

Mississippi Gov. Bryant previews ambitious goals in annual state of the state address

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Just two weeks after being sworn in as the 64th Governor of Mississippi, Phil Bryant delivered his 2012 state of the state address. In his speech, Bryant set forth a robust and ambitious agenda for helping his state thrive in the years ahead. From employment, energy, transportation, health care, and education, Bryant's initiatives run the gamut of government verticals, all in hopes of boosting Mississippi's economic landscape and bettering the lives of its citizens.

The main objective: Employment

As is the case in many states battling unemployment, Bryant said his top priority is to "make sure every Mississippian has a job." To get the jobs ball rolling, Bryant is proposing a package to the state legislature known as the Mississippi Works Agenda. He plans to have the Mississippi Department of Education, the Department of Employment Security, and state community colleges work together to launch a workforce training program that students at risk of dropping out can enroll in to learn marketable workforce skills.

Bryant also plans to expand state business with the Mississippi Small Business Regulatory Flexibility Act, which will authorize a review committee to oversee regulations in state agencies to determine whether or not current functions are stunting job growth.

Energy initiatives

Parallel with Bryant's economic development and regulation initiatives is a strong focus on natural resources and the environment. The governor touted Mississippi as a "leader in the energy economy," and said its innovative approach to power sourcing will spur great success in the 21st century. Bryant is proposing the Energy Sustainability and Development Act of 2012 to create incentives to employers who generate savings through energy-efficient upgrades.

The act will also result in the creation of the Biomass Center for Excellence, which will involve "a partnership of the public, private, and education sectors to coordinate and promote biomass research, development, and manufacturing." Bryant said the money saved through public sector upgrades will reduce tax money spent on energy and therefore allocate more funds to infrastructure, public safety and education initiatives.

Merging energy with transportation, Bryant is asking the Mississippi Department of Finance and Administration to implement a pilot program to transition fleet vehicles to natural-gas-powered automobiles in an effort to save money and power.

Expanding health care

Standing next to energy as a leader in economic growth is health care, said Bryant. To aid in the expansion of Mississippi health care services, he proposed the creation of tax-credited medical zones throughout the state for medical facilities to be constructed and jobs be created. The governor has also tasked the Mississippi Economic Council with conducting a study to determine how to increase economic development opportunities in the health care arena. With the study, Bryant is calling for 10 recommendations on how best to advance the industry. He declared the project an "effort unlike anything in the nation; a comprehensive action plan to provide health care as an industry of necessity."

Advancing education

Gov. Bryant is a strong advocate of enhancing education to build a firm foundation for Mississippi's future workforce. In his address, he highlighted the importance of teacher effectiveness and said he plans to propose a budget recommendation to level fund the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP) and fully fund the National Board Certified Teacher Program.

Additionally, he aims to guarantee educators are ready to teach once they finish college by increasing minimum entrance standards for training programs at universities. Further, he has tasked the Mississippi Department of Education to pilot a program in seven school districts to determine what qualities encompass an effective teacher. Upon completion of the program, Bryant plans to implement a pay-for-performance strategy and start "paying for quality, not longevity."

Bryant also announced he will ask the state legislature to delegate \$12 million in funding for education programs Teach for America and the Mississippi Teacher Corps. Lastly, he hammered the importance of finally passing a charter school act across the state.

The budget

Fiscal responsibility was highly emphasized in Bryant's speech, as was the significance of the Smart Budget Act, which has failed to pass the last two years – he once again asked for the act to be passed. He also said an extensive review of the more than 150 state boards and commissions will be conducted to determine their effectiveness and whether elimination or consolidation is necessary. Moreover, Bryant noted that he plans to set aside 2 percent of the state's revenue in the coming year to boost its rainy-day fund.

In closing his speech, Bryant announced that Mississippi's official website will be overhauled. Details were limited, but this could be a major opportunity for vendors in the website design field.

Deltek analysts are in the midst of a complete review of newly-released budgets for all 50 states. Through April, they will be crunching numbers and detailing funding across all state agencies and verticals, all of which will be posted in our [State Profiles and Industry Analysis](#) products. Mississippi's budget will be posted by month's end, so stay tuned. Additionally, Deltek's annual "State of the States" report, which breaks down all state of the state addresses and initiatives set forth, will be released in March. Be on the lookout for further analysis and an associated podcast within the next month.