

## **Mississippi Legislative Update**

### **Legislative Makeup**

Republicans control both chambers and the Governor's Office.

The House of Representatives welcomed 5 new members; Kevin Ford - District 54, Missy McGee - District 102, Cheik Taylor - District 38, Stacey Wilkes - District 108 and Fred Shanks - District 60. The Senate welcomed 2 new members; Joel Carter - District 49, Neil Whaley - District 10.

Governor Bryant appointed Representative Andy Gipson (District 77) to Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce, filling the vacancy of Cindy Hyde-Smith, who was appointed by the Governor to fill the United States Senate seat of retiring Senator Thad Cochran.

### **Legislation**

During the 2018 legislative session, members of the Mississippi State Legislature introduced a total of 2788 bills (1701 House bills & 1087 Senate bills). Of those bills, the legislative affairs team identified 82 bills that could impact our business. Of the 82 tracked bills, 7 of those bills have been signed by Governor Phil Bryant.

The 2018 regular session of the Mississippi Legislature adjourned "Sine Die" on March 28, leaving some unfinished business that must be addressed in a special session before next fiscal year which begins on July 1. Again, there was a standoff between the House and Senate over funding for roads and bridges, passing a new funding formula for public education and how to handle the BP money. The final budget number agreed upon by both the House and Senate members comes in around \$6 billion. If something is not done soon to fund and repair several bridges throughout the state, Mississippi could lose federal funding for our state's road and bridges.

HCR 103 recognized the lasting legacy of retiring United States Senator William Thad Cochran. Senator Cochran will step down from his seat after 46 years of representing the Magnolia State in Washington, D.C. He was first elected to the Senate in 1978, becoming the first republican in more than 100 years to win a statewide election in Mississippi, and he retires as the 10th longest serving Senator in the United States History. As Chairman of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee he was known for "bringing home the bacon" to Mississippi. Due to his ability there were numerous projects funded - including federal programs, aid for farmers, buildings and programs for the universities, contracts for Pascagoula shipyard and military installations. Part of Senator Cochran's strong

legacy is his response during Hurricane Katrina. He was able to provide \$29 billion in immediate Katrina relief. This was in the form of the HUD Community Development Block Grant Disaster Program funds for Mississippi, allowing the state to provide homeowner grants for rebuilding that helped prevent financial and social ruin in Mississippi. Senator Cochran will truly be missed by all.

Senate Bill 2838 would have changed the make-up of the PSC. The commission would have consisted of five members, one from each of the four congressional districts and one member to be appointed from the state at large by the Governor with the advice and consent of the State Senate. Elections for the reconstituted commission would have been held in the general election in November 2019 and every four years thereafter. The member appointed by the Governor shall be appointed for a term of four years and until his / her successor is appointed. This would have also required three members for a quorum. It would have also established a Public Utilities Staff which would be under the authority and supervision of the PSC. The PUS would have conducted investigations and performed other functions to the regulation of public utilities as ordered by the commission. This bill died in committee.

Senate Bill 2562 & House Bill 1108 would have established the Office of Residential and Small Business Advocate. This office would have represented the interests of residential and small business consumers in any matter properly before the PSC. They could have also participated for the purpose of representing their own interest. This office would have been independent of the PSC and PUS but under the PUS for administrative purposes only, including office space and equipment, accounting and other office services and other relevant resources that are available to the PUS. This Office would have been funded separately from the PSC – therefore adding additional cost to all utility customers. These bills died in committee.

House Bill 1179 would have established a Public Utilities Staff to serve as a support staff to the PSC and the PSC Staff by balancing the respective concerns of the residential, commercial or industrial ratepayers, the state and its agencies and departments. In no event shall the duties of and responsibilities of the PUS be exercised outside of the role of a support staff of the PSC and Commission Staff. This bill died in committee.