

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

TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC HEARING

Lynn Meadows Discovery Center
246 Dolan Avenue
Gulfport, Mississippi 39507
On Thursday, September 3, 2015
at 5:30 p.m.

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

1 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Everybody take your
2 seats, please, and we'll start on time.

3 First, I want to welcome everyone here
4 tonight to the Lynn Meadows Discovery Center.
5 And we appreciate so much the participation of
6 the Gulf Coast. We were down here last week
7 for the remembrance of Katrina -- I don't want
8 to say it was a celebration -- the remembrance
9 of Katrina and putting it in the Coast's
10 rearview mirror with a great view towards
11 where y'all are going.

12 I have to take -- and then we'll start
13 on the rest of this -- but after Katrina, I
14 was able to drive trucks down the Mississippi
15 Gulf Coast and later painted houses, and then
16 we had fundraisers for the first responders
17 and whatnot. But I will tell you the days
18 that I came down here, which were probably
19 within about a week, I guess, of the disaster,
20 I never believed the Coast would come back
21 like it is. I just couldn't see the
22 resiliency that was going to be here and the
23 fact that there was a willpower greater than
24 wind power. And the willpower won out on the
25 Coast. So congratulations to all of y'all for

1 rebuilding your community. It's pretty
2 phenomenal to all of us, including the former
3 President of the United States and everybody
4 else that's been able to come here.

5 So tonight we talk about an initiative,
6 our public hearing. And to give you a little
7 bit of the background -- and for those of you
8 who have come to several of these, pardon me
9 for going over it for the ones that haven't.

10 The Mississippi Legislature adopted a
11 process by which Mississippi could amend its
12 Constitution by initiatives. And, as such, we
13 have Initiative 42 that has come today. We
14 started with Initiative 1 that didn't make the
15 ballot because you have to have 107,000
16 signatures to do so -- 42 got more than
17 that -- and to have that placed on the ballot.
18 And so we had a number of initiatives that
19 failed during the years.

20 Then term limits actually made the
21 ballot, and the citizens of Mississippi voted
22 not to amend the Constitution for term limits.

23 Three years ago Mississippians voted on
24 several constitutional issues -- actually,
25 three -- and they were voter ID, personhood --

1 the right-to-life amendment it was called --
2 and also imminent domain. Two of those
3 passed, and personhood did not pass. The
4 voting on all three of them was markedly
5 different, by as much as 30 percent
6 difference.

7 So Mississippians paid attention to
8 amending their Constitution, and I expect they
9 will on this initiative as well.

10 when the initiative met the required
11 signatures and was certified by the circuit
12 clerks -- where's Gayle? She's here
13 somewhere. There she is. My favorite one.
14 Don't tell the other 81.

15 when it was certified and we had the
16 required signatures, it goes to the attorney
17 general, who writes the ballot title, and we
18 begin the process.

19 The Mississippi Legislature met shortly
20 thereafter in the spring of this year and
21 adopted a competing amendment. The
22 Mississippi Legislature is able to do that
23 under the constitutional provisions that allow
24 this, and so they adopted 42A. They adopted
25 42A, which is a competing amendment. Those

1 have been outlined -- I think you have folders
2 on those, and I would encourage you very much
3 to read those particular ones.

4 So Mississippi has a part of its
5 Constitution Section 201 that addresses
6 education, and now we have competing
7 amendments that will come before the voters.

8 So we're required by the legislature to
9 hold hearings in the five old Congressional
10 districts. We only have four Congressmen now.
11 So they are required. This will be number
12 seven of eight that we are conducting around
13 the state. On matters such as voter ID and
14 the right to life and imminent domain and
15 education, we believe it's very important for
16 the citizens to have the right to speak to
17 their fellow citizens.

18 Every word that you say tonight will be
19 transcribed. Where's my transcriptionist? I
20 don't see her here. There she is. Welcome
21 back. Will be transcribed and put on our
22 website. We anticipate that being available
23 around the first of October.

24 Also, the other seven of these -- a
25 total of eight -- will also be on the website.

1 You are welcome to read what your fellow
2 citizens said about these two initiatives. So
3 I would caution you, when you come to speak --
4 and we will get to a public part of the
5 speaking -- when you come to speak, don't say
6 anything that you don't want in public,
7 because they are going to transcribe all that
8 stuff and write it down. So watch your
9 language or whatever.

10 The way that we have established this is
11 we speak for and against 42 and 42A. And we
12 have different individuals have spoken around
13 the state of Mississippi. Mr. Jarrius Adams
14 is here. He's spoken -- I think this is his
15 third time. Other individuals have spoken for
16 it. Frank Corder is here speaking against
17 that, and other individuals have spoken at
18 other locations against 42 and for 42A.

19 So with that process, each of these
20 individuals will be given up to ten minutes to
21 speak for and against each of the initiatives.
22 Following that ten minutes, we will go to a
23 public forum. And Lea Anne Brandon, who's
24 right here, has given me everybody who signed
25 up. If you haven't signed up, please see Lea

1 Anne.

2 We will start by giving the ones for and
3 against an equal two-minute segments, and you
4 can speak your will and address your fellow
5 citizens and the rest of the citizens in
6 Mississippi as they see our website. So we
7 welcome you to do that.

8 I'll be able to stay -- I'm on public
9 transportation, so I'll be able to stay until
10 about 7:30 or so before I have to head back
11 the other way. We have another one in
12 Brookhaven coming up, which will be our last
13 one.

14 So without further ado, we will have for
15 and against, for and against, and then we'll
16 have the public speaking component of this.

17 So speaking on behalf of Initiative 42
18 is Mr. Adams.

19 Mr. Adams.

20 *MR. ADAMS:* I want to thank you all
21 for the invitation to speak here today. My
22 name is Jarrius Adams, and I'm here today in
23 support of Initiative 42 for better schools.

24 I am a 2015 graduate of Hattiesburg High
25 School, and I am honored to be this year's

1 National Speech and Debate Association student
2 of the year.

3 I have been blessed by the opportunities
4 given to me. I had great teachers and a great
5 speech coach. But for every one of me, there
6 are thousands of public school students who
7 are not so lucky. There are thousands of
8 students who struggle every day in schools
9 that lack the resources to make them
10 successful.

11 I think that we can all agree that every
12 child in Mississippi has a fundamental right
13 to a free and adequate public education. That
14 means safe and modern buildings, classrooms
15 that don't leak when it rains, up-to-date
16 computers, technology, and lab equipment,
17 enough textbooks for every child to take home,
18 smaller class sizes, more college prep
19 classes, and safe buses.

20 You see, in 1997 state lawmakers passed
21 a law called the Mississippi Adequate
22 Education Program to adequately fund K through
23 12 education in every school district in our
24 state. Yet, since 1997 lawmakers have
25 repeatedly broken their own law and have

1 severely underfunded every single school in
2 Mississippi.

3 Now, the results are clear. Local
4 school districts have been shortchanged.
5 Local property taxes have gone up. Too many
6 schools have too few teachers, outdated
7 textbooks, antiquated facilities, unsafe
8 buses, and a lack of computers. The
9 underfunding of schools is hurting our state's
10 ability to attract companies to move here, and
11 our students are not learning the skills
12 companies are looking for. The result is
13 hurting our ability to grow and attract
14 good-paying jobs.

15 In one school district facilities are in
16 such need of repair that teachers have to put
17 down wooden pallets every time it rains so
18 that students can walk to class. In my own
19 school district in Hattiesburg, classrooms are
20 too cramped because we don't have the money to
21 afford new teachers. And right here in
22 Gulfport, in Harrison County, schools have
23 been shortchanged \$44 million since 2008.
24 That's enough money for 128 new teachers for
25 ten years. Let me say that again. That's

1 enough money for 128 new teachers for ten
2 years.

3 You know, it's stories like these in
4 schools all across our state that harm our
5 kids and scare companies away from doing
6 business in Mississippi and eventually costs
7 us jobs.

8 Now, we can do better. We can have
9 better schools, better jobs, and a better
10 future for our kids and our state.

11 Well, some of you may ask, "What is
12 Initiative 42?" You see, nearly 200,000
13 Mississippians from every county and both
14 political parties signed petitions to put
15 Initiative 42 on this year's ballot. This is
16 a people's movement. Mothers, fathers,
17 teachers, business leaders, Democrats,
18 Republicans -- they all understand that
19 underfunding our schools damages our state's
20 economy and our future.

21 Initiative 42 will require lawmakers to
22 adequately fund Mississippi public schools
23 under the 1997 law they passed. Now, this
24 will help every school.

25 Opponents of Initiative 42 will tell you

1 it means that one judge in Hinds County will
2 decide how much money our schools will get.
3 That's simply not true. All the judge would
4 do is ensure that the lawmakers are spending
5 the money on education as required under the
6 law. Local school boards, you, your community
7 get the funding and set the priorities. This
8 gives you local control and helps you keep
9 property taxes down.

10 Now, Initiative 42 would not require
11 raising taxes or cutting the state budget,
12 period. As stated on every petition signed by
13 nearly 200,000 Mississippians last year,
14 funding can be phased in over seven years
15 using general fund revenue from the state
16 budget. Those revenues have grown an average
17 of 4.8 percent each year for the last ten
18 years. Using just a quarter of projected
19 future growth amounts to \$37.5 million per
20 year. At that rate, it would only take seven
21 years to fully fund the MAEP.

22 Now, it's time to start giving every
23 Mississippi child the education they deserve.
24 Our schools should have sufficient funding to
25 provide each and every child with a 21st

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

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

12 Now, in November you can decide whether
13 to increase funding for our kids or allow
14 lawmakers to continue to underfund our
15 schools. 42 is an investment in the future of
16 our children. 42 is an investment in our
17 state. 42 means better schools, better jobs,
18 higher wages, and more economic growth.

19 Now, I urge you to study the facts. Go
20 to the 42 website at 42forbetterschools.org.
21 When you go there, you can see exactly how
22 much your local schools are underfunded. Look
23 it up. Then take out your property tax bill
24 and look at that. They're related to each
25 other. But we can fix the imbalance with 42.

1 Talk to your friends and neighbors. Democrats
2 and Republicans -- it doesn't matter which
3 party they're in. Everyone in Mississippi
4 understands that our schools have been
5 shortchanged, our kids have been shortchanged,
6 and our economy has been shortchanged. 42 is
7 our chance to really make a difference,
8 because I'm fed up with being 50th.

9 Thank you.

10 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Thank you, Mr. Adams.

11 In your chairs is the actual amendment
12 itself. And also the constitutional
13 initiative legislation that started all this
14 is out here, so please make sure you read all
15 of that.

16 Frank Corder is opposed to Initiative
17 Measure 42.

18 Mr. Corder.

19 *MR. CORDER:* Good evening.

20 My name is Frank Corder. A little bit
21 about me: My family owns a small business in
22 downtown Pascagoula. I'm a former Pascagoula
23 city councilman. In that role I've vetted and
24 appointed school board members and reviewed
25 and approved school district budgets and tax

1 requests. I'm also a writer and analyst on
2 local, state, and national politics and
3 government.

4 I've been married for 15 years to my
5 wife, who's a nurse at Ocean Springs Hospital.
6 We have two great children who both attend
7 Pascagoula School District, a public school
8 here in Mississippi. Mr. Rodolfich, our
9 superintendent, is actually in the room. I
10 saw him while ago. There he is right there.

11 Fortunately, I've been blessed to have
12 two great kids who have made all A's
13 throughout their time in school. I'm a very
14 proud, proud papa.

15 My wife also attended public school,
16 just like I did. She moved around quite a bit
17 from Natchez to Carthage to Pascagoula to
18 Greenwood because her dad was a pastor.

19 I'm also an ordained minister, a youth
20 football coach and baseball and soccer coach,
21 and a volunteer in my children's schools. So
22 I, like many of you, have a vested interest in
23 our K through 12 educational future in this
24 state.

25 I am here against 42. Now, my quick

1 take of Initiative 42 is that it is a terrible
2 public policy that has the very real potential
3 of implementing a Robin Hood effect on your
4 local tax dollars. The ballot title for
5 Initiative 42 asks, "Should the state be
6 required to provide for the support of an
7 adequate and efficient system of free public
8 schools?"

9 You might as well ask, "Do you love your
10 children?" Of course you do. Of course you
11 want that. A question I've always asked is
12 "why must we be okay with being just adequate?
13 why must our schools just be adequate public
14 schools?" The notion goes against everything
15 that I want for my children and for your
16 children.

17 But the trouble, you see, with this
18 initiative is in the details. This initiative
19 spells out in the ballot summary exactly what
20 the proponents of this measure intend to do if
21 it passes. They desire to force their will of
22 appropriation by way of litigation. They take
23 the legislature out of the equation, taking
24 away your direct voice, your direct vote in
25 this initiative. In essence, it's taxation

1 without representation.

2 The summary reads, "This initiative
3 would also authorize the chancery courts of
4 this state to enforce this section with
5 appropriate injunctive relief."

6 It removes the word "legislature" and
7 puts in "state" and adds "chancery courts" to
8 enforce the appropriation process. The idea
9 here is simple. It's to create a new right to
10 sue -- appropriation by way of litigation.
11 Trial lawyers across the state will be running
12 out the door happy with glee.

13 You see, this initiative shifts the
14 funding and policy decisions away from the
15 legislative branch, away from those you elect,
16 and puts it in the hands of one judge in one
17 county in central Mississippi. So when the
18 backers of 42 ask you and say that they're
19 breaking the law, this is simply not true
20 because -- the very Hinds County Chancery
21 Court system that they're wanting to push this
22 into has stated recently that there is no --
23 "There is no relevant statute that mandates
24 legislators to automatically vote to allocate
25 each school district 100 percent of the funds

1 estimated under MAEP." There is no statute.
2 That's from the court itself where this would
3 go into.

4 In theory and in all possible reality,
5 should a school district in, say, Tupelo or
6 Greenwood decide they were getting
7 shortchanged, if you will, compared to, say,
8 Gulfport, Biloxi, Oceans Springs, or
9 Pascagoula, and then sue for their fair share
10 of the state educational funding, one judge in
11 central Mississippi could determine that, yes,
12 they are getting shortchanged, they are
13 getting less, and then redistribute the funds
14 away from successful school districts,
15 especially here on the Coast, and give it to
16 north Mississippi districts. Essentially
17 playing Robin Hood with your tax dollars.
18 Robin Hood may have been a great children's
19 tale, but it makes for horrible public policy.

20 That's why there are so many voices
21 against Initiative 42 at this point. And it's
22 not just Republican politicians in Jackson.
23 It's local people. It's your neighbors. It's
24 your teachers, state employees, agency heads,
25 community college and university presidents

1 and professors, small business owners,
2 business and industry leaders, and on and on.
3 Just about every major trade and industry
4 association is reviewing ramifications of this
5 initiative; and many, if not most, have or
6 will weigh in opposing this come November.
7 why? Is it because they hate our children or
8 want to shortchange our public schools? Do
9 they want our state's future leaders, their
10 future employees to come out of school
11 ill-prepared for college or for work force?
12 Of course not. Because they realize that the
13 proper application of our Republican
14 democracy, our democracy in this republic is
15 to have legislative oversight, is to
16 legislatively appropriate funds, your tax
17 dollars, not through a chancery court in one
18 part of this state.

19 So that's who's against this initiative.
20 Now let's talk about the political area that's
21 pushing this initiative. Very little has been
22 discussed about that. Most Mississippians
23 have never heard of the major donor behind
24 this Better Schools, Better Jobs effort, the
25 New Venture Fund. And they have no idea why

1 this group would be throwing millions -- over
2 \$1.5 million in a convoluted campaign to amend
3 our State Constitution.

4 The New Venture Fund is a Washington,
5 D.C. based 501(c)(3) formed in 2006 with three
6 main goals: To promote health programs such
7 as human rights and development aid and family
8 planning. They actually push and give money
9 to groups who support the controversial
10 planned parenthood. Environmental programs
11 like climate change and reduction of fossil
12 fuels. And education programs that support
13 common core.

14 Now, that is way out of touch with the
15 majority of this state. The connection
16 between what the New Venture Fund fiscally
17 supports and liberal causes globally,
18 including planned parenthood and those kind of
19 things, cannot be denied. It's prevalent
20 throughout the list of those contributions.

21 One thing is for sure: This is a
22 Democratic ploy, and it's a result of the
23 Democrats losing control of the House in 2011
24 after being in control for 104 years. And the
25 truth is MAEP was passed under a Democrat

1 governor and in the hands of a legislature
2 controlled by Democrats for years. So why do
3 they force this initiative in? One simple
4 reason: They were in control. They had the
5 power. Now they don't.

6 So the reasons this initiative is in
7 front of us today are purely political. It's
8 a power play. And they are using our children
9 as pawns and tugging on your heartstrings to
10 help their cause.

11 You see, you've been told that the
12 legislature has shortchanged schools and
13 cheated students. None of that is true. What
14 you probably have not been told is that from
15 fiscal year 2009 to 2013, state revenues
16 remained below fiscal year 2008 levels.
17 Cumulatively the state was over \$1.1 billion
18 down these years from that 2008 level. Why is
19 this important? Why is it important about
20 this? Because the revenue of over \$1 billion
21 never actually hit state coffers. Yet it's
22 the same very money -- it's the very same
23 money that backers of 42 say that the
24 legislature shortchanged the schools, that it
25 owes the schools, that it didn't give to our

1 children. Their fiscal premise is broken from
2 the start.

3 Something else you probably haven't
4 heard: Over the past four years the
5 legislature has increased education funding at
6 all levels by \$395 million. There has been
7 \$288 million increased total in K through 12
8 funding. Of this amount, 225 million went
9 into MAEP. And the second largest teacher pay
10 raise in our state's history was adopted. Yet
11 backers of 42 want to dismiss this Investment
12 in our teachers and our children.

13 \$395 million. And it should be noted that
14 every Democrat and every Republican in the
15 State House voted for this, along with all but
16 three state senators.

17 So voting no on Initiative 42 isn't a
18 vote against our children and our schools as
19 they make you feel like it is. Voting no is a
20 vote for fiscal sanity and the rightful
21 spending of our tax dollars from the Coast to
22 Corinth through a legislative process that
23 while at times may be murky and uncertain and
24 we may not like it, but it offers each of us a
25 voice through our elected representatives.

1 with this as the background and
2 understanding the powers at play and the
3 out-of-state groups pumping money into this
4 group, I would urge you to vote no to
5 appropriation through litigation and vote no
6 to giving Robin Hood a place in our public
7 policy and vote no to Initiative 42.

8 *MR. HOSEMANN:* we're pleased to have
9 with us tonight Senator Brice Wiggins.
10 Where is Brice? There he is in the back.
11 Senator Wiggins from Pascagoula, Jackson
12 County area. welcome. He's on the
13 education committee and chairman of marine
14 resources.

15 And we have a candidate for lieutenant
16 governor, Tim Johnson. Tim is right here.
17 Democrat candidate for lieutenant governor.

18 Is there any other -- I acknowledged
19 Gayle earlier. Is there any other elected
20 officials here that we didn't have a chance to
21 introduce?

22 *SPEAKER:* Election commissioner.

23 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Thank you. Election
24 commissioners are critical.

25 *SPEAKER:* District 4.

1 *MR. HOSEMANN:* District 4. Thank you.
2 Anyone else?

3 Okay. Having said that, we now move to
4 42A. And, again, all of this is in the
5 handouts there and also the Constitution. I
6 encourage you to read that.

7 We'll now move to 42A, and we start in
8 the reverse order, Mr. Corder speaking on
9 behalf of 42A, and then Mr. Adams.

10 *MR. CORDER:* So why should you vote
11 for 42A and against 42? As I previously
12 outlined, I believe there are real harmful
13 public policy precedents and fiscal dangers
14 for our state if Initiative 42 passes this
15 November. 42A does not have the language
16 that pushes the appropriation process to a
17 judge. 42A allows the legislature, the
18 rightful body where tax dollars are
19 appropriated through our Constitution, to
20 provide for the establishment and
21 maintenance and support of an effective --
22 not adequate and efficient -- an effective
23 system of public schools.

24 I don't know about you, but the language
25 in 42A in general is far better than 42. Do

1 you want adequate schools funded through
2 litigation, or do you want effective schools
3 funded by your voices in Jackson? I'll take
4 the latter every time.

5 And, by the way, did you know -- off
6 script a little bit -- MAEP funding is
7 calculated based on the C level school
8 districts; on the average, the adequate level
9 school districts. Now, the funny part of that
10 is if you wanted to be a B school district, if
11 you funded it at a B level to make it work
12 that way in that formula -- which, by the way,
13 is very convoluted -- funding would actually
14 drop by \$91 million. If you happen to want to
15 reach further and be an A school district,
16 which I think we all do, funding would
17 actually drop \$60 million. Why? Because A
18 and B school districts manage their money
19 better.

20 I believe a vote against 42 and 42A is a
21 vote to keep the courts out of your child's
22 education. Parents and voters -- not a
23 judge -- should decide what's best for our
24 schools. You see, to try and stem the tide of
25 making a very poor decision for our state, the

1 legislature gave us as parents and voters an
2 alternative to the madness that is 42.
3 Backers of 42 never intended to have to
4 explain or debate their proposal. They wanted
5 it to be taken at face value. The last thing
6 they wanted to do was to have anyone read the
7 actual language of the initiative and discuss
8 its flaws. They never thought that the
9 legislature would muster the political courage
10 or will or have the good common sense to pass
11 an alternative. But it did, and we should be
12 thankful.

13 42A shines a bright light on what's
14 really proposed for our Constitution with the
15 original measure. And when you peel back the
16 onion, 42 isn't pretty. People were told that
17 the petition for 42 was about four things,
18 basically -- funding, MAEP, general fund
19 growth, and seven-year increments. None of
20 these are specifically outlined and addressed
21 in the initiative. Why? It could have been.
22 They could have written it in there, but they
23 didn't because there's more at play than what
24 they want to tell you. It goes back to my
25 previous comments against 42.

1 It's truly unfortunate that these
2 petitions were signed and collected most
3 likely based on what the petitioners were told
4 the initiative would do, which in reality it
5 doesn't. Knowing this, backers of 42 panicked
6 and began using their millions and millions of
7 dollars from out-of-state money to create a
8 narrative that demonized the state legislature
9 for offering an alternative to their scheme.
10 Quite simply, they didn't want to have to
11 explain to the voters what they were really up
12 to.

13 Both the State House and Senate passed
14 42A. The same law that allows the initiative
15 process also allows a legislative alternative
16 for this very reason. If not for 42A,
17 Initiative 42 could have sailed through
18 without anyone knowing what was really at
19 stake.

20 For example, you've been told 42 would
21 do some things that the actual language shows
22 it would not, such as you've been told all it
23 does is force the legislature to fully fund
24 MAEP. Not true. MAEP and funding are never
25 even mentioned in the constitutional

1 amendment.

2 You're told that funding can be phased
3 in. This is only if a court allows it. It
4 says it. They won't tell you it's required.
5 The legislature already is funding
6 education -- at least over the last four
7 years -- at around 26 percent general fund
8 growth. That's at a faster rate of the actual
9 25 that they want it to be.

10 They say if the legislature doesn't
11 break the law, there won't be any need for
12 courts. Not true again. First, a court has
13 already ruled the legislature is not breaking
14 the law, as I noted earlier, because the law
15 itself does not require funding absent
16 consideration of available revenues.

17 Second, the initiative is not tied to
18 MAEP formula or funding at all. Anyone can be
19 sued based on adequate or efficient. That has
20 yet to be defined. Not just the state, but
21 your local school districts and school boards.
22 They can play Robin Hood with your money, or
23 courts could force curriculum and staffing
24 needs or district consolidations.

25 And the legislature is not even

1 mentioned in 42. It removes the word
2 "legislature" totally. Would you want a court
3 to decide to consolidate your school district
4 with a neighboring one so another district up
5 state could benefit? I highly doubt it.

6 Petitioners were also told that 42
7 brings back local control. You've heard that
8 tonight. It does the exact opposite. It's an
9 assault on representative democracy.

10 Decisions will be made by someone you can't
11 vote for in central Mississippi. If it
12 passes, all education policy decisions are in
13 the hands of a judge. So don't go complain to
14 you state senator or state representatives
15 because the judge is in charge. Complain to
16 him. And how do you complain to him? By
17 hiring a lawyer, which once again, as I said
18 earlier, may be the idea to buoy the trial
19 lawyer base in the state.

20 So what would Initiative 42 do about
21 funding even though it's not directly defined?
22 The short answer: No one has a clue, because
23 only a court will say. The last thing the
24 legislature wants to do is to allow the court
25 to dictate funding.

1 Appropriations Chairman Herb Frierson
2 says, "If 42 passes, they will seek to fully
3 MAEP in a good-faith effort to stay out of
4 court. What does that mean in fiscal reality?
5 Other state agencies and funding will take a
6 significant hit, which will have a ripple
7 effect across the state."

8 Ironically, rather than being welcome
9 news, 42 proponents and their backers, they
10 screamed and hollered. They ran to the
11 *Clarion-Ledger* and all the press outlets with
12 outrage that Mr. Frierson, a longtime educator
13 himself, was asking for state agencies to come
14 up with a plan to cut the state budget by
15 7.8 percent if 42 passed. They said he was
16 using scare tactics by threatening to fully
17 fund MAEP. But that's what they wanted.
18 Really? Why? Because they, too, know what
19 that really means in dollars and cents and how
20 devastating it would be to our state budget as
21 a whole.

22 So 42A, the alternative, is a far better
23 option in maintaining a strong, healthy,
24 fiscally responsible state budget. It keeps
25 your voice in the education process by

1 maintaining taxation with direct
2 representation. And it calls for effective --
3 not just adequate -- effective public schools,
4 giving our legislators a directive to provide
5 resources as fiscally able without handing
6 those decisions over to one judge in one
7 county of this state.

8 So with that I urge you to vote no to 42
9 and support 42A to continue having your voice
10 heard in our education system across this
11 state.

12 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Next Mr. Adams will
13 reply opposed to 42A.

14 *MR. ADAMS:* Before I begin, I just
15 have a simple question. You-all don't have
16 to answer. I have the answer for you.

17 In 1997 lawmakers passed a law to fully
18 fund the MAEP. Have they done it in the last
19 year? No. Have they done it the year before?
20 No. Year before that? We can go on and on
21 and on. But, look, ladies and gentlemen, I
22 won't let them fool you. Do not be fooled by
23 the legislative alternative.

24 Never before in the history of
25 Mississippi has the state ever thwarted the

1 people's will by placing an alternative to an
2 initiative on the general election ballot. It
3 didn't happen until nearly 200,000
4 Mississippians signed petitions saying they
5 wanted a constitutional amendment to force the
6 lawmakers to obey their own law and fully fund
7 our public schools.

8 42A was placed on the November ballot by
9 lawmakers for one purpose and one purpose
10 only: To divide the supporters of public
11 education so that Initiative 42 would not get
12 the percentage of votes needed to amend our
13 state's Constitution. In other words, it is a
14 trick, a sleight-of-hand deception. Please do
15 not fall for it.

16 Now, voters will have two choices when
17 entering the voting booth on November 3rd.
18 The first choice is whether to amend the
19 state's Constitution. The Constitution needs
20 to be amended because it gives the lawmakers
21 control over public school funding with no
22 accountability. Voters who want that
23 accountability for full funding of our public
24 schools must vote yes for this constitutional
25 amendment.

1 The second choice is between Initiative
2 42 and the legislative alternative, 42A.
3 Again, voters who want better public schools
4 should vote for Initiative 42, not 42A. It's
5 easy if you just remember that 42A stands for
6 42 against, as in against public education.

7 Now, the authors of 42A did not put that
8 on the ballot in the hope that it would pass.
9 They did it to split the vote so that neither
10 amendment is adopted. By putting 42A on the
11 ballot, lawmakers simply thumbed their nose at
12 the Mississippians who signed petitions for
13 42.

14 Don't be fooled. 42A keeps the status
15 quo. 42A allows lawmakers to continue to
16 underfund our schools. 42A, as he said, is
17 against adequate funding. 42A says yes to
18 unsafe buses, yes to leaky roofs, yes to less
19 training for teachers. It does nothing to
20 improve our schools. In fact, 42A provides no
21 additional money for public education. Only
22 Initiative 42 will hold our lawmakers
23 accountable to fulfill their promise to make
24 education funding a priority.

25 Now, the lawmakers will tell you some

1 tall tales. The politicians in Jackson and
2 their lobbyists will tell you that throwing
3 more money at public schools will not solve
4 our problem; but not following its own 1997
5 law, they've never given their own plan a
6 chance to succeed. You know, it's like never
7 putting gas in your car and then complaining
8 that it won't run.

9 I mean, now, the politicians in Jackson
10 and their lobbyists, they will tell you that
11 one judge in Hinds County will decide how much
12 money your school district will get. The fact
13 is one judge in Hinds County has never had the
14 final say on anything that one side or the
15 other didn't like. The nine-member State
16 Supreme Court has always had the final word.
17 But all of this is irrelevant if the lawmakers
18 would just follow their own 1997 law that they
19 passed.

20 Now, these guys keep talking about one
21 judge in Hinds County, one judge in Forrest
22 County, one judge in Madison County. Now, I'm
23 just a kid, but I'm smart enough to know that
24 if you don't break the law, you won't go to
25 court.

1 Now, the politicians in Jackson and
2 their lobbyists will tell you that they will
3 have to cut the state budget or raise your
4 state taxes if you force them to follow their
5 own law. But go look at your local county tax
6 bill and see how much it's gone up in the past
7 ten years, all because those same politicians
8 won't do their job and follow the law.

9 Now, the money is there for our schools
10 without cutting the budget or raising taxes,
11 and it can be done responsibly over seven
12 years. Now, I tell you it's a matter of
13 priorities. Can you believe in 2010 our
14 lawmakers invested in a company outside of
15 Columbus, Mississippi, who told them that they
16 could turn wood into gasoline? Crazy. Right?
17 Our lawmakers agreed to give that company
18 \$75 million. And that company has gone
19 bankrupt, and we will never see that money
20 again -- money that could have gone to our
21 public schools. It's a matter of priorities.

22 Now, every single story those
23 politicians and their lobbyists in Jackson
24 will tell you is based on fear, using scare
25 tactics that have no basis in fact. Now, I

1 want you to ask yourself "why would our
2 lawmakers work so hard on confusing us about
3 an issue as important as public education?"
4 well, maybe it's because they're scared of
5 losing their power and their control to tell
6 you how your school should be run. You know,
7 sometimes these politicians get confused about
8 who works for whom.

9 Now, on November 3rd you have the chance
10 to take back the control of your schools by
11 voting for Initiative 42. You have the chance
12 to tell lawmakers that you won't be fooled by
13 42A. And you have the chance to hold those
14 politicians accountable for fully funding our
15 public schools like they promised. And you
16 have the chance, most importantly, to show the
17 children of Mississippi that there is nothing
18 more important than education, because better
19 schools means better jobs, higher wages, and
20 more economic growth.

21 So on November 3rd when you walk into
22 the voting booth, say yes to the only true
23 choice for better public schools -- Initiative
24 42.

25 Thank you.

1 *MR. HOSEMANN:* we'll go ahead and
2 start on the initiative measure. The first
3 one is Patsy Brumfield from Jackson,
4 Mississippi.

5 Ms. Brumfield, I think they have a mike
6 there that's cut on for you.

7 *MS. BRUMFIELD:* Thank you.

8 This is my seventh forum, and I don't
9 usually get up. But I'm the communications
10 director for 42 for Better Schools, and I'm
11 just plain mad, so I wanted to get up and tell
12 you what the heck is going on.

13 Now, first of all, I've got a vested
14 interest because I'm a grandmother, and my son
15 and his wife want to be able to send James to
16 public school when he gets old enough. So
17 that's one reason I'm up here.

18 And I cannot expand any better than
19 Jarrius did about why we need Initiative 42
20 and why 42A is against public schools.

21 But let me respond to one question
22 Mr. Corder had about who supports 42. That's
23 easy. 200,000 people signed those petitions.
24 That's who supports Initiative 42.

25 Now, let me tell you what Jarrius

1 couldn't tell you, but I'm going to tell you:
2 The lobbyists at the power brokers in Jackson
3 and their electronic mouthpieces are running
4 scared, and they are doing their best to kill
5 Initiative 42. So I want to tell you to get
6 angry about it and rise up and vote
7 November 3rd.

8 Here's what's going on: Last year they
9 did everything they could to make it difficult
10 for us to get those signatures certified in
11 the circuit clerk's offices. And God bless
12 them, the circuit clerks got to their jobs and
13 we got it done. That made them sick, and so
14 they decided they'd stop us with 42A. And
15 they've threatened education lawmakers to make
16 that happen. They threatened those lawmakers
17 and they told them they were going to get
18 political opposition if they didn't support
19 42A, so we got 42A.

20 Now they've confused the ballot so that
21 we're going to have to work extra hard to
22 explain to you and our friends how to vote on
23 that ballot. But we're going to do it and get
24 ready. They're trying to divide the education
25 community by pressuring the community college

1 presidents, the university presidents.

2 They've spread lies about how 42 is going to
3 hurt higher education budgets. That is not
4 true. With this phase-in plan they can avoid
5 budget cuts and tax increases.

6 They've threatened teacher's pay raises.
7 You've seen our video. Greg Snowden says,
8 "Teachers, if 42 passes, this is what your pay
9 raise is going to look like." Go to our
10 website. He does it every time you hit that
11 button.

12 They've threatened state employees that
13 it's going to blow up the budget. And they've
14 threatened state employees to stop supporting
15 42. But we got an attorney general's opinion
16 that says you can do any darn thing you want
17 to on your own time.

18 Money. They brought all the lobbyists
19 together and told them, "You better get busy."

20 But, frankly, what happens to business
21 if 42 fails? If your schools fail, your
22 communities dry up. This week they won't show
23 us our e-mails, but they're e-mails that
24 they're talking about 42 and 42A. Yesterday
25 they threatened the school superintendents.

1 Am I wrong? They threatened the school
2 superintendents for saying anything about 42
3 on their websites. Yesterday they told their
4 lawmakers when they brought them to Jackson,
5 "we're going to change MAEP in January, so get
6 ready."

7 So I'm telling you get mad. Tell your
8 friends and neighbors to get mad. We are fed
9 up with being 50th, so let's rise up and do
10 something about it.

11 Thank you.

12 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Thank you,
13 Ms. Brumfield.

14 Brian Pierce. Good to see you.

15 *MR. PIERCE:* Good to see you also.

16 Good evening. My name is Brian Pierce.
17 And I'm also -- I don't know if you're
18 announcing candidates, but I'm a candidate for
19 District 121, state representative. Thank
20 you.

21 As a Mississippian, I'm really
22 embarrassed that we are even at this point
23 that we have to have a vote such as this. Our
24 number one priority in our state should be our
25 children and how we educate them. No question

1 about it. For those even with some of the --
2 I came here to really get educated about how
3 that things are going that go down. And
4 Jarrius, he did an outstanding job explaining
5 it tonight. And I agree with him. If you
6 don't break the law, then you won't go to
7 court. So I don't think we ever will have to
8 go to a judge. If our legislators are
9 standing here telling you that we're going to
10 go to court, then they're standing there
11 telling you they're going to break the law,
12 their own law that they set forth.

13 As a state legislator, I will be one who
14 would want to be there to support our school
15 districts 100 percent. You won't even have to
16 come to me and question me about that. I will
17 be there for our students and our school
18 districts, to adequately fund them and give
19 them the resources that they need to make our
20 children better, more educated, and improve
21 the conditions in our state.

22 Get out there and tell everybody you
23 know to support the initiative.

24 Thank you.

25 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Thank you, Mr. Pierce.

1 Jeremy Eisler from Ocean Springs,
2 Mississippi.

3 *MR. EISLER:* Good evening, everybody.

4 I'm Jeremy Eisler. I'm an attorney with
5 the Mississippi Center for Justice. And
6 where's Jarrius? what he said.

7 I'm here to say 42A, vote no way; 42,
8 vote it through. This state has fully funded
9 MAEP only twice since it was passed in 1996
10 and became effective in 1997. They have
11 cumulatively underfunded it by \$1.5 billion.
12 At this point more than \$1.5 billion. I
13 believe this last year they put \$400 million
14 in our rainy day fund because I guess they
15 figured they didn't need it for adequate
16 education.

17 Here's the truth: The legislature does
18 not want to adequately fund education. If
19 they wanted to, they would have done it. If
20 they wanted to, the word "adequate" would
21 appear in their legislative alternative.
22 That's why it's not there. They don't want to
23 fund it. They don't want to have to fund it.
24 That's why a provision for judicial
25 enforcement is not in their legislative

1 alternative. They want to keep doing what
2 they've been doing, which is nothing.

3 This is probably . . . well, let's just
4 get down to it. Not so long ago in the state
5 it was illegal to teach black people to read.
6 We can't get away with doing that anymore in
7 Mississippi, so what is the legislature going
8 to do? They're just not going to adequately
9 fund public education at all. That's why they
10 proposed this alternative measure. They don't
11 want it to pass. They want to keep business
12 as usual. They just want to split the vote so
13 neither one of these alternatives pass.

14 So I'm going to keep it simple just the
15 way I started. 42A, vote no way; 42, vote it
16 through. And vote.

17 Thank you.

18 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Thank you, Mr. Eisler.

19 Harry Yoste. Mr. Yoste.

20 *MR. YOSTE:* I'm Harry Yoste. I'm from
21 Gulfport.

22 Mr. Corder told us who was opposed to
23 42. He said public employees, teachers,
24 administrators, business people.

25 Mr. Corder, I know who's against 42.

1 It's one group of people, and they are elected
2 representatives and senators who we send to
3 Jackson. Those are the ones who are opposed
4 to 42, and they're the ones who want you to be
5 confused by the alternative, 42A.

6 The Secretary of State provided you with
7 the language of the Constitution as it reads
8 today at the top of your handouts, and the
9 legislative proposal under 42A, and also 42.
10 If you read through those -- they're in red --
11 the only significant difference is the fact
12 that in 42 there's a provision that allows the
13 chancery court to review what the legislature
14 has done. We're told that that's going to
15 take the legislature out of the equation.
16 That's not true. The legislature is in the
17 equation.

18 The problem is that, under the law, the
19 legislature can do anything they want to, and
20 the court cannot touch them. The only time
21 the court system can say something about the
22 legislature and how they act and what they
23 vote on is if there is a constitutional
24 provision. So putting that constitutional
25 provision into effect through 42 would give

1 the court system some right and power to
2 review what the legislature has done.

3 Now, we've had a very recent case with
4 Governor Musgrove has tried to get the
5 legislature to fund what it didn't fund under
6 MAEP. That suit was not successful, partly
7 because they didn't break any laws, as was
8 said. They have all kinds of laws. They
9 follow the law. They are the lawmaking body.
10 They didn't violate the Constitution either.

11 The change now would add a
12 constitutional provision that would subject
13 the legislature to some review. And we're
14 told that's a terrible thing. Well, I'm a
15 lawyer, and I see courts reviewing actions of
16 common people every day, and I don't think the
17 legislature should be left out of that
18 process.

19 There was a case 15 years ago right
20 after 2000 when the census was taken and we
21 had to go from five districts to four. Some
22 folks sued because the legislature would not
23 redistrict as they were required to do by the
24 law, by the Mississippi law. That case was --

25 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Take a minute,

1 Mr. Yoste. You go ahead and finish if you'd
2 like to.

3 *MR. YOSTE:* All right.

4 I was going to say that Chief Justice
5 Bill Waller, in his review of that court
6 suit -- which was dismissed because there was
7 no authority to question the legislature -- he
8 said, "Mississippi too often defaults in
9 meeting its responsibilities as a state."

10 Amen.

11 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Thank you.

12 Joyce Helmick. Ms. Helmick. She's been
13 at all of them, I think. Ms. Helmick is from
14 Hernando, Mississippi.

15 *MS. HELMICK:* Good evening. I'm Joyce
16 Helmick. I was going to use my teacher
17 voice. I am a 37-year veteran of the
18 Mississippi public schools. I am also a
19 product of the public schools in
20 Mississippi. My children are; my husband
21 is; my whole family is. My grandchildren
22 will be in public schools. One of them is
23 in kindergarten.

24 But tonight I rise as president of the
25 Mississippi Association of Educators, and I

1 speak for thousands of educators and parents
2 across this state who know for sure that the
3 only way that our state lawmakers will ever do
4 the right thing by our students and fully fund
5 is through Initiative 42.

6 Now, it was mentioned and kind of
7 touched on about leaky roofs, buses, and those
8 things. In my job I travel across the state,
9 so in the past three weeks I have been to all
10 of these except the one in Hattiesburg. And
11 as all of that has been going on, I have
12 visited several schools. And in my two years
13 as president of this organization, I have
14 visited schools in every area of this state.

15 Now, let me give you some reality. Just
16 this year in the past couple of weeks I
17 visited a district where there were 37
18 students in a fifth-grade class. And the
19 principal said to me, "I don't know what I'm
20 going to do. I can't get another teacher. I
21 don't even have an assistant to put in there
22 with that teacher."

23 Another district, 19-year-old school
24 buses. How many of you drive a 19-year-old
25 car? I mean, I drive my cars until the wheels

1 fall off, but very few of us drive a
2 19-year-old car. Nineteen-year-old school
3 buses, folks. Not just one or two.

4 Now, talking about leaky roofs -- this
5 is reality -- I was visiting a school during a
6 rainstorm. The principal runs in. He's got
7 pants wet from his knees down. His shoes are
8 soaked. And he says, "I can't meet with you.
9 I have three rooms where the roof is leaking.
10 I've got to do something. But worse of all,
11 it's time for the kids to get out of school,
12 and I just had an awning fall."

13 There's a teacher shortage in our school
14 districts. There are two districts -- and I
15 won't mention where those two schools -- half
16 of the faculty are TFA teachers. Now, for
17 those of you who don't know, those are
18 Teachers for America teachers who come here to
19 Mississippi -- and some of them are really
20 good teachers -- but they are coming to do
21 their good deed to get their loans paid off.
22 And they stay two years, and they are out of
23 here. They are not invested in our students
24 across this state. But half of two buildings
25 that I visited, half of the faculty is TFA.

1 Now, last week I visited a school where
2 the principal came to the school in the
3 summer, and there were 11 -- 11, mind you --
4 vacancies in his school in elementary. He
5 doesn't qualify for those TFA teachers. So he
6 goes to the Philippines and brings in 11
7 educators with master's degrees from the
8 Philippines. This is a teacher exchange
9 program. And this is an F school. And he is
10 determined, with those educators and the ones
11 who were there, they are going to dig in and
12 bring that school up. No extra funds.
13 Nothing.

14 I want to mention that I was at a
15 school -- a couple of schools -- elementary,
16 absolutely no playground equipment whatsoever.
17 None, zip, zilch. Now, you guys live in a
18 great school district. I was at a school here
19 where they had three different playground
20 things, and they're three stories high.
21 That's marvelous. I mean, I'm a high school
22 teacher, but I love those playgrounds. I
23 mean, goodness gracious, that's awesome. But
24 that speaks to what your schools have that our
25 other school districts do not have.

1 I speak for educators, and that is why I
2 am here to tell it you that our educators and
3 the parents of our public school children
4 support 42A [as said].

5 Thank you.

6 *AUDIENCE MEMBERS:* No, no.

7 *MS. HELMICK:* No, no, no. Please.
8 No, no, no, no.

9 By the way, Jarrius Adams, you are
10 absolutely my hero. Thank you.

11 *MR. ADAMS:* Thank you very much.

12 *MS. HELMICK:* Now, let me start all
13 over. That is why the educators and parents
14 in this state support -- are you ready
15 now? -- Initiative 42.

16 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Thank you.

17 Reilly Morse. Mr. Reilly Morse.

18 *MR. MORSE:* Good evening, everybody.

19 You know, we hear people who resist
20 Initiative 42 saying "Throwing more money at
21 our schools isn't going to improve things."
22 well, I want you to think for a moment of what
23 it meant to have \$5 billion thrown at the
24 Mississippi Gulf Coast and the region above it
25 to get our recovery back, the recovery that

1 we've heard praised so strongly.

2 Can you imagine if we had a fraction of
3 that kind of money every year to build and
4 strengthen the education of our students?

5 Now, that's what Initiative 42 proposes to do.

6 And we've had to go to the extent of
7 having to propose to amend our Constitution.
8 why? Because our legislature has demonstrated
9 15 out of 17 times -- am I right? -- 16 out of
10 18. That would put them in grad school or
11 maybe a postgrad degree of Fs. Right?
12 Eighteen years, and they can't get it right
13 but two years? That is the worst social
14 promotion I ever heard of in my life. All
15 right?

16 Now, next door upstairs was a little
17 lady who had her hair done perfectly every day
18 and had horn-rimmed bifocals and a voice that
19 was a lot higher than mine and a little
20 sharper than mine. That was my grandmother,
21 Birdie Reilly. She taught sixth grade here at
22 Mississippi City Elementary for decades. She
23 would have had no problem the first time out
24 getting Scotty or Greg or Frankie to
25 understand what "shall" means. And if they

1 didn't get it the second time, they would have
2 gone to the principal.

3 Now, the proponents of 42A want to
4 eliminate the principal. The proponents of
5 42A want to see nobody second-guessing them.

6 For our friend Mr. Corder to say the
7 courts have no role in this based on the
8 existing law is missing the fundamental point
9 of why we're having to make this change. We
10 have to make this change in order for a court
11 to be able to take action when we are faced
12 with a broken legislature. It's that simple.
13 And the legislature can avoid any problem, any
14 invasion of its prerogatives by simply doing
15 what it itself enacted into law -- or changing
16 that law. But it wants to have it both ways.
17 Well, in Ms. Riley's class you don't get to
18 have it both ways. You've got to do what
19 "shall" means, or you're going to go to the
20 principal's office. That's what ought to
21 happen here.

22 I want to mention to you that several
23 months ago in a big room like this, all of the
24 Gulf Coast business leaders and civic and
25 political folks gathered at a Gulf Coast

1 business council meeting to hear Carey wright,
2 the education superintendent, talk about
3 education. And I asked her how much did
4 Maryland, the state she came from, spend per
5 pupil. And it was something on the order of
6 13- to \$14,000. And I asked her how helpful
7 was that in business recruitment, and she
8 said, "Very helpful." And I said, "And how
9 much are we spending?" And it was around
10 8,000.

11 If we want to get up off of 50th, we've
12 got to invest in education. And as Ben
13 Franklin said, "That pays the best interest of
14 any investment out there."

15 Thank you.

16 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Thank you, Mr. Morse.

17 Matt Williams. Mr. Williams is from
18 Biloxi, Mississippi.

19 *MR. WILLIAMS:* Hello, everyone. Thank
20 you.

21 Matt Williams from Biloxi. My day job
22 is the policy and data analyst at the
23 Mississippi Center for Justice. I'm going to
24 put some numbers into this discussion.

25 First of all, Initiative 42 will lay the

1 foundation to compel full funding of the
2 Mississippi Adequate Education Program. And
3 in less wealthy districts Initiative 42 will
4 enable MAEP to provide the transformational
5 equity as originally intended.

6 Mississippi's legislature has never
7 given MAEP a chance to work. So 42 is crucial
8 to hold the legislature to what they promised
9 Mississippians in 1997. In the meantime
10 districts have been driven further into
11 economic distress, and we now have a competing
12 amendment that threatens to put MAEP's equity
13 principal or to keep it from ever coming to
14 life. And by now we've all heard the story of
15 the chronically underfunded MAEP. At this
16 point short \$1.7 billion.

17 There are many ways to measure a school
18 district's general financial health, and so
19 I'm going to put this out there. Several
20 years ago the Office of the State Auditor sent
21 out a brief to all school districts, and they
22 said, "What you need to do to maintain a
23 healthy fund balance and to reserve some rainy
24 day funds is to reserve 7.5 percent of the
25 revenue you take in each year."

1 So according to my analysis of 2013-2014
2 school district financial data that I got from
3 the state superintendent's office, the average
4 gain in revenue over expenditure, the average
5 percentage of revenue that school districts
6 are able to retain in Mississippi is just
7 3 percent; far short of that 7.5 percent that
8 the state auditor recommends. My analysis
9 found that 49 districts actually have spent
10 more on operational costs during the 2013-2014
11 year than they received in total revenue. On
12 average these districts spent 3.5 percent more
13 than they received in revenue.

14 while a lot of districts -- the majority
15 of districts -- spend, as they should, less on
16 operational expenses than they receive in
17 revenue, they are only able to retain, on
18 average, about 6 percent; still short of the
19 OSA's recommendation for a healthy fund
20 balance.

21 only 25 school districts in the entire
22 state have been able to retain the recommended
23 share of revenue during that year. And the 49
24 districts that are spending more -- that spent
25 more than they received, they're going to have

1 to dip into the previous year's savings for
2 the upcoming year's expenses, assuming they're
3 available. And most of the districts that are
4 able to retain some portion of their revenue
5 didn't achieve the adequate savings according
6 to the state auditor.

7 School districts can't afford more
8 erosion of public education funding. Many are
9 already getting way too comfortable on the
10 edge of financial instability. They've tapped
11 out local tax bases. Initiative 42 is
12 necessary to put all children on equal
13 footing. And that's it.

14 Thank you.

15 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Thank you,
16 Mr. Williams. Thank you for being on time.

17 Reilly Morse. Mr. Morse is from
18 Gulfport.

19 *MR. MORSE:* I've spoken.

20 *MR. HOSEMANN:* You already spoke. I
21 had you down twice. I'm sorry. My bad.

22 Christie Yoste. Ms. Yoste is from
23 Gulfport, Mississippi.

24 *MS. YOSTE:* Good evening.

25 I'm for 42 very simply because I'm

1 selfish. My two daughters, who are 24 and 26,
2 both graduated from Gulfport High School.
3 They went to college out of state, and they
4 now live out of state. One lives in
5 Washington, D.C., and one lives in Annapolis.

6 Given the chance to find jobs -- and my
7 eldest just recently was in a position to look
8 for another job -- I said -- I had
9 suggestions. "What about this company in
10 Jackson? What about this place in Gulfport?
11 Come home. I miss you."

12 She said, "Mother, there is nothing for
13 me in Mississippi."

14 And this makes me really sad, and it
15 makes me mad that because of our state
16 legislature -- and many members who I know
17 very well -- but I'm angry that my girls don't
18 think they can come home to raise their
19 families in the state that they love so well.
20 And I'm mad and I'm fed up.

21 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Thank you, Ms. Yoste.

22 Julia Weaver. Ms. Weaver is from Ocean
23 Springs.

24 *MS. WEAVER:* You stole my thunder.

25 I was going to say I'm Julia Weaver, and

1 I'm from Ocean Springs. I'm a parent of two
2 public school students -- two high school
3 students.

4 And I wanted to say first a few words
5 about MAEP. We haven't touched on that very
6 much. Mississippi Adequate Education Program,
7 why did we adopt that in 1997? That was the
8 legislature wanting to avoid lawsuits based on
9 inequitable funding between poor districts and
10 rich districts. And this funding is meant to
11 provide a base level so that every child has
12 access to a C-level education in our state.
13 And that if we want to get to an A or a B
14 level, you can use your local tax dollars to
15 do that.

16 So when we fail to fund the formula,
17 we're saying -- especially to poor
18 districts -- "Too bad. I'm sorry." And I
19 guess being a mom makes me really
20 tenderhearted. And to think about -- I said
21 this earlier -- children in Itta Bena or
22 Leakesville or Hazlehurst being told, "Sorry,
23 we're not going to provide for a C-level
24 education." I'm fed up.

25 I'm also a founder of a new Fed Up with

1 50th group of parents. We have a social media
2 campaign. We have exactly zero money. We
3 have no budget. In any case, so that's who we
4 are.

5 But I also wanted to say that you've
6 heard recently that the House budget chairman,
7 Herb Frierson, called agency heads and
8 presidents of the universities together and
9 told them to get ready for an 8 percent budget
10 cut. Agency heads have been asked to tell
11 their employees to get ready to be fired and
12 laid off.

13 I find this very mysterious because I
14 happened to be paying attention during the
15 legislative session of 2015. And Lieutenant
16 Governor Tate Reeves, in the middle of the
17 session, entered a bill -- he called it a
18 taxpayer pay raise act -- that would have
19 reduced -- that would have a tax cut of
20 \$382 million. Speaker Philip Gunn, not to be
21 outdone, proposed a tax cut proposal that
22 would phase out the state personal income tax,
23 which would have cost the state \$1.38 billion.

24 And I was paying attention, and I can
25 tell you that there were zero meetings with

1 state budget -- with state agency heads asking
2 them how this was going to affect their
3 budgets and to be ready for cuts. I find that
4 very mysterious; that a proposal to provide an
5 adequate education for little children in Itta
6 Bena or an excellent education for my children
7 in Ocean Springs is going to cause us to get
8 everybody in the room together and say, "watch
9 out. Your job is on the line." where, if
10 it's my proposal, I can cut \$1.38 billion out
11 of the budget and we're going to magically
12 make things all right?

13 So, anyway, I find that very mysterious.
14 I would encourage you to find it mysterious,
15 too, and to vote for 42 and against 42A.

16 Thank you.

17 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Thank you, Ms. Weaver.

18 Rebecca Guidry. Ms. Guidry is from
19 Gulfport.

20 *MS. GUIDRY:* Good evening.

21 I'm Rebecca Guidry, and I live in
22 Gulfport. My son is a first-grader in the
23 Gulfport School District, and I support
24 Initiative 42.

25 I became aware of the challenges that

1 our public schools face when my son entered
2 kindergarten last year. Our PTA was helping
3 to fund a range of items, from sidewalk repair
4 to additional computers that are required for
5 testing. The library relies on proceeds from
6 book fairs to restock shelves with new books.
7 Teachers' wish lists include books and other
8 learning aids for the classroom. And, yes,
9 I've even pitched in with glue sticks when the
10 teacher has sent home a note to the parents
11 looking for additional supplies.

12 The problem, as I see is, is that no one
13 is being held accountable for shortchanging
14 our schools -- it's been said several times --
15 over 1.7 billion. Initiative 42 adds that
16 layer of accountability to ensure that the
17 laws that our legislators have passed,
18 including but limited to MAEP, are upheld.

19 Public education, given adequate and
20 efficient resources, is the best opportunity
21 for our children, our community, and our state
22 to be successful. In November when I see that
23 initiative on the ballot, I will be voting
24 yes, and then 42.

25 Thank you.

1 an alderman for four years. I was a state
2 senator for eight years, and I was a county
3 supervisor for eight years. And when our
4 leaders in Jackson talk about that they
5 haven't raised taxes, that they have -- I've
6 heard figures that next year the rainy day
7 fund will be up to a billion dollars, but
8 they're not raising taxes.

9 But here on the Coast in the coastal
10 schools, the figures from, like, '09 to '14,
11 these schools were underfunded about
12 \$69 million. And I just want to tell you
13 that, when you have that underfunding, that is
14 passed on to your local boards, your local
15 school boards, your supervisors, your city
16 council, and that is passed on to all of you.
17 So whether it's a millage increase or
18 whatever, you're having to pay for that. And
19 it's time that we take responsibility in
20 Jackson.

21 As I'm running for lieutenant governor,
22 I will commit to you that we will fully fund
23 our schools to make sure they have the
24 resources they need. Because I say this to
25 the rainy day fund: It's raining in our

1 schools. It's raining.

2 I would encourage each of you to support
3 42. Vote for it November 3rd. And I'm Tim
4 Johnson. I just want to thank you for
5 allowing me to be here today. And I believe
6 in your cause, and I want to tell you I have
7 this contribution for your group. You don't
8 take money? Okay. I'll give it to a school.

9 Thank y'all so much.

10 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Congratulations on not
11 taking money. I think the individual effort
12 is always more than monetary effort.

13 Robin Boswell. Ms. Boswell is from
14 Ocean Springs, Mississippi. And no
15 inappropriate language they're reminding you.

16 *MS. BOSWELL:* That's a joke.

17 I'm Robin Boswell. I am from Ocean
18 Springs, and I am a parent of two public
19 school children in Ocean Springs -- a senior
20 and a fourth-grader.

21 what I want to say today is I thought we
22 were waiting to have enough money. Okay?
23 I've been waiting because we were having to
24 tighten up our belts in Mississippi. Right?
25 And we're used to that. And so when we got

1 enough money and I started hearing that,
2 "well, we're still not going to be able to
3 fund the schools," that's when I started
4 thinking, "Okay, this does not make sense, and
5 I had better start doing some research."

6 And I wondered what was happening in my
7 school district. well, in my school district
8 of Ocean Springs, which is -- sorry, Pass
9 Christian -- we're the best, we had already
10 had to eliminate 41 positions. And our
11 classes were crowded. And we didn't have
12 enough buses to run the bus routes that we
13 needed. Our children were on the bus way too
14 early. And then we were looking at
15 eliminating our top academic program, the
16 International Baccalaureate program; which, if
17 you get an International Baccalaureate
18 diploma, you get 24 or more hours in college
19 at a Mississippi school. And I just didn't
20 think it made sense.

21 So this is what I thought. I'm kind of
22 lofty. "well, wait a minute. As soon as they
23 hear from people from good schools from our
24 party, they're going to do it. Right?
25 They're going to do it."

1 So we just started talking to the people
2 we elected. But guess what I found out? "No,
3 no. We're not going to vote. We're not going
4 to vote for MAEP. And there are a lot of
5 reasons."

6 Okay, I don't understand it. It has
7 something to do with there are some people
8 that are apparently just -- I don't know --
9 taking the money home? I don't know. It
10 doesn't make sense. I really still don't
11 know.

12 So this is what I started researching.
13 Who are they listening to? Because they're
14 not listening to me, and they're not listening
15 to anybody I know that is saying, "Hey, we
16 want y'all to vote to fund the schools." A
17 lot of them are friends of mine, and they
18 didn't vote. They voted to underfund our
19 schools, and I didn't understand it.

20 So as I researched it -- and this was
21 strange -- as 42A came up -- and do you
22 remember when it came up? It had all that
23 marked-out language of what the Constitution
24 said and what this one ballot said, and this
25 one was redacted. It was hard to read, but I

1 could do it because what you don't know is I
2 am a lawyer, but I don't practice anymore.
3 I'm an English teacher, and I like that
4 better.

5 I actually started researching, and
6 here's what I found: The loudest voices
7 against 42 were actually people who have
8 started these nonprofit organizations. And
9 every -- and I looked them up. One is usually
10 here, Mr. Latino. He started one just a month
11 ago, and it is called Kids -- Mississippi Kids
12 First or something. It does not represent my
13 children. But it actually is there for
14 educational funding reform.

15 And the other loud voice was a man named
16 Mr. Grant Callen, and he has started a group
17 called Empower Mississippi. And, actually,
18 one of his incorporators -- I looked at your
19 website -- his incorporator was Mr. Latino.
20 Anyway, he's for education funding or
21 education reform.

22 well, when I started looking a little
23 more, I found something called the American
24 Legislative Exchange Council, and it consists
25 of businesses. And they treat our leaders to

1 trips and conferences where they teach them
2 about laws that they need to come back and
3 pass in their states. And if you will look at
4 some recent laws in our state, you can
5 actually find them on their website, too,
6 because that's where they came from.

7 So I'm thinking all these groups are
8 funded from companies, and those companies
9 make profits from profit charter schools,
10 virtual schools. Who wants to put their kid
11 in a virtual school? I don't. I don't. And
12 also companies that are going to sell products
13 to those places.

14 Okay. So am I voting for 42 because I'm
15 uninformed? which we've been told we are.
16 Heavens no. I'm very, very informed.

17 Most of our state leaders, they've
18 stopped listening to those of us who sent them
19 to represent us. Ninety percent of our
20 students go to public schools. That's where
21 we put them. They've switched channels. Mine
22 listen to me, but they don't do what I ask.
23 They do listen. They do. They do give me
24 that favor. They have switched channels from
25 the people of Mississippi channel over to the

1 moneymaking voucher channel. That's where it
2 is.

3 *MS. BRANDON:* Ms. Boswell, let's wrap
4 it up.

5 *MS. BOSWELL:* So when you hear them
6 brag about all their laws and reform and
7 they actually spent more money than MAEP,
8 they've spent more money, y'all, all of
9 those are things that they passed that they
10 control. They don't put it in the control
11 of our superintendents, our school board. I
12 have a school board member who is a very,
13 very smart person who I want to make
14 decisions for my children. They leave it
15 where they control it. Okay, so they're not
16 listening to the people.

17 *MS. BRANDON:* Ms. Boswell, we need to
18 move on.

19 *MS. BOSWELL:* Thank you.

20 And they're not making decisions in the
21 best interest of my children. And so for that
22 reason I don't want them making the decision
23 that they've been making. The best indicator
24 of future performance is what? Past
25 performance. Vote 42. I'll be there.

1 *MS. BRANDON:* Mr. Dawkins from Pass
2 Christian.

3 *MR. DAWKINS:* Good evening. How is
4 everybody doing today? I really do
5 appreciate Mr. Adams, too, over there. I
6 really think it was the best thing said.

7 what I want to talk to you about just
8 for a brief little short period of time is a
9 personal situation. I come from -- yes, Pass
10 Christian is the well-known best public school
11 in the state. I mean, I'm not putting myself
12 above anyplace else, but this school district
13 has done such a phenomenal job every year.
14 And my child has been going there for the past
15 two years in pre-K receiving special services.

16 I go to a special needs conference
17 meeting a few weeks ago, and I saw and I
18 pretty much read the budget reports. This,
19 the number one school district in the state of
20 Mississippi, was \$85,000 in the hole after the
21 fact. And they've spent as much money as they
22 could, but yet they were still going to have
23 to be slighted \$85,000. This is not
24 acceptable. This is not acceptable.

25 And from what -- I will ask this from

1 each person that is thinking about this. This
2 is one single question: would you rather --
3 do you want your children to be able to go to
4 great schools? I believe that every person,
5 every parent wants their child to go to great
6 schools. Do you want your children to be able
7 to advance afterwards? That is the most
8 important question. And I believe -- I truly
9 honestly believe everybody in here is a great
10 parent, those that are parents. I believe
11 every single person is a great parent and hope
12 that their kids can advance.

13 And I'm certainly in question of that
14 to -- and I've also known Mr. Frierson for
15 around 15 years, and I pretty much know that
16 he was throwing you a poker face right off the
17 bat, because the fact of the matter is the
18 schools are owed this money; because after the
19 State Constitution was passed in 1997, these
20 state agencies already had this in their
21 budget to be able to give this amount of money
22 for the school funding because the adequate
23 education was supposed to happen. Yet, this
24 didn't happen. And we are trying to make this
25 happen. Please vote for 42.

1 Thank you very much.

2 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you, Mr. Dawkins.
3 James Crowell from Biloxi.

4 *MR. CROWELL:* Good evening.

5 My name is James Crowell, and I'm the
6 local president of the NAACP here in Biloxi.
7 And I was really kind of taken back by some of
8 the statements that I heard from the ordained
9 minister from Pascagoula.

10 I really feel -- I'm up here because,
11 you know, we had a personal issue in our city
12 where we had a school that was a STAR school
13 in our city, that was a majority minority
14 school, that was brand-new, had the technology
15 that any school would want. And the children
16 in that school academically achieved a STAR
17 rating from our state. No other school in the
18 Biloxi School District elementary achieved
19 that. And then a couple of years later it was
20 closed. And the reason that we were told that
21 the school was closed was because of money;
22 that they couldn't afford to keep that school
23 open.

24 So what we did was to go out and try to
25 help the school district by asking some people

1 to give us the money. We said, "How much does
2 it cost to keep this school open for a year?"

3 And they said, "450- or -60,000
4 dollars."

5 So we went to Kellogg Foundation and
6 said, "Can you give us \$460,000 so we can
7 continue?"

8 Because the community had their heads up
9 in the air. You know, this is unheard of for
10 a majority minority school to be doing so
11 well. "Something is going on right in this
12 school, and we ought to support this." And
13 they said, "we're going to support it too.
14 we're going to give you the money. We're
15 going to let you have that money for three
16 years, and then you-all work with the school
17 district and try to work something out after
18 those three years are up."

19 Had we had the adequate funding from our
20 state with the MAEP, we wouldn't have been in
21 that situation. We wouldn't have to close
22 down a school that's doing great things
23 because we don't have the funding.

24 I've heard the saying that "A rising
25 tide raises all boats." I think everybody, if

1 we get the funding, I was told -- I'm pretty
2 sure a lot of you heard this too -- if we vote
3 in gaming, that that money would go to
4 education, and we would have the funding that
5 we need to keep education going. And we know
6 what happened to that money when the
7 legislature got it.

8 So how can we continue to trust people
9 that do these kind of things and say they're
10 going to do this without coming up with an
11 initiative like 42? I'm going to support it.
12 I'm going to vote for it.

13 We've got Nichols back open again. We
14 have a pre-K program in there. But it's not
15 open because the state legislature did it;
16 it's open because Kellogg's was able to help
17 fund, and the school district found a few more
18 dollars to keep and bring the other school
19 classes back in there.

20 So let's vote for 42 so we won't have
21 that to happen again. Thank you.

22 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you, Mr. Crowell.

23 Robin Cooley from Ocean Springs.

24 *MS. COOLEY:* I'm Robin Cooley from
25 Ocean Springs. I'm the president of the

1 League of Women Voters of the Mississippi
2 Gulf Coast. I'm the parent of a
3 third-grader, and I'm a former teacher.

4 There is a lot of passion in this room.
5 And as I've sat up here, I've changed what I
6 was going to say about four times. There are
7 a lot of informed people in this room more
8 informed than me. And so all I want to do is
9 try to give a voice to those who are not here
10 tonight.

11 Those who are not here tonight are a lot
12 of children and a lot of parents who are in
13 school districts that are way worse off than
14 ours. I'm concerned about too many children
15 in my child's classroom. Other people are
16 concerned about their children staying dry
17 when it's raining, having outdated books, and
18 even unsafe buildings. Let's be a voice for
19 those who don't have a voice, and that is the
20 children.

21 The League of Women Voters of
22 Mississippi supports a strong public education
23 for all Mississippi children. I do too. Even
24 those who don't make straight A's, even those
25 who don't have new technology and new books,

1 even those who don't have someone in here
2 tonight from their home. We can speak for
3 them. Vote 42.

4 Thank you.

5 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you, Ms. Cooley.
6 Next is Tara Skelton from St. Martin.

7 *MS. SKELTON:* Hi. I'm Tara Skelton,
8 and I am fed up. I'm one of those ladies.

9 And it seems like -- I really wasn't
10 sure what I was going to talk about because it
11 seems like every day I'm fed up about
12 something new. So I will go with what I was
13 fed up about this morning, and that was an
14 article I read in the newspaper that there's a
15 Costco opening in Ridgeland, Mississippi, that
16 got \$29 million of my tax money to open a
17 Costco. It just so happens that that is
18 exactly the amount that is owed to Jackson
19 County Schools, \$29 million. So what that
20 tells me is that my elected leaders whom I
21 have had many long conversations with about
22 the importance of my school to me as a
23 taxpaying voter, that, to them, what is more
24 important is giving the people of suburban
25 Jackson access to low-cost toilet paper than

1 giving my kids an adequate education. That is
2 what that tells me.

3 For them to say the money is not in the
4 budget is laughable. The money is in the
5 budget. They could find the money. They
6 don't want to find the money. I want them to
7 find the money.

8 Again, I'm being a little bit selfish.
9 I don't have an option. I have a son who has
10 special needs. He has to go to public school.
11 I tried to enroll him at St. Alphonsus. They
12 said, "Thank you, ma'am, but we can't help
13 him. You need to go look at St. Martin."

14 So I went to St. Martin. He's had a
15 wonderful education, and so has my daughter.
16 I love it there. But every year the class
17 sizes get a little bit bigger. We have one
18 band director for middle school and one band
19 director for high school. They sit in front
20 of classes that have like 100 kids in there.
21 Can you imagine sitting in front of 100
22 13-year-olds every day? Does that sound fun
23 to you? That doesn't sound fun to me. I used
24 to teach high school. That's not fun.

25 So \$29 million would pay for more

1 teachers. And things like -- you know, they
2 talk about the programs that they have done,
3 like the teacher pay raise. Who could be
4 against that? You know, teachers do need to
5 get paid more. Well, here's the thing: If
6 you don't fund it, it actually winds up
7 hurting the school systems. Because if the
8 systems are ordered to give every teacher a
9 raise and they don't have the money in the
10 budget to do it, what happens then is when
11 somebody retires or quits or moves or
12 whatever, they don't replace them because they
13 can't afford it. And then suddenly you've got
14 a kindergarten classroom that's got 31 kids in
15 it, which is what they have at St. Martin East
16 right now. And that's unacceptable to me.

17 So I'm being selfish. I want my A- and
18 B-rated schools to stay A- and B-rated. I pay
19 my taxes. I follow the law. They need to
20 too. That is the only way I see to make them do
21 that. So I'm fed up.

22 Thank you.

23 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you.

24 Lisa Pomeroy from Ocean Springs.

25 Another front row.

1 *MS. POMEROY:* Hi. I'm Lisa Pomeroy,
2 and I am yet another Fed-Up mama from Ocean
3 Springs, Mississippi. And my daughter goes
4 to a great school in a wonderful school
5 district, and I'm very blessed.

6 And I'm here to talk to you about one of
7 the long-term repercussions for not voting for
8 42. I'm a military spouse. My husband is a
9 lieutenant colonel in the United States Air
10 Force. He's a cardiologist. I don't know if
11 you've noticed when you go to the doctor how
12 many of your physicians are actually former
13 military. I don't know if you are aware of
14 how many people who own businesses here are
15 former military. Your engineers, your
16 architects, the pilots, you know, at Gulfport
17 Airport, they are former military. They help
18 make the Coast grow. They help make up the
19 Coast. And it used to be because we have
20 great schools.

21 But we've lost confidence. We don't
22 have confidence because the legislators aren't
23 giving us any confidence. I may have an
24 A-rated school, but for how long? There's
25 limited books; there are bigger classrooms.

1 we know what happens down the line if we don't
2 fund our schools.

3 So I will tell you that a year ago Ocean
4 Springs was on my short list of places to
5 retire. We retire in January of '19. We
6 could set up a medical practice here. We
7 could live happily ever after. But it's no
8 longer on my list, and it won't be until we
9 fully fund our schools. And when we vote in
10 42, I'll put it back. But I'm not alone.
11 You're not just going to lose me -- and I'm a
12 big loss -- it is also all of my military
13 friends. The engineers, the pilots, the other
14 physicians, the techs -- they have taken
15 Mississippi off their list. They used to not
16 just -- you know, "This will be the last
17 posting. wow, I love it. I'm going to stay."
18 They come back after being all over the United
19 States and around the world. They've come
20 back here. We're not doing it anymore. We're
21 not interested because the Mississippi
22 Legislature isn't interested in helping our
23 children. And until we get full funding and
24 until we vote 42 in, the military, we're just
25 going to move back home.

1 So please vote for 42A and -- did I say
2 42A? I'm sorry. Don't vote for 42A. See,
3 there you go. That's the point. They're
4 trying to confuse us. They've even got me
5 addled. So vote for 42. Keep me in
6 Mississippi.

7 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you.

8 Mavis Mason from St. Martin.

9 *MS. MASON:* Hi. I kind of came here
10 more to support my friend. I had an idea of
11 what 42 was. Now I'm kind of mad.

12 I didn't grow up here, but I love it in
13 Mississippi. I mean, Mississippi is awesome.
14 My kids are so proud of the state of
15 Mississippi. I don't know what to say. It's
16 just -- it's so important.

17 And I see everybody here is for 42, so
18 I've got nothing else to say but make sure you
19 vote. And that's it.

20 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you.

21 Julie Winckler from Jackson.

22 *MS. WINCKLER:* Good evening.

23 My name is Julie. I'm from Jackson. I
24 work for the Parents' Campaign, actually. But
25 I don't care about this issue because I work

1 for them; I work for them because I care about
2 this issue. It's very personal to me.

3 I have a first-grader, and when he
4 started school, I started doing all the things
5 that good parents do, which is raise money. I
6 was clipping boxtops, selling raffle tickets,
7 buying Carnations, doing whatever it takes.
8 But I realized this is a frustrating and
9 futile effort because I cannot clip enough
10 boxtops to buy the things that really make a
11 difference to my child's education. I cannot
12 offer him a world class 21st Century education
13 with raffle tickets.

14 And that's when I started paying
15 attention to what the legislature is doing and
16 realized, "Hum, there is a law in place that
17 tells us how much we need to fund our public
18 schools to an adequate level, and we are not
19 following that law."

20 And when I met with my senator, he said,
21 "we don't have the political will to do that."

22 And on a side note -- and so that's when
23 I got involved, and that's when I contacted
24 the Parents' Campaign and said, "what more can
25 I do?"

1 Now, I know parents all over the state
2 are just as mad as we are. They're
3 everywhere. There are parents, and there are
4 30,000 teachers in this state, and there is a
5 grassroots movement, a swell for better public
6 schools. And that's what Initiative 42
7 represents. So this is about the people of
8 this state trying to take charge and take
9 power back.

10 This week I talked to a parent who
11 called one of our offices for one of our
12 statewide leaders, and they were able to speak
13 with a staff person about Initiative 42. And
14 that staff person said to them, "But what if a
15 mom gets mad and sues the state?" That's what
16 they think about us. "What if one of those
17 moms just gets angry and sues us because we
18 don't fully fund our schools?" Exactly.
19 That's right. We're coming for you. We are
20 here to pass this constitutional amendment so
21 that we can do something about it when you
22 ignore us.

23 I know y'all are with me. This is a
24 great crowd. If our energy could do it alone,
25 this would have been passed yesterday. But

1 what I am really scared about is that we have
2 two months from today, and the truth is this
3 is a serious get-out-the-vote effort, and I'm
4 sure Patsy can attest to that. This is about
5 getting hundreds of thousands of people to the
6 polls. And it is going to take every one of
7 us because the legislature clearly is doing
8 everything they can, as she said, to work
9 against us and thwart the people's movement.
10 And they are coming up with things right now
11 in some room somewhere that we can't even
12 imagine yet to try to kill this initiative.

13 So between now and November 3rd we have
14 to do everything we can to make it happen.
15 And that means use social media, weekly
16 tweets, Facebook posts. That means a sticker
17 on our cars. That means yard signs. That
18 means telling our friends. That means
19 postcards. The campaign has great postcards
20 that you can send personal notes to your
21 friends and ask them to vote. People need to
22 be personally asked to vote for this because
23 they're hearing all kinds of things, and
24 they're scared. And they should be scared
25 because the lawmakers are threatening,

1 coercing, intimidating. People are afraid for
2 their jobs. How can they go and vote for 42
3 when someone just told them they're going to
4 lose their job?

5 We've got to let the people we know in
6 our communities -- we have to tell them those
7 are -- that's called coercion, actually.
8 There's some ethical questions about what's
9 being done right now. You don't have to
10 believe it. These people are not trustworthy.
11 Let's think about it. Parents and educators
12 or politicians -- who do you believe? But
13 people might succumb to some of this pressure,
14 and it is incumbent upon us to move with our
15 feet. We can pray, we can hope, and we can
16 use Facebook, and we can use Twitter, and we
17 can put the sticker on our car, and we can
18 tell all our friends at PTA, and we can send
19 e-mails; we can send personal requests to our
20 friends.

21 So I wanted to ask you to join me in
22 doing that for the next two months, doing
23 everything we can to let voters know, because
24 we need hundreds of thousands of votes. And
25 we're up against some pretty powerful folks

1 who are not wanting to relinquish that power,
2 and they clearly will do just about anything
3 to keep that power.

4 Vote Initiative 42 November 3rd. Thank
5 you.

6 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you.

7 Tom Clark from Petal.

8 *MR. CLARK:* I have absolutely nothing
9 prepared to say. All this stuff came in my
10 mind of what I wanted to say, but y'all all
11 have said it.

12 My name is Tom Clark. I have
13 represented education for 46 years now, and
14 I've been listening to this debate about
15 funding for as long as I can remember. You
16 know, one thing about it: Public educators
17 are terrible politicians. We don't know how.
18 I love to see this effort here tonight,
19 though.

20 But Jarrius -- is Jarrius still in here?

21 *AUDIENCE MEMBERS:* Yeah. He's riding
22 with us.

23 *MR. CLARK:* Oh, he's riding with you.
24 There you go.

25 Have y'all figured out how old Jarrius

1 is? He graduated 2015. Didn't he say that?
2 So at about 18 years old he understands this
3 stuff better than most of us. That's a
4 product of public schools right there. A
5 great product. We need more of them. We
6 can't get them in some schools because there's
7 not enough funding. Hattiesburg has actually
8 got a pretty good fund base. I mean, they've
9 got, you know, funding to educate their
10 children.

11 Now, we have a lot of poverty in this
12 state. Of course we do. And funding is going
13 to help bring that up.

14 I've been listening, like I said,
15 since -- I came to Mississippi in 1979 as a
16 coach and a teacher, and I got into
17 administration in the '80s. And I'm telling
18 you it's been the same dang argument. So in
19 '97 when they passed the MAEP, I said,
20 "Finally Mississippi has stepped up. They'd
21 and going to do something that's going to
22 really make a difference." And they choose
23 not to follow their own law for the next ever
24 how many years that's been. Two times. And,
25 by the way, I want you to know it was during

1 election year that they did it.

2 Now, this year they didn't do that. Had
3 enough political whatever to not do it. So
4 what do they do? Give the teachers a raise.
5 Last year and this year. Was it election year
6 this year too?

7 So I'm saying to you this: 42 is where
8 we need to go, even though some of my best --
9 and I don't think there's any bad. We live in
10 America. Thank God we can have public forums.

11 And I will tell you that Delbert
12 Hosemann didn't have to have but five. He's
13 having seven.

14 *AUDIENCE MEMBERS:* Eight.

15 *MR. CLARK:* Eight. Y'all know.

16 That means he understands -- and I have
17 no idea how he falls, and I'm not going to ask
18 him, but he understands the importance of this
19 initiative.

20 So what I'm saying to you is just
21 remember to tell all your friends. Because
22 most of us don't understand it, just like this
23 young lady said; and she's emotional now about
24 it.

25 And by the way, we're 50th. We are.

1 And you know what? I think I heard the other
2 day we're the only state in the union that
3 doesn't have a constitutional amendment like
4 this, a constitutional mandate to fund
5 education adequately. I don't care where they
6 get the money; we just need to fund it
7 adequately so we'll get up off 50th.

8 That's all I have to say.

9 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you, Mr. Clark.

10 Erica Carter from Pass Christian.

11 *MS. CARTER:* So Mr. Corder had some
12 comments I wanted to address. He argued
13 trust the legislature. I get the e-mails.
14 I follow Fed Up, and I get the campaign --
15 the Parents' Campaign e-mails. But I don't
16 just trust those; I like to make up my own
17 mind.

18 So I think a lot of people know that the
19 legislature live streams their debates, so I
20 made a point -- when they started debating the
21 education funding, I made a point to watch.
22 And I'm on my little iPhone, and so whoever
23 came up there very earnestly -- he went up to
24 the podium and said, "You know, we all want to
25 fund education, you know, but the funds just

1 aren't there."

2 My phone's small. I don't know if he
3 wiped away a tear or not. But they did a
4 little bit of funding. They did the teacher
5 pay raise and I think a little bit extra. And
6 then a week, maybe two weeks later they were
7 back in session debating ending the income
8 tax.

9 So I'm curious how does this work. So
10 I'm watching that. And there was an amendment
11 put with that income tax that they would not
12 reduce the income tax until education was
13 fully funded. And it was party line rejected.

14 So they say, "Trust the legislature."
15 well, I say, "which is more important? what
16 they say or what they do?" And they've shown
17 very clearly that they're not going to fund
18 education.

19 So I'm with Pass Christian. I think
20 there's a few people here.

21 One of the other comments was that A
22 schools manage their resources better. That
23 kind of irritates me. There's a big debate,
24 you know, "Throw more money at education and
25 you don't get the improvements." There's one

1 thing that I've seen that correlates with
2 successful schools, and that's poverty. And
3 Mississippi has a major problem with poverty,
4 and I don't know what the answer is going to
5 be. I know throwing more money isn't really
6 going to help until people are brought out of
7 poverty, but we've got to at least give them
8 the foundation.

9 And I think the teachers are the ones
10 that are going to pull us out, and we've got
11 to make it where the teachers want to stay in
12 Mississippi. And even in Pass Christian I see
13 a pretty high turnover in teachers, and I
14 can't imagine what it's like in some of these
15 poor-performing schools where they have so
16 much challenges and then they don't have the
17 support of our legislature.

18 So for those reasons I'm supporting
19 Amendment 42.

20 *MS. BRANDON:* Nancy Loome from
21 Clinton.

22 *MS. LOOME:* Thank you.

23 I don't think you-all need to be
24 convinced that you need to vote for Initiative
25 42, but you might need to be convinced to

1 please spend some time, as Julie said, in the
2 next two months making sure that all of your
3 neighbors vote for Initiative 42. There is
4 very broad support for this among parents
5 across the state, but there is a tremendous
6 effort out there with lots of money behind it
7 to defeat it. There are lots of threats and
8 intimidation, and there's lots and lots of
9 misinformation, and you've heard a lot of
10 that.

11 How many of you have heard that, if the
12 MAEP is fully funded, that it will hurt the
13 school districts on the Coast? That the
14 school districts on the Coast will get less
15 money if they fund MAEP.

16 well, that is the most ridiculous -- I
17 can't even imagine anybody saying it, but I
18 have actual proof that that's not true right
19 here. This is a spreadsheet that the
20 Mississippi Department of Education sent out
21 to every school district this year. They
22 always send a spreadsheet telling each
23 district how much money they'll get. And this
24 year they included another column that showed
25 what each district would have gotten had they

1 been fully funded. And without exception, of
2 course every single school district would have
3 received significantly more money had they
4 been fully funded.

5 So that's just an example of the silly
6 things that are out there but that people
7 sometimes believe when a person who seems to
8 be an authority tells them that it's true. So
9 you need to go and tell all your friends and
10 neighbors that all of these threats and
11 intimidation and the things that they're
12 hearing, telling them they should not vote for
13 Initiative 42, those are scare tactics to get
14 you to vote against yourself. Don't do it.
15 Help us make sure. We've got to have hundreds
16 of thousands of people vote for this.

17 The leadership of the legislature is
18 working night and day to stack the deck
19 against us. They are working in tandem with
20 corporate lobbyists to stack the deck against
21 us. They've done that over the course of
22 many, many years by doing things like -- did
23 you know there is a law that says that retired
24 educators and any retired state employee
25 cannot draw their retirement and serve in the

1 legislature? That's to keep all of you from
2 being able to run against them. They pass
3 these sunshine laws with a great big parasol
4 over the Mississippi Legislature so that
5 there's no sunshine on them. We don't get to
6 see their e-mails and things that they send on
7 state time and state funding. So they're
8 stacking the deck against us.

9 But we still -- we still have the power
10 at the ballot box to say no. We know better.
11 We want our schools fully funded. But we've
12 got to motivate all of our friends and
13 neighbors to go out, to get on Facebook, get
14 on social media, send e-mails to your friends.
15 Let them know where you stand.

16 Teachers, do not let your voices be
17 silenced through intimidation. You are
18 citizens of the United States of America. You
19 have the same protection of your speech that
20 all the rest of us do. Don't let them silence
21 you. Tell everybody you know to vote for
22 Initiative 42. It's the most important work
23 we can do for our children in the next two
24 months, and it will take all of us to get it
25 done. Just because all of us here support

1 that doesn't mean that we've got this in the
2 bag. They're going to make it hard, I promise
3 you. Help us spread the word and get this
4 done for our kids.

5 Thanks so much for all you're already
6 doing.

7 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you.

8 Leon Sootin from Gulfport. Did I get
9 that right?

10 *MR. SOOTIN:* You got it right.

11 I'm really nervous. Is there anybody in
12 this room that doesn't want to get Mississippi
13 off the bottom? I didn't think so. How many
14 people in this room that are left want to get
15 Mississippi off the bottom? I agree with you.
16 What I don't agree with -- and I know I'm
17 going to get ripped to shreds on this --
18 number one, I've heard about education. Both
19 my parents taught in inner city schools in the
20 '60s, '70s, '80s in Miami. And inner city
21 schools in Miami are a lot different than what
22 we call underprivileged or underfunded schools
23 here. My parents also fought very strongly
24 for vocational education because it helps
25 keeps these kids in schools. The sports

1 activities, the band, the choruses, the music.
2 And I am a fighter for funding for these
3 schools.

4 But what bothers me and I'm concerned
5 with is who decides what's adequate or not,
6 and is it going to create -- and my parents
7 always taught me growing up, "Son, be careful
8 what you wish for because you just may get
9 it." One of the things that concerns me the
10 most is, number one, creating a battle between
11 elected officials and a judge.

12 I've already heard 1.5 million.
13 1.7 million, 1.8 million just tonight.

14 *AUDIENCE MEMBERS:* Billion.

15 *SPEAKER:* Billion. I'm sorry.
16 Billion. Just tonight. I don't know the
17 details.

18 what I learned I went online, like a lot
19 of people were, and what I read from various
20 articles that appeared in the paper. What I
21 am saying my biggest concern is and other
22 friends that I've talked with is we want to
23 see education funded, but we want it done
24 through our elected officials. And if they
25 don't do it and if they're pushed, then we

1 need to get them out of office and politically
2 remove them.

3 But what scares me, quite frankly,
4 because what we've seen nationwide in other
5 states is to have a judge make these decisions
6 scares me and scares a lot of other people.

7 I'm not as smart as most of you in this
8 room. You know, I graduated college and
9 started working, became a single dad. My
10 girls graduated from here. And I won't say
11 their names, or they'd kill me.

12 But the main idea is right now I listen
13 to the different sides. I agree with you.
14 But what concerns me -- and I'm blunt about
15 it -- is when you bypass elected officials and
16 have someone who is not elected to office
17 making financial decisions for the state,
18 that's what scares me. And I know there's
19 debate on how it's done and the steps. And
20 I'm not an attorney, but whenever I've seen
21 attorneys involved in situations, it costs
22 everybody a lot, and a lot of times there ends
23 up not being a winner.

24 I support education, the full funding of
25 education, but I don't feel comfortable with

1 having a battle and going to a judge to make
2 the decision.

3 Thank you.

4 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you.

5 Roberta Avila from Biloxi.

6 *MS. AVILA:* Good evening.

7 I am here for a very selfish reason --
8 because I care about the state of Mississippi.
9 I consider myself a relentless Mississippian,
10 and I want to be sure that all of our
11 children -- not just my children -- have an
12 adequate and excellent education. And for
13 that reason I support Initiative 42.

14 I have a child who graduated from high
15 school in 2014, and she's going to the
16 community college here in Biloxi. And it's
17 critical that our community colleges are fully
18 funded and adequately funded so that all of
19 our children and all students going to
20 community colleges get the best education they
21 can.

22 My son Brandon started at Lopez
23 Elementary in kindergarten, and I watched him
24 go through up to -- he's a junior now in high
25 school. But I noticed that when he was in

1 middle school, he wasn't doing so well in
2 school. So I would meet with his teachers,
3 and I would say, "what can we do to help him?"

4 And they'd say, "well, you know, we have
5 these textbooks here that he could check out"
6 because there weren't enough textbooks for all
7 students.

8 I would buy the book, and I would bring
9 it home. And I'd say, "So you don't have to
10 worry about having to return the book." well,
11 he didn't like that, but that was my strategy
12 to say there's no excuse; there's absolutely
13 no excuse. well, I'm happy to say that he got
14 through middle school. He's a junior in
15 Biloxi High School. Biloxi High School is an
16 A-rated school. I'm happy for him to be going
17 to that school. They're seeing stars at
18 Biloxi High School, but they aren't seeing
19 textbooks.

20 For the orientation for parents, every
21 single class that I went to, the teacher
22 announced, "we won't be issuing any textbooks
23 because" -- as they point to a shelf over
24 there -- "because there aren't enough
25 textbooks to go around."

1 Now, this is an A-rated school, and we
2 don't have enough textbooks for our children?
3 So what does that say about the other school
4 districts where there are even fewer
5 resources?

6 So I encourage everyone to vote for
7 Initiative 42 and to defeat 42A. And 42, vote
8 it through.

9 Thank you.

10 *MS. BRANDON:* Lynn Blackwell from
11 Gulfport.

12 *MR. BLACKWELL:* Every now and then
13 when I'm in despair, I come to something
14 like this, and it makes me realize how much
15 I love the state of Mississippi.

16 Willie Morris quoted William Faulkner as
17 saying "To understand the world, you must
18 first understand a place like Mississippi."

19 And, you know, we have to cut the
20 legislature a little bit of slack because
21 they, in the '50s, wanted to abolish the
22 public schools. That was how they were going
23 to deal with the *Brown v. Board* case, you
24 know. We'll just retire from the playing
25 field, and that would be the way we'd handle

1 it. Thank goodness they didn't do that.

2 This is the state that had no
3 state-supported schools until the
4 Reconstruction Era after the Civil War. So we
5 got a late start, and we haven't been doing
6 very well.

7 But this is also the state that has
8 produced people like William Faulkner and
9 Willie Morris and Eudora Welty, and many other
10 award-winning writers and scientists and
11 doctors and business people. And a lot of
12 those business people are for 42. Take Jim
13 Barksdale.

14 We have some of the best and brightest
15 children in the world and some of the hardest
16 working and most dedicated teachers. They're
17 having to buy their own supplies and work
18 overtime without extra pay, but they're doing
19 it.

20 But we don't have a good record on
21 public education. Even though every credible
22 economic development expert says that the key
23 to good jobs in our state is by having a
24 better education system, we stay on the
25 bottom. It is in the numbers. Mississippi

1 spends less money per pupil than Louisiana,
2 less than Tennessee, less than Alabama, less
3 than Florida, less than Georgia, less than
4 Arkansas. Let that sink in.

5 when an industrialist -- and I've
6 brought some of them -- comes to look for a
7 place to locate a factory and to find a place
8 for his executives to live, what is the first
9 question that is asked? "How are the
10 schools?" If we want to succeed in the
11 competitive business environment, we must fund
12 our schools adequately.

13 And, by the way, that word is not in the
14 Constitution right now. It says "free public
15 schools," but it doesn't say "adequate."
16 That's why we need 42. I respect the
17 legislature and the governor and the
18 lieutenant governor, but we've tried their
19 way.

20 For three of the last four years the
21 state has had sufficient moneys coming in to
22 fully fund K through 12 in our state without
23 cutting any other agency budgets. But our
24 leaders have chosen not to do so. And sadly,
25 now that over 200,000 of our people have risen

1 up and said that we want this adequate
2 education initiative, 42, they have proposed a
3 decoy initiative. And it looks to me like
4 they've done everything possible to defeat
5 this wonderful effort by the people. It makes
6 me wonder what they're afraid of.

7 We have over 500,000 kids who attend our
8 public schools in Mississippi. Almost
9 90 percent of our children are in public
10 schools.

11 I would urge you not to be misled by the
12 scare tactics that are being used by the
13 opponents of Initiative 42. Besides
14 concocting that decoy to throw us off, they've
15 argued that the initiative will cut the
16 budgets of every agency or cause taxes to be
17 raised. This is simply not true. The
18 petition for Initiative 42 says very plainly
19 that funding increases are to be based on
20 increases in general state revenues. This is
21 a very conservative way to bring our schools
22 up to par.

23 And there are other scare tactics
24 involved -- the question that the gentleman
25 brought up earlier -- and that is the

1 enforcement mechanism of the courts. Guess
2 who sets the judge as the arbiter of whether
3 the Constitution is determined to be followed
4 or not? The legislature. They're not taken
5 out of this equation at all. And it is quite
6 common for the Chancery Court of Hinds County
7 to hear matters on appeal from state agencies
8 like the Public Service Commission.

9 *AUDIENCE MEMBERS:* And are they
10 elected?

11 *MR. BLACKWELL:* And they are
12 absolutely elected. And then it will not
13 stop with them, because there will be two
14 sides. It will be argued, and it would go
15 to the supreme court, which is elected in
16 all three districts of Mississippi. So this
17 is not a departure from our Democratic
18 system.

19 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you, sir.

20 *MR. BLACKWELL:* Let me just say this,
21 and I'll close. And I know I take too long.

22 I attended the public schools. My
23 parents were teachers. My grandmother taught
24 here for 50 years in Harrison County.

25 My grandchildren came to town the other

1 day, and they played a game with me, and it's
2 called the *Game of Life*. Some of y'all may
3 know that game. We didn't have it when I was
4 coming up. But on the board the players move
5 their pieces, and they make their choices.
6 And invariably, if you chose the education
7 route, you tend to win the game by making more
8 imaginary money and enjoying the good things
9 about life. That's what I want for this
10 state. And that's why I support Initiative
11 42.

12 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you, sir.

13 And on that note this concludes our
14 seventh of eight public hearings. Our last
15 public hearing to be held by the Secretary of
16 State's office will be in Brookhaven,
17 Mississippi, next Tuesday, September 8th.
18 We'll be at the Lampton Auditorium of the
19 Mississippi School of the Arts.

20 I encourage each of you tonight to go to
21 the website, the Secretary of State's website.
22 It's www.sos.ms.gov. Click on the
23 "initiatives" tab. We have as much
24 information as we can put up there about
25 Initiative 42, 42A, as well as the

1 Constitution, and other information.

2 If you have not spoken tonight and would
3 still like to have your voice heard, as you
4 leave, there's a small display. There's some
5 cards out there where you can make a written
6 comment. You can leave them here tonight or
7 you can e-mail to initiatives@sos.ms.gov.
8 We'll post those on our website so everyone
9 around the state can read it.

10 See you at the polls on November 3rd.
11 Be safe driving home. Thank you.

12 (PROCEEDINGS CONCLUDED AT 7:45 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 105 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 5th day of October, 2015.

Sharron F. Allen, CSR, RPR
SHARRON F. ALLEN, CSR, RPR
CSR NO. 1144

My Commission Expires:

November 5, 2015