

RE: PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDING  
INITIATIVE MEASURE 42  
INITIATIVE MEASURE 42A

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*TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC HEARING*

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The Bologna Center  
Delta State University  
1003 W. Sunflower Road  
Cleveland, Mississippi 38732  
On Thursday, August 27, 2015  
at 5:30 p.m.

*REPORTED BY: SHARRON F. ALLEN, CSR, RPR  
CSR NO. 1144*

1           *MS. WEAVER:* On behalf of the state of  
2           Mississippi, welcome. My name is Pamela  
3           Weaver, and I work with Secretary of State  
4           Delbert Hosemann.

5           One of our duties is to have public  
6           hearings across the state of Mississippi for  
7           any constitutional amendments that shall  
8           appear on general election ballot on  
9           November 3rd. Tonight is the fifth of eight  
10          public hearings our office will be hosting.

11          I would like to thank Delta State  
12          University for use of this hall tonight for  
13          our meeting and Captain Chris Williams with  
14          the Mississippi Highway Patrol for the  
15          officers who are here with us tonight.

16          This year Mississippi voters will have  
17          the opportunity to decide if they want to  
18          amend the Mississippi Constitution to address  
19          public education funding. If they do, they  
20          will have the opportunity to vote for one of  
21          two measures regarding public school funding.

22          Initiative Measure 42 was placed on the  
23          ballot after 107,216 registered voters -- at  
24          least 21,444 from each of the five old  
25          congressional districts -- signed a petition

1 asking that the State Constitution be amended,  
2 or Alternative Measure 42A which was placed on  
3 the ballot by the Mississippi Legislature as a  
4 competing amendment.

5 Tonight's hearing and the four we have  
6 already held and the three remaining we will  
7 host around the state in September are part of  
8 the initiative process we refer to as our  
9 "voter education efforts." In addition to  
10 these public hearings, our agency will also  
11 publish an informative brochure outlining both  
12 sides of the public education funding issue.  
13 This will be available next week and will be  
14 posted to our website. I encourage you and  
15 all Mississippians to educate yourselves on  
16 this issue prior to election day.

17 Many of you have already heard a great  
18 deal about these two measures. Others will  
19 hear arguments tonight you may have not heard  
20 before. Hopefully, we will all learn  
21 something from these comments presented  
22 tonight on both sides of this issue. That is  
23 why we're here.

24 There are a couple of things that we  
25 need to go over before we get started. Anyone

1 who wants to speak either for or against  
2 either measure is welcome to do so. Please  
3 make sure you have signed in to speak and  
4 obtained a speaker's card. You will be  
5 recognized alternating pro and con in the  
6 order in which you were registered.

7 Everything that is said tonight will be  
8 transcribed and posted to the Secretary of  
9 State's website after the public meeting. If  
10 you do not want to speak tonight but would  
11 like to express your opinions, you may submit  
12 comments in writing. There are written  
13 comment cards at the entrance to our meeting  
14 room. These will also be placed on the  
15 website of the Secretary of State's office as  
16 either for or against Initiative Measure 42 or  
17 Alternative Measure 42A. This allows you to  
18 speak not only to Cleveland and Bolivar  
19 County, but also allows you to speak to  
20 individuals in Oxford, Starkville, Vicksburg,  
21 Natchez, McComb, and Greenville, and all other  
22 communities in Mississippi where voters will  
23 be interested in reading what you have to say  
24 on each of these initiatives.

25 It is very important that we have an

1 informed electorate, and having an open and  
2 free discussion of these issues is what we're  
3 about tonight. So your written comments and  
4 your oral statements are welcome.

5 Tonight the format is as follows: We  
6 will discuss each initiative measure,  
7 beginning with Initiative Measure 42 and then  
8 Alternative Measure 42A. We will begin with a  
9 ten-minute presentation by those who are for  
10 or against each initiative. Then we will open  
11 the floor for public comment. I would ask you  
12 to please come and speak at the microphone in  
13 the order you will be recognized to speak.  
14 Every speaker who registers should have a  
15 numbered card, and I will call you by name  
16 when it is your turn. Please give that card  
17 to Lea Anne before you begin speaking. Each  
18 speaker will have a maximum of three minutes  
19 to make a comment. You will be given a  
20 30-second warning when your time is about to  
21 expire.

22 I would also like to remind you the  
23 reason why we are here, and that reason that  
24 we're here this evening is because servicemen  
25 and women in Mississippi are fighting and

1 dying for our rights, including free speech to  
2 discuss constitutional issues and the freedom  
3 to gather together to have public forums like  
4 this. That is what we're about tonight. I  
5 would ask that you respect those sacrifices as  
6 we speak and have your rhetoric be concise and  
7 civil as you go forward. We are looking  
8 forward to hearing everyone's comments.

9 We begin with Initiative Measure 42, and  
10 speaking for Initiative Measure 42 is Rana  
11 Mitchell.

12 *MS. MITCHELL:* Good evening. Thank  
13 you for the invitation to speak here today.  
14 My name is Rana Mitchell, and I'm here today  
15 in support of Initiative 42 for better  
16 schools.

17 Y'all, I'm here tonight as a parent. I  
18 am not a politician; I am not a lawyer; I am  
19 not a lobbyist. I'm a mom. I'm a mother of  
20 two boys who attend public school in Eupora,  
21 and they are two of the most important reasons  
22 that I'm here to talk to you about Initiative  
23 42 tonight.

24 I'm also the assistant superintendent of  
25 Carroll County Public Schools, and I'm

1 partially responsible for the educational  
2 success of over 1,000 students, so I know  
3 firsthand the importance of Initiative 42.

4 I think we can all agree that every  
5 child in Mississippi has a fundamental right  
6 to a free and adequate public education. That  
7 means several things. It means safe and  
8 modern buildings. It means classrooms that  
9 don't leak when it rains. It means up-to-date  
10 computers, technology, and lab equipment,  
11 enough textbooks for every child to take a  
12 book home, smaller class sizes, more college  
13 prep classes, and safe buses.

14 In 1997 the Mississippi Legislature  
15 passed the Mississippi Adequate Education  
16 Program to adequately fund K-12 education in  
17 every school district in our state. But since  
18 1997 the legislature has repeatedly broken its  
19 own law and has severely underfunded every  
20 single school in Mississippi. The results are  
21 clear. Local school districts have been  
22 shortchanged. Your local property taxes have  
23 gone up. Too many schools have too few  
24 teachers, outdated textbooks, old facilities,  
25 unsafe buses, and a lack of technology.

1           The underfunding of our schools is  
2 hurting our state's ability to get companies  
3 to move here, and our students are not  
4 learning the skills they need that companies  
5 are looking for. The results hurt our ability  
6 to grow and attract good-paying jobs.

7           In one school district near here  
8 facilities are in such need of repair that  
9 teachers have to put down wooden pallets when  
10 it rains just so students can walk to class.  
11 In my own school district our bus fleet is so  
12 old that when two spare buses broke down, we  
13 had no spare buses on hand. When those broke  
14 down, we were actually forced to borrow buses  
15 from neighboring districts, their spare buses,  
16 just so we could make our routes.

17           And right here, everybody, in your area  
18 in Cleveland and in Bolivar County, y'all have  
19 been shortchanged \$23 million -- \$23 million  
20 since 2008. People, that is enough money for  
21 67 new teachers for ten years. I'm going to  
22 let you let that sink in. Sixty-seven  
23 teachers for ten years. What would that mean  
24 to y'all? What would that mean to your  
25 children?



1           It's stories like these in schools all  
2 across our state that harm our kids, that sell  
3 us short, and scare companies away from doing  
4 business with us in Mississippi. They are  
5 costing us jobs. But we can do better. We  
6 can have better schools, better jobs, and a  
7 better future for our kids and our state.

8           So what is Initiative 42? Nearly  
9 200,000 Mississippians from every county and  
10 both political parties signed petitions to  
11 have Initiative 42 on this year's ballot.  
12 This is a bipartisan people's movement.  
13 Mothers, fathers, business leaders, teachers,  
14 everyone understands that underfunding our  
15 schools damages our state's economy, and it  
16 damages our future. Initiative 42 will  
17 require the legislature to adequately fund  
18 Mississippi public schools under the 1997 law  
19 they passed. This will help every school in  
20 our state.

21           The opponents of Initiative 42, they  
22 will tell you it means one judge in Hinds  
23 County, one judge in Forrest County, one judge  
24 wherever will decide how much money our  
25 schools will get. Guys, that is simply not

1 true. All a judge would do is ensure that the  
2 legislature is spending the money on education  
3 as required under their own law. Local school  
4 boards, you, and your community, you get the  
5 funding; you set your priorities. This gives  
6 you local control, and it also helps you keep  
7 your property taxes down.

8 Initiative 42 would not require raising  
9 taxes or cutting the state budget, period. As  
10 stated on every petition that was signed by  
11 nearly 200,000 Mississippians last year,  
12 funding can be phased in over seven years,  
13 using general fund revenue from the state  
14 budget. Our state budget -- our revenues have  
15 grown an average of almost 5 percent over the  
16 last ten years. Just a quarter of that growth  
17 amounts to \$37 1/2 million a year. Just a  
18 quarter of that growth. At that rate it would  
19 only take seven years to fully fund the  
20 Mississippi Adequate Education Program. This  
21 is a responsible plan.

22 It's time to start giving every  
23 Mississippi child the education they deserve.  
24 Do you agree? Our schools should have  
25 sufficient funding to provide every child with

1 a 21st Century education so they have the  
2 tools they need to either attend college or  
3 technical school and the skills they need to  
4 compete for those 21st Century jobs.

5 Better schools will help our state grow.  
6 when looking to relocate, companies are always  
7 looking for a highly educated work force.  
8 Better schools will attract new businesses to  
9 your area and will help drive economic growth  
10 and strengthen your community. Better schools  
11 will lead to better jobs and higher wages.

12 In closing, in November you can decide  
13 whether to increase funding for our public  
14 schools or allow the legislature to continue  
15 to underfund our schools. You have that  
16 choice. 42 is an investment in the future of  
17 our children. 42 is an investment in our  
18 state. 42 means better schools. It means  
19 better jobs, higher wages, and more economic  
20 growth.

21 I urge you to study the facts. If you  
22 haven't already, visit the 42 website at  
23 [42forbetterschools.org](http://42forbetterschools.org). when you go there --  
24 and you will want to go there and look at  
25 this -- you can see exactly how much your

1 local school is being underfunded. Look at  
2 that. Then go take out your property tax  
3 bill. See how much it's gone up. Those two  
4 numbers are related. The more they underfund  
5 your schools, the more your local taxes will  
6 go up. We can fix that with 42.

7 Talk to your friends. Talk to your  
8 neighbors -- Republican, Democrat; it does not  
9 matter. Everyone in Mississippi understands  
10 that our schools have been shortchanged, our  
11 kids have been shortchanged, and our economy  
12 has been shortchanged. 42 is our chance to  
13 really make a difference.

14 Thank you.

15 *MS. WEAVER:* Speaking against  
16 Initiative 42 is Russell Latino.

17 *MR. LATINO:* I have now been to four  
18 or five of these things, and at every single  
19 one of them I have heard the same passionate  
20 rhetoric, the same passionate talk. And,  
21 candidly, I'm just as guilty of that when I  
22 talk. I've said a lot of the same things.  
23 And after a while it starts to feel a little  
24 disingenuous. It starts to feel a little  
25 mechanical, and so I thought I would just

1 change it up a little bit tonight and talk  
2 to you directly.

3 I'm not a politician. I'm not a  
4 lobbyist. I was a lawyer; I'm recovering from  
5 that. That's hard.

6 Look, everybody in the room -- I agree  
7 with a lot of what Ms. Mitchell said, a lot of  
8 it. There are obviously some points that I  
9 disagree with. But everybody in the room  
10 wants schools to be better in Mississippi.  
11 Everybody in the room recognizes that being  
12 50th or 48th or whatever the number actually  
13 is -- because it's different depending on who  
14 you read -- is not good enough. There's not a  
15 single person that I know on either side of  
16 this debate that looks at this debate and  
17 says, "You know, our schools are good enough."  
18 We all recognize there are deficiencies.

19 The question that you've got to ask  
20 yourself is not can our schools be better or  
21 should our schools be better. The answer to  
22 that is emphatically yes. There's no doubt  
23 about it. The question you should ask  
24 yourself is not even do we need more funding  
25 in schools. You can think the answer to that

1 question is yes and still be against 42. It's  
2 never that simple. And when we try and make  
3 things that simple, we end up making mistakes.

4 Look, I grew up as a guy who's  
5 passionate about history. Some of you may be  
6 history teachers in this room or government  
7 teachers, and you've taught people about  
8 limited government, and you've taught people  
9 about separation of powers, and you've taught  
10 people about what a constitution is. A  
11 constitution is the framework for how our  
12 government should work. It's always been that  
13 way. It's never been a place where we  
14 legislate through.

15 with 42, to some degree we're using the  
16 Constitution to try and legislate, and it's  
17 dangerous, and it should worry you. Even if  
18 you look at what the legislature is doing and  
19 you say, "Man, I really don't like what those  
20 guys are doing," you should be concerned about  
21 using the Constitution to circumvent those  
22 guys; because someone else can do it to you in  
23 a way you don't like, and before you know it,  
24 we've got 1,000-page Constitution and we've  
25 taken all the powers away from the people that

1 we elect, from the people that we get to hold  
2 accountable at the ballot box. And that  
3 should concern you. It should make you at  
4 least look at the language of the amendment  
5 and not just say "I really want more funding,  
6 so I've got to vote for this," or be persuaded  
7 by lines like "for our children." who's not  
8 for our children? The question is how do we  
9 get there? The devil's in the details, and  
10 you guys know that.

11 Look, MAEP passed in 1997. Right? It's  
12 been funded twice. Twice. The first ten  
13 years of MAEP, Democrats had control of both  
14 the House and the Senate. There were no  
15 lawsuits. Governor Musgrove wasn't suing the  
16 state. There was nobody pushing an initiative  
17 then. Democrats controlled the House for the  
18 first 14 years after MAEP passed. weren't  
19 fully funding it. There were no lawsuits;  
20 there were no initiatives. Republicans come  
21 into power in 2011 for the first time since  
22 Reconstruction. Okay? At the time average  
23 funding of schools is \$8500 a student in  
24 Mississippi. \$8500 a student. And if you  
25 look at the numbers before the consolidation

1 of Bolivar County, those numbers are even  
2 better. Cleveland School District had \$8800  
3 per student, north of \$8800 per student. West  
4 Bolivar and North Bolivar were both north of  
5 11,000 per student, way surpassing anything in  
6 surrounding states.

7 You know, you've got -- my buddy over  
8 here is looking at me like I'm going to  
9 mispronounce this word because I'm a Cajun  
10 guy. So I was going to say Benoit [Ben-wa].  
11 Benoit? Is that how you say it? Somebody  
12 correct me.

13 *UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER:* Benoit  
14 [Bee-noit].

15 *MR. LATINO:* Benoit. There you go.  
16 I'm sorry. That's my Cajun coming out. I'm  
17 sorry. Had over \$14,000 a student.

18 *UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER:* what  
19 about Mound Bayou?

20 *MR. LATINO:* I don't know the numbers  
21 for Mound Bayou, but I'm happy to pull it  
22 for you. I'm happy to pull it for you.

23 *UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER:* Check  
24 that out and see how it stacks up against  
25 the other ones.



1                    *UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER:* He  
2 already said it. It's \$11,000.

3                    *MR. LATINO:* Look, look. I'm not  
4 trying to argue with anybody. My point is  
5 this: A lot of dollars are being spent in  
6 those districts, way beyond what surrounding  
7 states are paying. I'm not suggesting --  
8 again, you can disagree as to whether or not  
9 there should be additional funding, but one  
10 of the things that we should be looking at  
11 is how we allocate that funding.

12                    Is there waste at the state level? You  
13 better dang well believe there's waste at the  
14 state level. I'm not going to make any  
15 excuses for that. But if we're honest with  
16 ourselves in this room, we'd recognize that  
17 there's also waste that occurs at a district  
18 level. And probably a lot of it.

19                    We look at the grades in those schools  
20 that are spending that kind of money -- four  
21 times the money that was being spent in 1970,  
22 adjusted for inflation -- and we look at how  
23 they're doing on NAEP tests, and it's  
24 staggering. We've nearly quadrupled spending,  
25 and scores have not gone up. And you look at

1 a state like Utah that's spending \$3,000 less  
2 per student, and they're in the top ten in the  
3 country.

4 I'm not suggesting that Mississippi is  
5 Utah. What I am suggesting, however, is that  
6 this problem -- this education problem -- is  
7 more than just a money problem. It's more  
8 than just a money problem, and it's more than  
9 just a political problem.

10 Now, it's important when you're about to  
11 amend the Constitution that you actually look  
12 at what the amendment says. The Secretary of  
13 State handed out these lovely forms that show  
14 what the current Constitution says, and it  
15 shows what 42 and 42A would do. Okay?

16 The current Constitution, Section 201  
17 says "The legislature shall, by general law,  
18 provide for the establishment, maintenance,  
19 and support of free public schools upon such  
20 conditions and limitations as the legislature  
21 shall prescribe." You got this sheet. That's  
22 what it says right now. And every bit of  
23 education policy in our state is derived from  
24 that power -- from the Mississippi Department  
25 of Education all the way down to your local

1 elementary school. It comes from that power  
2 in the Constitution. The amendment deletes  
3 all references to the legislature. And that  
4 phrase "by general law" means a lot in the  
5 scope of constitutional law. It's how the  
6 legislature gets its power to act.

7 So while the proponents may say that  
8 this is just a check on the legislature, if  
9 you read the amendment, the amendment actually  
10 cuts the legislature entirely out of the  
11 education policymaking process. It's not just  
12 a check. We are giving to a court the right  
13 to be a policymaker. And you don't have to  
14 take my word for it. Look at Sid Salter. Sid  
15 Salter's been writing articles about this for  
16 the last few months. He's probably the most  
17 respected political journalist in the state of  
18 Mississippi.

19 *UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER:* Hardly.

20 *MR. LATINO:* And Patsy disagrees.

21 *UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER:* And  
22 Patsy disagrees.

23 *MR. LATINO:* One of the most respected  
24 political journalists in the state of  
25 Mississippi. And he's saying the same stuff

1 I'm saying. You look at -- there are plenty  
2 of lawyers saying the same stuff I'm saying.  
3 You've got a guy down at *Mississippi*  
4 *Business Journal* last of this week said "Be  
5 careful of this. It's a wolf in sheep's  
6 clothing." There are lots of people who are  
7 frustrated. There are lots of people who  
8 are frustrated and who want better schools.

9 But every person in this audience is  
10 smart enough to look at the amendment, read  
11 the amendment, and say there's no reference to  
12 the legislature anymore in the one section of  
13 our Constitution that deals with education.  
14 And we're giving the power to a court to  
15 determine what is adequate and efficient.

16 Justice Randolph, in his opinion on 42A,  
17 came back and basically said, "Look, if this  
18 thing passes, we're not looking at a ballot  
19 title and summary. We're not looking at the  
20 petition. We're looking at what the amendment  
21 says."

22 But even as a best-case scenario, if a  
23 court were to look at the petition and read  
24 into the Constitution what the petition says,  
25 it's important to understand what it says.

1 Right?

2 So when it talks about adequate, in the  
3 petition itself it says MAEP -- defines  
4 adequate as MAEP as a minimum standard.  
5 Right? So that means that this judge -- and  
6 if it's a suit against the state, it will be  
7 brought in Hinds County. It will be brought  
8 in Jackson. -- this judge gets to determine  
9 what in addition to MAEP it means to be  
10 adequate. That's an unprecedented transfer of  
11 power to a judge that none of you have a  
12 chance to elect. None of you have a chance to  
13 elect that person.

14 The word "efficient" is basically to do  
15 what is necessary to enable us to be  
16 competitive with surrounding states. That  
17 sounds awesome. Right? We want to be  
18 competitive with surrounding states. But we  
19 are giving a single judge the ability to  
20 determine what that is. And none of you will  
21 elect that judge. And they say, "well, it  
22 could go up to the supreme court." Yes, it  
23 could. It could. And the supreme court may  
24 accept jurisdiction. But then we're talking  
25 about nine people -- nine men and women in

1 black robes having to make education policy  
2 instead of the 174 that you elect, that live  
3 in your communities, that take your phone  
4 calls.

5 This is doing away with representative  
6 government. It is doing away with  
7 representative government. And I know you're  
8 frustrated, and I understand that frustration,  
9 and we all want better schools. But this is  
10 dangerous and unprecedented, and you shouldn't  
11 just buy into slogans, and you should  
12 recognize that when you're gambling that MAEP  
13 will be imposed, you're also gambling that  
14 that judge won't go well beyond MAEP and do  
15 things that will raise your taxes and do  
16 things like consolidate your schools and do  
17 things like impose common core or some  
18 curriculum that your local officials have no  
19 authority over. Think through this. Think  
20 through this carefully, because you're setting  
21 a precedent that could severely hurt the  
22 future of education in Mississippi.

23 Thank you.

24 *UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER:* That's  
25 why Mississippi is number 50.

1                    *MS. WEAVER:* We are now going to move  
2 to Alternative Measure 42A. I would ask  
3 that you please allow each petitioner or  
4 their designee to speak without  
5 interruption. If you would like to make a  
6 comment, there will be a time to do so after  
7 they speak.

8                    Now speaking for Alternative Measure 42A  
9 will be Russ Latino.

10                   *UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER:* Again?

11                   *MR. LATINO:* In fairness, she also  
12 gets to talk twice. And I will tell you, as  
13 a recovering lawyer, that it is a much more  
14 enviable position to get to speak first and  
15 last versus us speaking twice in the middle.

16                   You will hear that 42A is a dirty trick.  
17 That's what you're about to be told. The  
18 truth is this -- you're also going to hear  
19 that it's the first time in the history of the  
20 state the legislature has ever proposed an  
21 alternative. Let me put that in context for  
22 you.

23                   In 1992 the ballot initiative process  
24 became part of the Constitution. That was the  
25 first time we ever had it. So it's not like

1 200 years of history on ballot initiative.  
2 Right? This will be number five that appears  
3 on the ballot. So it's not like we've had a  
4 bunch of them either. And I think the  
5 legislature actually did its duty, because it  
6 has a constitutional right to propose an  
7 alternative. And it did its duty in this  
8 instance.

9 And here's why I say that: If you just  
10 look at the amendment itself that's in the  
11 proposal in 42, you might not pick up on the  
12 fact that the legislature has been cut out of  
13 the process entirely. There are no references  
14 to it. You might not think about it. And  
15 what 42A does is it reminds you -- it sets as  
16 a point of contrast that the legislature  
17 historically has been a part of this process.  
18 So when you look at both of them in  
19 combination, one is about giving power to the  
20 court, and the other is about giving power to  
21 the legislature, where it has always resided.

22 And that's why it was important for that  
23 to be in there. It makes an awful lot of  
24 sense for 42A to be in there so people are  
25 reminded that they've got a choice between the



1 two; that if you believe in separation of  
2 powers, if you think it's important that the  
3 people that you elect locally get to make  
4 decisions, then you see the legislature in  
5 42A. It's not a dirty trick.

6 You know, I find it somewhat  
7 disingenuous, because if you look at the  
8 amendment as proposed in 42, the word  
9 "funding" doesn't appear in the amendment.  
10 The word "MAEP" doesn't appear in the  
11 amendment. It's not there. And yet when  
12 these petitions were being passed out and  
13 people were being asked to sign the petitions,  
14 what were they being told? "would you like to  
15 fully fund our schools without raising taxes?"  
16 And that sounds good. Right? Okay, who  
17 doesn't. "More money for schools; no  
18 additional taxes." Okay.

19 But that's not what the amendment says.  
20 It's not in there. You have to rely on the  
21 petition to get anywhere close to that. And,  
22 like I said, the court is not bound to read  
23 that petition into the Constitution. They're  
24 not. Look at Justice Randolph's opinion on  
25 that. They're not bound to read it into the

1 Constitution. But even if they do, the power  
2 still goes well beyond funding. It goes well  
3 beyond funding.

4 You'll hear this said: "That if you  
5 don't break the law, you don't end up in front  
6 of a judge." well, the first thing I'd tell  
7 you is that the legislature did not break the  
8 law. That may be hard for some people to  
9 take. The legislature constitutionally has  
10 always had power over appropriations --  
11 always. And it has always been the law that  
12 one legislature cannot bind another  
13 legislature when it comes to appropriations.

14 The second thing that I would tell you  
15 at that logic point, that if you don't break  
16 the law, you don't end up in front of the  
17 judge, is having practiced law for a really  
18 long time, it's simply not true. People end  
19 up in courts all the time having done nothing  
20 wrong. You don't have to be right to sue  
21 somebody. And there's a monetary incentive to  
22 sue. Right? That lawyers find theories to  
23 put in front of courts because ultimately  
24 that's how they make their living. So it's a  
25 silly notion to say that the only way you end

1 up in front of a court is if you break the  
2 law.

3 The other thing that I've heard at all  
4 of these forums that people will say is,  
5 "Look, this is no different than the situation  
6 now. A judge has the power to review what the  
7 legislature does now." That's partially true.  
8 There's something called the "political  
9 question doctrine," and I won't bore you with  
10 it, but basically courts have to respect the  
11 legislative process.

12 And then here's a second question for  
13 you: If this is no different than what can be  
14 done now, why are we amending the  
15 Constitution? If this is no different than  
16 what can be done now, why the amendment?  
17 There's no good answer for that because it is  
18 different, because we've never given the court  
19 this kind of authority and power over  
20 policymaking decisions.

21 we talked about this phase-in period,  
22 the seven-year phase-in. By the way, at least  
23 two of the forums, the official 42 proponent  
24 has gotten up and suggested that that  
25 seven-year phase-in in the petition was a

1 suggestion. Okay?

2 But let's say that a court takes that  
3 suggestion of a seven-year phase-in. It  
4 assumes a lot of things. One, we're assuming  
5 that MAEP is a perfect formula because we're  
6 making it constitutional. I bet there are  
7 teachers in this room right now who can look  
8 at the MAEP formula and say, "If I was doing  
9 this, if I look back at square one, I would  
10 draw this bad boy up differently. I would  
11 make it better." But we're putting it in the  
12 Constitution. We're binding future  
13 policymakers when it comes to that.

14 The other thing I'd say is, look, we've  
15 got this supposed seven-year phase-in that's  
16 based on projected economic growth. Right?  
17 what happens when 2008 or 2009 happens again?  
18 Some of you in this room are on PERS, on the  
19 Public Employee Retirement System plan. It's  
20 funded at about 60 percent. And one of the  
21 reasons it's funded at about 60 percent and  
22 we've got this \$16 billion hole is because we  
23 make economic projections, because we assume  
24 growth at a certain rate, and our economy has  
25 not grown at that rate. You are preventing

1 the legislature and you're preventing  
2 policymakers from being able to adjust to what  
3 happens in the economy. And that should scare  
4 you a little bit.

5 Look, if there are schools -- and I  
6 don't doubt it -- if there are schools where  
7 you've got leaky roofs and kids without  
8 computers and kids without crayons and glue  
9 sticks and all of that, we should be  
10 addressing that. I'm not going to sit here  
11 and tell you we shouldn't. The question is  
12 whether or not this is the vehicle to do it.  
13 And it carries with it an awful lot of risk  
14 and an awful lot of baggage that every person  
15 in the room should take seriously. Because we  
16 talk about property taxes, for instance. New  
17 Jersey did something like this. They've been  
18 having litigation for the last 30 years. They  
19 pay the highest property taxes in the nation,  
20 and they don't have great schools.

21 It's not as simple as throwing money at  
22 the problem. It's not as simple as taking out  
23 a shotgun and trying to shoot a fly. You guys  
24 have seen the commercials on TV that talk  
25 about drugs, like prescription drugs. Let's

1 say you've got dry mouth, and there's some new  
2 drug out there for dry mouth. And there's a  
3 laundry list of potential side effects. Your  
4 arm's going to fall off. You're going to have  
5 a heart attack. You know, whatever it is. A  
6 laundry list of side effects.

7 That's this thing. There is a laundry  
8 list of potential unintended consequences by  
9 passing this thing that actually result in  
10 less control at the local level, less control  
11 for parents, and more uncertainty for  
12 business.

13 You want to talk about businesses? I've  
14 talked to a lot of business leaders in our  
15 state. They're scared to death of this  
16 because of the uncertainty of putting this  
17 much power in the hands of one judge. Scared  
18 to death of it.

19 Guys, I suspect that 90 percent of this  
20 room is educators. Actually, raise your hand  
21 if you're an educator. Okay. Raise your hand  
22 if you're undecided coming in today. Okay.  
23 we've got two, I think.

24 I get it. I get the frustration. I'm a  
25 product of public schools. I've worked with

1 kids in public schools. Look at the amendment  
2 and think through it. Think if this is the  
3 best way. The best way to have accountability  
4 in our system of government is to vote people  
5 out of office that we don't agree with. If we  
6 do this, you won't have the option of voting  
7 that judge in Jackson out of office.

8 Thank you.

9 *MS. WEAVER:* Now speaking against  
10 Alternative Measure 42A is Rana Mitchell.

11 *MS. MITCHELL:* Let me see your hands  
12 if you're a parent, a grandparent, an aunt,  
13 or an uncle of a child in public school.  
14 And on your behalf here in Bolivar County, I  
15 would like to personally invite Mr. Latino  
16 to go over to Benoit, and I'm sure -- I'm  
17 sure they would appreciate your visit before  
18 you begin talking about how much money we're  
19 spending on those children in those schools.

20 *UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER:* Come on  
21 up to Mound Bayou.

22 *MS. MITCHELL:* Yes, sir.

23 And if you're not certain, you are  
24 talking to a county who just had their  
25 district consolidated when you talk about

1 consolidation. Guess who consolidated this  
2 county?

3 *UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER:* The  
4 State Legislature.

5 *MS. MITCHELL:* Excuse me?

6 *UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER:* The  
7 State Legislature.

8 *MS. MITCHELL:* The lawmakers --  
9 right? -- in Jackson.

10 Before I begin also, though, I do need  
11 to say one thing: When Mr. Latino insists  
12 that the courts will make decisions about our  
13 schools if 42 passes, he is presupposing that  
14 the legislature will continue to underfund our  
15 schools, will continue to not follow the law.  
16 He's making that judgment. It's a  
17 hypothetical. A judge never has to be  
18 involved. This never has to go to court  
19 unless they break the law.

20 I just think that's -- he's conceding  
21 that lawmakers are going to keep breaking that  
22 law, and that's inexcusable.

23 He is correct, however, about the  
24 wording of the amendment. Mr. Latino is  
25 right. The seven-year phase-in plan, that is



1 not found in the constitutional amendment.  
2 Also not found in the constitutional amendment  
3 any mention of MAEP or any mention of funding  
4 MAEP in one year as some of our lawmakers have  
5 threatened by cutting your budget and raising  
6 your taxes. Nowhere in the Constitution does  
7 it say that MAEP has to be funded in one year.  
8 It is a scare tactic. Do not fall for it.

9 And he's right. We have mentioned at  
10 these forums that if legislators have a -- I  
11 mean, if they have a better idea that doesn't  
12 require raising your taxes or cutting our  
13 state budget, we're all for it. We are  
14 listening. We're open to that. We provided a  
15 very responsible phase-in plan on the  
16 petition. If they choose to use it, that's  
17 very responsible.

18 And he mentioned that about the state  
19 growth. Nobody expects the state to dump a  
20 bunch of money that we don't have into  
21 education if the state budget does not grow.  
22 If those general revenues continue to grow,  
23 like I said, just a quarter of them equals  
24 \$37 1/2 million a year.

25 Now, I am supposed to get up at this

1 point and talk against 42A and why it's so  
2 bad, but up until this point I didn't really  
3 understand or hear what was so good about 42A.

4 However, as Mr. Latino did mention,  
5 never before in our 198-year history of  
6 Mississippi has the State Legislature ever  
7 gone against the will of the people and put an  
8 alternative measure on a general education  
9 ballot. Never. None of those times, the five  
10 times that he mentioned from 1992, not one  
11 time have they ever proposed an alternative.  
12 It didn't happen until nearly 200,000  
13 Mississippians signed petitions saying they  
14 wanted this constitutional amendment to force  
15 the legislature to obey its own law and fully  
16 fund our schools.

17 42A was placed on the November ballot by  
18 the legislature for one reason and one reason  
19 only, and it was to divide all the supporters  
20 of public education. And they are trying to  
21 divide us all. At the last forum there was  
22 mention against no teacher pay raises.  
23 They're trying to divide teachers and  
24 supporters of 42. Tonight it's retirees.  
25 They'll throw in the kitchen sink if they

1 think that it will make a difference. In  
2 other words, it is a trick. And I don't want  
3 anyone to fall for it.

4 voters will have two choices when they  
5 enter the voting booth on November 3rd. The  
6 first choice does ask you if you would like to  
7 amend the State Constitution. The  
8 Constitution needs to be amended because it  
9 currently gives the legislature control over  
10 public school funding with zero accountability  
11 right now. None. Voters who want that  
12 accountability for full funding of our schools  
13 must vote yes for a constitutional amendment.

14 Your second choice is then between  
15 Initiative 42 and the legislative alternative,  
16 42A. Again, voters who want better public  
17 schools should vote for Initiative 42, not  
18 42A. Just remember 42A, the A stands against  
19 public education.

20 The author of 42A did not put it on the  
21 ballot in the hopes that it would even pass.  
22 He has admitted this. He did it to split the  
23 vote of those who favor an amendment so that  
24 neither one of the amendments is even passed.  
25 By putting 42A on the ballot, the legislature

1 just thumbed its nose at the hundreds of  
2 thousands of people who signed petitions for  
3 42.

4 Do not be fooled. 42A keeps the status  
5 quo. 42A allows the legislature to continue  
6 to underfund our schools. 42A is against  
7 adequate funding. 42A says yes to unsafe  
8 buses, yes to leaky roofs, yes to less  
9 training of our teachers. It does nothing to  
10 improve our schools. In fact, 42A budgets no  
11 additional dollars for public education.  
12 None. Only Initiative 42 will hold our  
13 legislatures accountable to fulfill their  
14 promise to make education funding a priority.

15 Now, these lawmakers and their  
16 lobbyists, they will tell you some tall tales.  
17 They'll tell you as he just did tonight that  
18 throwing more money at public schools will not  
19 solve our problems. But by not following  
20 their own 1997 law, they have never even given  
21 their own plan a chance to succeed.

22 The politicians in Jackson and their  
23 lobbyists will tell you that one judge in  
24 Hinds County will decide how much money your  
25 school here will get. The fact is one judge

1 has never had the final say on anything that  
2 one side or the other can't agree on. It  
3 always goes to the nine-member State Supreme  
4 Court. But every single bit of this is  
5 irrelevant if lawmakers will just follow their  
6 own law.

7 The politicians in Jackson and their  
8 lobbyists will tell you that they will have to  
9 cut our state budget and raise your taxes if  
10 you force them to follow their law. But go  
11 look at that county tax bill we talked about  
12 and just see how much it's gone up in the past  
13 ten years, and it's all because those same  
14 politicians will not follow their own law.

15 The money is there without cutting our  
16 budget and without raising taxes, and it can  
17 be done responsibly over seven years. It is  
18 merely a matter of priorities. Education is  
19 not their priority.

20 Seriously, we should look at some of the  
21 things that our lawmakers have spent money on  
22 in the past. Millions upon millions of  
23 dollars on projects that have gone bust. You  
24 wouldn't believe some of the crazy things that  
25 they waste money on -- money they could have

1 given to public education. They could have  
2 given that money to our kids.

3 Every single story that those  
4 politicians in Jackson and their lobbyists  
5 will tell you is simply based on fear and  
6 scare tactics that have zero basis in fact.

7 Just ask yourself this question: why  
8 would they spend so much time and effort and  
9 work so hard to confuse you about an issue as  
10 important as public education? Because they  
11 have. They have spent some time and effort on  
12 this. It's because they are scared to death  
13 of losing their control and their power to  
14 tell you how to run your schools. You know,  
15 sometimes I think the politicians in Jackson  
16 get confused about who works for whom.

17 In closing, on November 3rd every one of  
18 you has the chance to take back control of  
19 your schools by voting for Initiative 42. You  
20 have a chance to tell the legislature that you  
21 will not be fooled by 42A. You have the  
22 chance to hold those politicians accountable  
23 for fully funding our public schools just like  
24 they promised. And you have the chance to  
25 show our children in Mississippi here in

1 Bolivar County and all over the state that  
2 nothing is more important than education.  
3 Because better schools means better jobs; it  
4 means higher wages and more economic growth.  
5 So on November 3rd when you walk in that  
6 voting booth, say yes to the only true choice  
7 for public education, and that's Initiative  
8 42.

9 Thank you.

10 *MS. WEAVER:* We move now to the public  
11 comment portion of our initiative hearing.  
12 We're going to ask you to please remember to  
13 speak clearly and talk slowly enough so you  
14 can be understood. Your comments will be  
15 transcribed and placed on our website for  
16 public viewing.

17 I would like to reiterate for you to  
18 please give the speakers the courtesy to speak  
19 uninterrupted.

20 Our first speaker will be Joyce Helmick.  
21 She will speak in favor of Initiative Measure  
22 42.

23 *MS. HELMICK:* Good evening. My name  
24 is Joyce Helmick. I am a mother of public  
25 school students. I am a grandmother of a

1 public school student. I'm a product of  
2 public school myself. My husband is a  
3 product of public schools. And as far as I  
4 know, all of my family is a product of  
5 public schools. I also have been an  
6 educator in the public schools of  
7 Mississippi for 37 years.

8 Tonight I rise in favor of Initiative  
9 42, and I speak for Initiative 42 as president  
10 of the Mississippi Association of Educators.  
11 I speak for thousands of educators across this  
12 state who know that the only way that our  
13 lawmakers will be forced to fund our schools  
14 is through Initiative 42.

15 Tonight -- well, in another session a  
16 young man got up and spoke about the reality  
17 of the situation. Tonight Mr. Latino said  
18 "if," and he mentioned leaky roofs and bad  
19 buses, et cetera. Part of my job is to tour  
20 schools in this state, and for the past two  
21 weeks I have seen and been in many schools  
22 across the state -- five, six a day. So let  
23 me tell you the reality today in Mississippi:  
24 37 students in a fifth-grade classroom.  
25 During a thunderstorm and rainstorm, three



1 flooding classrooms and an awning falling  
2 while the students were leaving school to  
3 catch the bus. Thirteen-year-old books.  
4 Science books that are so out of date, the  
5 material is not any longer useful.

6 Just today I toured a school where a  
7 storage room was being cleaned out to be used  
8 as a classroom because there's not enough room  
9 for all the students in the school.

10 We spoke earlier of buses. We have  
11 19-year-old buses taking our students back and  
12 forth to school. And technology -- in some  
13 schools, there's almost no technology.

14 Another school I visited, the principal  
15 told me when he arrived as a new principal  
16 this summer, there were 11 vacancies in that  
17 school. These vacancies have recently been  
18 filled by educators from the Philippines.

19 I spoke in a college where there used to  
20 be 37 interns for practice teaching. There  
21 are now 7. In another school where there are  
22 usually 250, there are now 65. We have a  
23 serious teacher shortage.

24 There are no art classes. Right here in  
25 this area I visited schools where there are

1           either no playgrounds or the playground  
2           equipment is so unsafe, the children cannot  
3           play on it.

4           And then there's the decoy. And this is  
5           what I have to say about that: Everyone knows  
6           what a decoy is; and when brought home, it  
7           will not put meat on the table. And that's  
8           why the educators in this state support  
9           Initiative 42.

10          Thank you.

11          *MS. WEAVER:* Thank you, Ms. Helmick.

12          Next we'll have Dr. Detra Bishop. She  
13          will speak in favor of Initiative Measure 42.

14          *DR. BISHOP:* Good evening. I am a  
15          local pastor at John Wesley United Methodist  
16          Church in Durant and Barlow United Methodist  
17          Church in Sallis. I grew up in Wayne  
18          County, lived in Forrest County, and work in  
19          Holmes County. I've been around.

20          And I didn't come tonight with a  
21          prepared speech, but I am a product of the  
22          public school system. I went from a GED to a  
23          Ph.D. because education was so important to  
24          me. Because of family problems, I could not  
25          study in school. I finished ninth grade.

1           Because I had very good teachers from grades  
2           one through nine, I was able to skip three  
3           years and still start college with my peers.  
4           Education is critical.

5                     And I looked up Psalms 127:3, "Children  
6           are an inheritance from God. Children are a  
7           gift to us from God."

8                     We are in the Bible Belt. I would  
9           presuppose that most of us in the room are  
10          believers and that if we really believe that  
11          children are a gift from God, then we would do  
12          everything in our power to make sure that they  
13          are well cared for.

14                    I looked at the stats for the prison  
15          system. For the prison system \$10,000 per  
16          head spent on mostly African-American males to  
17          be maintained at new prisons while our kids  
18          are in substandard classrooms at less than  
19          \$9,000 per child -- about 7- or \$8,000 per  
20          child. Where in any civilized nation do we  
21          spend more money on the prison system than we  
22          do on education? We have brand-new  
23          state-of-the-art prisons to house us.

24                    With our third grade we cannot put  
25          enough time, energy, money, and love into our

1 children so that they are able to be  
2 competitive in a global society.

3 We are a civilized nation. I've  
4 traveled all over the world. I spent seven  
5 years in Germany. Not one child in Germany  
6 goes without adequate education. By the time  
7 they reach high school, if they don't want to  
8 go to college, they have already been trained  
9 on some kind of trade.

10 This is America, people. Come on. This  
11 is America. And I'm appalled that we -- I  
12 took notes. My Ph.D. is education. Okay. I  
13 took notes, and I just want to say a few  
14 things. Tell me when my time is up, because I  
15 want to keep it short.

16 The word "simple" came up. I was quite  
17 insulted for the gentleman to say that it's  
18 not that simple. It's a question of your  
19 integrity. It is that simple. It's just that  
20 simple. It's so simple that we've forgotten  
21 the government is in power for the people, the  
22 government by the people, and it's for the  
23 people.

24 She said stop.

25 *MS. WEAVER:* Dr. Bishop, thank you.

1 If you have additional comments, we would  
2 love to have those as well.

3 Next will be Billy Ferguson, and he will  
4 speak in favor of Initiative Measure 42.

5 *MR. FERGUSON:* Good evening. I'm  
6 Billy Ferguson. I'm superintendent of  
7 Carroll County Schools.

8 [COURT REPORTER NOTE: COULD NOT HEAR  
9 PORTIONS OF SPEAKER'S COMMENTS AND MAY BE  
10 INACCURACIES]

11 I want to tell you a little bit about my  
12 background. I started teaching in 1969. I  
13 was elected superintendent in 1996. And the  
14 thing about the \$8,000 spent per child, I want  
15 you to know that I think it's 5,200 around 13  
16 dollars that the state funds MAEP.

17 Now, we have to do a local contribution,  
18 and it's either going to be right at 28  
19 million in the amount of 27 percent MAEP. So  
20 in Carroll County you get about \$4 million.  
21 It's all about numbers. In MAEP you've got  
22 1,000 kids. So you take 27 percent, gives you  
23 about 4,000. So actually the state spends  
24 about \$4,000 in MAEP monies. So the local  
25 contribution, as Ms. Mitchell talked about,

1 makes up about a fourth of it. And it varies  
2 from county to county.

3 I want to address this thing to you from  
4 myself. I'm going to call this the near-death  
5 experience of Carroll County Schools. We're  
6 getting cut money and cut money and cut money.  
7 We've been cut \$3.6 million since '09. In  
8 2014 we were cut \$547,000. It's just no way,  
9 really.

10 Most every day I pray for a miracle, and  
11 I guess the Lord answered my prayer. Vote for  
12 Initiative 42.

13 Twice in 2014 I was asked, "Do you want  
14 to go into a conservatorship?" And I thought  
15 about that and just telling you this: It's  
16 like a person with cancer. You have Stage 1,  
17 Stage 2, and you look at somebody who's  
18 emaciated. And we look back at those few  
19 years, well, we were starving to death. If  
20 you could paint a picture of us, that's what  
21 we looked like.

22 These are some things I did in 2013.  
23 The wages were frozen for the prior four  
24 years. Not the teacher raises. We made no  
25 teacher cuts. The staff had been cut for that

1 year. We had two people that were like  
2 assistants that were not paid. We did not  
3 purchase any textbooks, computers, libraries,  
4 books, or supplies.

5 In 2010 I purchased -- the District  
6 did -- eight used school buses that were ten  
7 years old. We still have those buses, and  
8 they're 15 years old now. After those eight  
9 buses, there's a total of 18 buses on the  
10 route.

11 What's kind of neat about this is back  
12 in the 1997 initiative I pledged money --  
13 we're paid \$161 per child out of MAEP moneys.  
14 We pledged that. It cost \$178,000 a year to  
15 meet an obligation that I made 20 years ago.  
16 I've got two more years left on the  
17 obligation. So we were cut \$147,000. I'm  
18 also cut 178,000 for us committing that money.

19 I wrote the governor a letter, and I  
20 thought surely he would respond, or somebody  
21 would. And one of my senators responded. I  
22 got responses as far away as Switzerland; from  
23 Kansas City, Missouri; from Houston, Texas;  
24 but my governor has not chosen to do that.

25 You know, I feel like the man on Jericho

1 Road. We've been robbed; I've been robbed;  
2 our children have been robbed. And Senator  
3 Thompson came along with the road. Our senate  
4 education chairman and Carroll County proposed  
5 we consolidate. Representative Moore, one of  
6 the things to note about him, he's not too  
7 much for us. But Speaker Gunn and the others  
8 have just rejected us.

9 And I'm going to close with this: In  
10 *Maud Muller*, a poem written by John Greenleaf  
11 Whittier, he said, "For of all sad words of  
12 tongue or pen, the saddest of these is what  
13 might have been."

14 Thank you.

15 *MS. WEAVER:* Thank you, Mr. Ferguson.

16 Next we have Dr. Leeson Taylor. He  
17 speaks in favor of Initiative Measure 42.

18 I'm going to ask everybody, if you  
19 would, please speak into the mike so that we  
20 can make sure that it's transcribed.

21 *DR. TAYLOR:* Good evening. I've been  
22 accused of a lot of things, but not being  
23 loud is not one of them. You will be able  
24 to hear me.

25 My name is Leeson Taylor, and I'm



1 currently the superintendent of schools in  
2 Greenville Public Schools. I've been there  
3 working actually 21 years. I'm a product of  
4 that school district. I graduated from that  
5 school district. I know the potential that  
6 that school district has.

7 So I'm not here to talk to you about the  
8 past. I'm not here to talk to you about the  
9 \$21.5 million we've been underfunded since  
10 2009. I'm not here to talk to you about the  
11 buses being so old. I'm not here to talk to  
12 you about the lack of textbooks, the lack of  
13 technology. What I am here to talk to you  
14 about is our future and our aspirations;  
15 because as you look at this initiative, we  
16 have the capability to make a decision that  
17 will have an impact not only for our children,  
18 but our children's children in the state of  
19 Mississippi.

20 When you think about it, we had an  
21 esteemed speaker tonight that referred to a  
22 state, and the state he referred to was New  
23 Jersey. And he named them as a bad model;  
24 that "we don't want to do what New Jersey  
25 did." But, you know, I'm fed up with being

1           50.

2                   when you look at the state of New  
3           Jersey, the state of New Jersey -- no other  
4           state in the nation scored statistically  
5           higher than New Jersey in the fourth-grade or  
6           eighth-grade reading exam in NAEP, which is  
7           the national assessment. when you look at  
8           their math assessment, New Jersey is among the  
9           top seven states in increases in fourth-grade  
10          math scores and eighth-grade math scores from  
11          2003 to 2014. when you look at New Jersey, no  
12          other state in the nation scored statistically  
13          higher than New Jersey on the 12th-grade math  
14          exam. New Jersey high school seniors have the  
15          second highest scores in the nation in math on  
16          the NAEP exam.

17                   I might be slow. This might be a slow  
18          day. But since when was 50th better than  
19          being number 1, 2, and 3?

20                   So I ask you to join me in building a  
21          future where we are a state like New Jersey,  
22          where our kids statistically score excessively  
23          high, where we can for our fourth-, eighth-,  
24          twelfth-grade kids, and all kids in between.

25                   Thank you.

1                    *MS. WEAVER:* Dr. Taylor, thank you. I  
2 apologize for mispronouncing your first  
3 name.

4                    Next we have Suzanne Smith, and she will  
5 speak in favor of Initiative Measure 42.

6                    *MS. SMITH:* Good evening. I am  
7 Suzanne Smith, and I am from Scobey,  
8 Mississippi. However, I am a veteran  
9 educator in the Grenada Public Schools. I  
10 have been an educator for 26 years now, and  
11 during that time I have grown very  
12 passionate about what I do.

13                    I love public education. I love public  
14 education in Mississippi. And it breaks my  
15 heart to know that our legislators do not feel  
16 the same way. They are not showing us that  
17 they have the same passion for education that  
18 we as educators and parents and community  
19 members do.

20                    I am urging you to think strongly about  
21 Initiative 42. This is our only chance at  
22 getting full funding, because right now we're  
23 sure not getting it. So we've got to do  
24 something, and this is what we're proposing  
25 that we do.

1           It's time for us to stand together and  
2 stand up against those legislators and tell  
3 them we want Initiative 42 passed so that our  
4 schools can be fully funded and our students  
5 can be the very best that they can be.

6           You know, we've heard several times  
7 tonight about being fed up with being 50th.  
8 Yes, education-wise Mississippi is at the  
9 bottom. But you know what? Mississippi does  
10 rank near the top in one thing: Teenage  
11 pregnancy. And I dare say that if we put more  
12 money into education, we could help prevent  
13 some of that. So please join with me and  
14 support Initiative 42.

15           Thank you.

16           *MS. WEAVER:* Thank you, Ms. Smith.

17           And next we have Lisa Kennedy Perkins.

18           *MS. PERKINS:* First of all, let me  
19 tell y'all I'm not a public speaker. This  
20 is the second time I've ever spoke in my  
21 life. Last Thursday night in Meridian was  
22 my first time. This is my second time. And  
23 I'm just so passionate about 42 that I've  
24 got to get up, and I've got to do what  
25 scares me. I've got a lot to say.

1           But if we don't vote this 42 in, it's  
2 going to be like going back to the '60s. I'm  
3 from Philadelphia, Mississippi; Neshoba  
4 County. We just voted in Jenifer Branning  
5 Green as our senator, who is against public  
6 schools. She's for vouchers and charter  
7 schools. Her children attend a church school  
8 where they're more or less -- they're in their  
9 own little world. You know what I'm saying?  
10 It's like they're controlled. My niece goes  
11 to that church.

12           If we fight our own countrymen that put  
13 forward bills and laws that serve a few and  
14 hurt many, you might be our government. We've  
15 got to join together. It just seems like all  
16 parties are serving themselves. There's no  
17 "we" anymore. It's the "us" and "them."

18           And I wrote this first thought: Our  
19 children and our state cannot prosper without  
20 doing the right thing, which is to get busy  
21 spreading the word before November the 3rd to  
22 vote for Initiative 42. You've got to explain  
23 to them there's four ways they're going to try  
24 to trick us. We owe it to every child. It  
25 doesn't matter who they are; we owe it to them

1 to do the right thing. We, the people of all  
2 walks of life, need to join hands for our  
3 children.

4 And to me 42A is all about fear and  
5 control like in the '60s. The legislators --  
6 our schools needs money for things that we  
7 don't have. For example, our schools need  
8 counselors that can counsel. We have one  
9 counselor at Philadelphia. She's basically a  
10 paper pusher. We need counselors and we need  
11 a social worker. Because when I was growing  
12 up, I was extremely shy. My mom taught school  
13 for 30 years. I was painfully shy. If one  
14 teacher had come forward to me and pulled me  
15 aside, one man or woman teacher, and said,  
16 "You know, you're worth something," it could  
17 have made -- it could have made a wonderful  
18 change in me. And that's why we need -- I  
19 mean, I'm okay now, but it took a lot of  
20 therapy. That's what we need.

21 I mean, I was in the car rider line last  
22 week, and I promise y'all there was a bus that  
23 looked like it was from the '60s -- I mean,  
24 not '60s, from when I was in school in the  
25 '70s. Excuse me.

1           I'm going to read something my husband  
2 wrote. "Mississippi is the only state whose  
3 constitution leaves education to the  
4 legislature's discretion. Most state  
5 constitutions declare that education is a  
6 fundamental right. Not Mississippi, not us.  
7 The legislature has fully funded education  
8 only two times since MAEP was made into law.  
9 Considering the legislature's inability to  
10 provide the children of Mississippi with an  
11 adequate education, I believe it's time to  
12 take away their discretionary control over  
13 education funding in Mississippi."

14           I've already talked about Jenifer  
15 Branning Green. She's in favor of charter  
16 schools and vouchers. We stood a little  
17 chance with the other guy; but, no, they  
18 wanted Jenifer Branning Green. I don't  
19 understand.

20           Every time I approach my  
21 representative -- who I go to church with;  
22 he's my neighbor; he's a nice man -- but no  
23 offense to him, every time I have something I  
24 want to say to him that I disagree with, he  
25 says, "Now, keep an open mind."

1 I think, because of our elected  
2 officials' inability to keep an open mind and  
3 consider our children's best interest, they  
4 should not have control over education  
5 funding. All children deserve a great quality  
6 free public education. If we get  
7 Mississippi's public education where it needs  
8 to be, people from private schools will be  
9 flocking back to our public schools.

10 One more thing. The legislators against  
11 42 have made it very confusing when you go to  
12 vote. I've already said that. They're trying  
13 to trick us four different ways.

14 *MS. WEAVER:* Ms. Perkins, it's time.

15 *MS. PERKINS:* Just spread the word,  
16 42.

17 *MS. WEAVER:* Thank you, Ms. Perkins.

18 Thank you, everyone, for joining us  
19 tonight. Our next public hearing will be  
20 Tuesday, September 1st, in Hattiesburg at the  
21 Jackie Dole Sherrill Community Center at 5:30.  
22 On Thursday of next week we will be in  
23 Gulfport at the Lynn Meadows Discovery Center.  
24 And our final hearing will be September 8 in  
25 Brookhaven.



1 I encourage each of you here tonight to  
2 visit the initiative pages on the Secretary of  
3 State's website at [www.sos.ms.gov](http://www.sos.ms.gov). Your  
4 comments and those of other Mississippians  
5 will be there. If you want more information  
6 about these two initiative measures or about  
7 Mississippi's initiative process, we have  
8 information in the foyer for you to take home  
9 and read.

10 Again, thank you for coming. Everyone  
11 please travel safely, and we hope to see you  
12 at our next initiative hearing.

13 Thank you and good night.

14 (PROCEEDINGS CONCLUDED AT 6:50 P.M.)

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*CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER*

I, *SHARRON F. ALLEN*, Certified Shorthand Reporter and Notary Public in and for the State of Mississippi at large, hereby certify that the foregoing 57 pages contain a full, true, and correct transcript of the proceedings as taken by me at the time and place heretofore stated in the aforementioned matter by stenotype and later reduced to typewritten form by me to the best of my skill and ability by means of computer-aided transcription.

I further certify that I am not in the employ of or related to any counsel or party in this matter and have no interest, monetary or otherwise, as to the final outcome of this proceeding.

WITNESS MY SIGNATURE AND SEAL, this the 21st day of September, 2015.

*SHARRON F. ALLEN, CSR, RPR*  
*CSR NO. 1144*

My Commission Expires:

November 5, 2015