

Clarion Ledger Article – 6-25-00

Governor Musgrove Calls Special Session For Legislators To Address Portion of the Retirement Bill

On Thursday, June 29, 2000 at 12:00 noon, members of the Mississippi Senate and House of Representatives will gather for a special session to address the portions of House Bill 1281, which provides for an increase in retirement for the members of the Mississippi Legislature and the President of the Senate.

This new law benefits state employees, members of the Mississippi Highway Patrol and teachers. It is vital that we keep those provisions of this legislation.

While I am opposed to the portion of the bill that increases retirement benefits for the Legislature, we must do what we can to provide for our teachers, our state workers and the men and women of the Mississippi Highway Patrol if we are going to promote these avenues as viable career options for Mississippians.

Members of the legislature have been called to reconsider only a portion of House Bill 1281 during the special session. The call only includes the portions, which provide for an increase in retirement for the members of the Legislature, and does not include any portion of the bill that benefits state employees, members of the Mississippi Highway Patrol or teachers because those provisions are needed and should not be discussed or voted on again.

The provisions of the bill that benefit state employees and teachers, provide a partial lump sum payment equal to as much as three times annual benefits as an alternate retirement option. If state employees choose that option, the employee's monthly benefits will be reduced accordingly.

Public Employees' Retirement System members, which includes all state employees and teachers, who retire on or after July 1, 2000, with at least 28 years of service credit at any age, or who are at least age 63 with at least 4 years of service credit will be eligible for this option.

This provision is an incentive to employees to continue in public service, and it benefits more than just the employee. It also benefits the employer who needs experienced and productive employees in the workplace or protecting our highways. Our children also benefit, because they have the opportunity to learn from teachers who have extensive classroom experience.

This session had to be handled separately from the economic development special session because it is important that we not be distracted from creating new job and developing new growth that will benefit all people of our state.

I called this special session so that members of the Legislature can address concerns regarding this provision before the benefits take effect on July 1, 2000. The session should take no longer than one day to complete while keeping in mind the best interest of Mississippians. We look forward to working with the Legislature to come to a quick resolution.