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EBT System is Positive Move Forward for Mississippi

This past week, I announced at a press conference that the State of Mississippi has approved a five-year, \$26 million contract with Lockheed Martin IMS to implement the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system.

This new system, which will begin its pilot phase in Rankin County in March 2002, is a great step forward for the state and recipients of food stamps and/or those receiving benefits through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. It will be in place statewide by October 2002.

Rather than using food stamp coupons, recipients will be issued a plastic card resembling a bank card. This card, along with a PIN number, will be used for purchasing groceries. This process is a win-win situation that benefits both the recipient and the state through added security, ease of use and cost control.

Problems with food stamp coupons have included theft, fraud and misuse. With the EBT system, those problems are removed. Each card is issued to the individual with an identification number which they choose. Cards are electronically tracked to prevent fraud or misuse.

For the state, the system means a financial savings. Costs associated with the production and distribution of food stamps will drop, as will the inherent expenses involved in investigating fraud and theft.

For the recipient, this means peace of mind and another step toward a life of dignity and self-sufficiency – something every Mississippian wants and deserves. It enhances their sense of security and privacy, as well as an easier process for replacement if stolen.

For the retailers, the use of the plastic cards will have a tremendous effect on their transactions, record-keeping and reimbursement processes. By having all transactions electronically monitored, they are protected as well from the risks of fraud and abuse.

Lockheed Martin IMS is a leader in this type of electronically-based system, and I look forward to working with them to implement this project statewide. I know their expertise will play a major role in the success of this program for all parties involved.

The oversight of the EBT system, beginning with its pilot program next year, will come from the Mississippi Department of Human Services. I know Janice Broome Brooks and her staff at DHS will see the process through to completion with a sense of caring and professionalism.

Everyone affected by this new system – recipients, retailers and the state – will work together to share in the program's success. Recipients will receive training at the county level through their local DHS offices. Retailers, large and small, will have the technology to handle the new cards. The state will do its part to notify and train all recipients as part of the transitional period.

Bottom line, the Electronic Benefit Transfer system will change the lives of many Mississippians in a positive way. That's a commitment shared by Lockheed Martin IMS, the Mississippi Department of Human Services, and my administration.

