportunities for all Mississippians.”

MEC – the State Chamber of Commerce – has been the voice of Mississippi business since 1949, dealing with broad issues that relate to all Mississippi businesses. MEC carries out its mission statement “to be the leading force for business in Mississippi” by using factual, data-driven research to promote collaboration between top private and public sector leaders and develop feasible solutions that will grow the state’s economy.

In the fall of 2021, MEC completed 51 small-group discussions in 18 regions of the state, gathering qualitative data on workforce, education, talent retention and attraction, economic development, and business climate. The information from these facilitated sessions, along with essential quantitative data, led to the development of MEC's "Securing Mississippi's Future: Vision for Economic Growth" report, released in early 2022. This report provides a clear, definitive picture of the public policy needed to advance the interests of MEC members and create a more prosperous future for all Mississippians.

The recommendations in the report align with key legislative initiatives, several of which were acted on during the 2022 session. Waller said a tremendous partnership among state leaders, key agencies, and other business groups led to transformative public policy this past year.

“Working with Governor Tate Reeves, Lt. Governor Delbert Hosemann, Speaker of the House Philip Gunn and members of the legis-

lature, we are making great strides in addressing the goals outlined in the ‘Securing Mississippi’s Future’ report,” Waller said. “By bringing public and private sector leaders together to focus on workforce training, economic development, and improving Mississippi’s competitiveness, our state benefits for years to come.”

Key Public Policy Achievements

- The Comprehensive Career and Technical Education Reform Act is a transformational approach to improving career pathways. It aligns CTE courses at the high school and community college levels, requiring a return-on-investment analysis. It also creates career readiness assessments.
- The Strategically Accelerating the Recruitment and Retention of Teachers (START) Act of 2022 is a \$250 million annual investment for teachers, increasing their salaries effective for the 2022-2023 school year, surpassing the regional and national averages.
- The Mississippi Flexible Tax Incentive Act is a performance-based incentive program to attract businesses to Mississippi, allowing flexibility in the use of incentives.
- More than \$500 million in new funding was appropriated for state and local infrastructure projects.

Organizational Development

- MEC developed its first formal strategic plan in over 20 years. This three-to-five-year plan will solidify MEC as the “Voice of Business” in Mississippi.
- Utilizing its foundations, the Public Education Forum of Mississippi and the M.B. Swayze Foundation, MEC received \$1.2 million in grants to support the organization’s efforts.
- The organization created a reserve fund, moving toward a goal of three months of core operating expenses.
- MEC provided professional development opportunities for staff, including two members of the MEC staff who earned the industry-recognized IOM designation.

“The Mississippi Economic Council’s value to its members is evident through the results of meaningful public policy,” said MEC 2022-2023 Chair Martin Williams, vice president and CFO of Coca-Cola Bottling of Corinth & Tupelo. “However, this award isn’t based on a single accomplishment. It highlights best practices among state chambers, and I am proud of the work accomplished by MEC and

the support of our members throughout Mississippi.”

“Chambers of Commerce play a vital role in helping to advance their state’s economy by advocating for business opportunity and growth for their private sector employers,” said Heather Briccetti Mulligan, President and CEO of The Business Council of New York State, and Chair of NASC. “Over the past year, the Mississippi Economic Council has continued NASC’s mission of demonstrating best practices to achieve these goals. Being named the top state chamber is a well-deserved top honor for MEC and its team.”

Building on these examples, along with its steadfast work that changed the Mississippi flag and removed a symbol of hatred and prejudice, MEC’s momentum is laying the groundwork for

State Farm, Mississippi settle lawsuit over Katrina payments

BILOXI, Miss. (AP) — Mississippi has quietly settled its lawsuit against State Farm Fire and Casualty Co. for allegedly minimizing its Hurricane Katrina payments to policyholders, leaving the state to compensate homeowners.

The settlement says the \$12 million payment represents “restitution for damage, which was or may have been caused by a violation of law or potential violation of law” on the part of State Farm, which has admitted no liability in its handling of claims from the 2005 storm, The Sun Herald reported.

State Farm paid the settle-

ment in February 2021, but Attorney General Lynn Fitch never announced details of the agreement. The Sun Herald recently filed a public records request to secure a copy of the settlement, which does not appear in the voluminous electronic case file on the lawsuit.

Former Attorney General Jim Hood originally filed the suit in 2015. State Farm later lost a state Supreme Court appeal seeking to have the case dismissed.

In July, the company, a subsidiary of State Farm Insurance, also agreed to pay the federal government \$100 million in restitution over its alleged mishandling of flood insurance claims following Katrina.

That settlement marked the end of legal proceedings that began more than 16 years ago when two whistleblowers sued the Illinois-based insurance company, which

had the largest market share of Mississippi policies when the storm hit. State Farm also agreed to dismiss counterclaims it filed against the whistleblowers.

In the federal case, State Farm agreed to pay the federal government \$100 million to avoid any further liability. A jury had already determined that State Farm defrauded the National Flood Insurance Program by charging it \$250,000 for flood damage to a Biloxi policyholder’s home when wind caused the loss.

State Farm policies cover wind damage, while the NFIP covers damage from flooding.

The newspaper checked on the state case after finding out about the federal settlement. Before the federal settlement, State Farm faced having thousands of its Katrina claims investigated for additional fraud.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS

1) Eyeglasses, informally

6) Impressive degree

9) Turkish generals

14) Artistic stand

15) Word from a finger-pointing chooser

16) Constructed

17) Jungle vine

18) Affirmative action?

19) "Tomorrow" musical

20) Aggravation at a lack of progress

23) Type of modern testing

24) Airplane passenger's concern

25) Addressed a waiter

27) Pronged weapons

32) ___ fide

33) It may be right above a knee

34) Down's partner

36) The time being

39) Knocks on a door

41) Begets

43) Gulf War missile

44) Stand on its head

46) Jack's nemesis

48) .0000001 joule

49) Went out, as a fire

51) Jewish sect member of old

53) Small scrap

56) It can help with a housewarming

57) "Overhead" engine part

58) A dam is one, essentially

64) States with conviction

66) "___ we having fun yet?"

67) First thing read, typically

68) Camelot weapon

69) One way to move quickly

70) Alpha's opposite

71) Church part

72) Tennis match segment

73) Chart anew

DOWN

1) "To thine own ___ be true"

2) Au ___

3) Jacob's twin

4) Used a thurible

5) Like proper venetian blinds

6) Bird that repeats (var.)

7) Cowboy's pride

8) Part of a TV feed

9) Leave high and dry

10) Big bang creator

11) Things that get in the way

12) Type of skirt that flares outward

13) "Farm" or "home" attachment

21) Some members of Indian royalty

22) Kingly sphere

26) "The Dukes of Hazzard" spin-off

27) By way of, briefly

28) Acquire in the field

29) Roadblock

30) H.S. math subject

31) Bacon bit

35) "Awright!"

37) Be a good doctor

38) Competitive advantage

40) Quick haircut

42) Big mess

45) Coup participant

47) John Deere product

50) Belle of the ball, briefly

52) One of these days

53) La ___ (Milan opera house)

54) Type of base

55) Autocrats no more

59) Common test answer

60) Lease

61) Agenda unit

62) Legendary gymnast Korbut

63) Tide type

65) Former electronics giant

BLOCKADE

By Timothy E. Parker

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