



THE CLAY FIRM

NEWSLETTER

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CAPITOL REPORT

The Legislature saw its busiest time of the legislative session this week, with dozens of committee meetings each day as the March 5 deadline approaches. Legislators have until Tuesday to pass general bills out of committee in their original house. Bills with no action on them will automatically die in committee following the deadline.

For the biggest topic of the week, the Mississippi House of Representatives passed Medicaid expansion as put forward by Speaker Jason White. Calls to expand Medicaid have been rejected for almost a decade, but under the new leadership of White, [HB 1725](#) passed the chamber by a vote of 99-20. Expansion



would cover those who make less than 138% of the federal poverty line and who are actively employed or enrolled full-time in an education program. The bill was transferred to the Senate Medicaid committee.

The Senate had its fair share of action on Medicaid this week as well, passing [HB 539](#), which provides presumptive eligibility to pregnant women. Presumptive eligibility re-

-fers to the process of granting Medicaid services to those who may qualify before their eligibility is verified by the program. The bill head's to Gov. Tate Reeves' desk for final approval.

Several issues that many individuals believed would be the main topics of discussion this session have yet to see action from lawmakers. Some of these include a brand new education funding formula, tweaks to the state's Certificate of Need process and a reform to the Public Employees' Retirement System of Mississippi.

Both the House and Senate have adjourned for the week and will gavel in at 4 p.m. Monday.

GOV. REEVES DELIVERS STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

Governor Tate Reeves delivered his first State of the State address for this new term before the Mississippi Legislature in a joint session on Monday. He avoided several hot-topic issues that have been discussed this session, such as Medicaid expansion and PERS reform.

Reeves' main focus of the night centered around economic development. Emphasizing the success Mississippi has seen in the last few months, such as securing

project developments for Amazon and an electric commercial vehicle battery site, Reeves said the state is in a position to work within multiple industries seeking to lay down roots.

Reeves also highlighted what has been dubbed the "Mississippi Miracle," the success K-12 education in Mississippi has recently seen. He proposed creating 12 new Mathematics and Engineering Magnet Schools throughout the state and

urged lawmakers to consider new and different education models, citing that parents should decide where to send their kids to school.

Lastly, Reeves once again called for the elimination of the income tax, something that many legislators say is not in the budget this year. Reeves said having additional dollars in Mississippi towns will do more than any government program ever could.



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QUICK HITTERS

1) A bill to reform Mississippi's prior authorization process will go into law without the signature of Gov. Tate Reeves. [SB 2140](#) addresses medical procedures that may require insurance approval before services can be rendered. Citing his reasoning as to why he did not sign the bill, Reeves said he is concerned over its inclusion of the Mississippi State School Employees' Life and Health Insurance Plan.

2) US Senator Cindy Hyde Smith blocked legislation on Wednesday that would have given protections for in vitro fertilization and for the doctors who perform the procedure. Bill author Sen. Tammy Duckworth of Illinois requested to pass the bill by unanimous consent, meaning any one senator could block it from advancing. Although Hyde-Smith said she supports IVF access, she believes it is an issue that should be left up to the states and not decided at the federal level.

3) The Mississippi Development Authority announced on Thursday that nearly \$1 million will be invested into project developments throughout the state. The \$993,250 is intended to assist local economic development entities in their efforts to spur growth by attracting new industries to shovel-ready sites. Projects include clearing and grubbing, road construction and wastewater system improvements.

4) Legislation to conduct a phased-down closure of the state's most notable penitentiary, Parchman, by 2028, passed out of the Senate Corrections committee this morning. The goal is to place the inmates in a more secure facility, and with the money saved, increase corrections officer pay and personnel overall. Being double-referred, [SB 2353](#) must pass out of the Senate Appropriations committee as well, before it can be debated on the chamber floor.

5) Mississippi Attorney General Lynn Fitch has joined 21 other state attorneys in urging federal leaders to take action after reports show that large numbers of migrant children have been released into unsafe environments. In a letter to the Department of Homeland Security, the AGs are calling on federal officials to address and review a recent report issued by the HHS' Office of Inspector General that found unaccompanied migrant children are being released into unsafe situations, including into human trafficking.

6) The Mississippi Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund Board of Trustees has approved \$14.5 million for 33 conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the state. Grant projects include improvements to river and trails and efforts to preserve public land.