

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

TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC HEARING

The Temple Theater
2320 8th Street
Meridian, Mississippi 39301
On Thursday, August 20, 2015
at 5:30 p.m.

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

1 *MR. HOSEMANN:* First, thank everyone
2 for coming this evening. Let me explain a
3 little bit about what we're doing, and then
4 we'll get started on time.

5 The Mississippi Legislature, in 1990,
6 adopted a process in which citizens could
7 propose a constitutional amendment. It began
8 with Number 1 and now we're up to Number 42.

9 During that period of time four
10 constitutional amendments have been submitted
11 to the voters. The first was term limits,
12 which was defeated by the voters. The second
13 one, which was a very important one, was voter
14 ID, imminent domain, and personhood. Imminent
15 domain and voter ID passed by 72 and 62
16 percent of the ballot. So in Mississippi
17 history we have had two constitutional
18 amendments passed by initiative and two failed
19 by initiative.

20 This past year -- it requires 107,000
21 signatures to be on the ballot. This past
22 year a number in excess of 107,000 was
23 obtained by Mississippi residents who were
24 qualified voters, and you're required to get
25 these in each of the Congressional districts.

1 Under that process the Section 42
2 amendment to the Constitution was proposed. A
3 ballot initiative was issued by Attorney
4 General Jim Hood, and it was proposed for the
5 ballot in November of this year.

6 When the legislature met this past year,
7 the legislature proposed a competing
8 amendment, which will be listed as 42A on the
9 ballot.

10 So for the first time in the history of
11 Mississippi, you have competing amendments
12 from which to choose. In addition, you have
13 of course whether or not to amend the
14 Constitution at all.

15 Now, in your chairs you should have a
16 copy of our booklet, a pamphlet on these
17 particular ones. The way that we will conduct
18 these hearings -- we're required to do five,
19 and we're doing eight around in the state of
20 Mississippi. We allow the opponents and
21 proponents for each side to give their views.
22 And then we have provided for you in front of
23 you a microphone for citizen statements.

24 The citizen statements are usually in
25 the two-minute range. And we transcribe each

1 and every one of them. You will see your
2 statements on the website. So don't say
3 anything that you really don't want to be
4 public. Watch your language.

5 We are blessed tonight to have -- it's
6 always precious to have members of the
7 Mississippi Highway Patrol here with us.
8 Thank y'all very much. Let's give them a
9 round of applause.

10 We are also pleased to have
11 Representative Johnny Stringer. I saw him
12 come in. There he is in the back here.

13 Representative Charles Young is here.
14 Welcome.

15 This evening we will start the process
16 by having each of these individuals speak for
17 and against the two competing amendments.
18 After that we will begin with the public
19 commentary.

20 We are on our fourth one of these, and
21 I'll be able to stay for a good bit of this
22 one. After, I have to go to another meeting.
23 Lea Anne will be here to continue on until
24 such time as every person who wants to speak
25 will be allowed to do so. In the past we have

1 stayed at the other events until almost
2 7:30 or 8:00.

3 I think it's critical -- Mississippi has
4 addressed term limits, personhood, imminent
5 domain, the right to vote, and now education.
6 Some of the basic things that we as a
7 citizenry propose have been addressed by
8 public discourse. And unless I miss my bet,
9 tonight you will hear your neighbors speak
10 eloquently for and against these individual
11 groups. And you will hear them and you will
12 learn things from them. You see the news
13 media. They will be reporting on things that
14 are said tonight -- some of them.

15 So without further ado, Ms. Rana
16 Mitchell is going to speak on behalf of
17 Initiative 42.

18 *MS. MITCHELL:* Thank you so much.
19 Thank you for allowing me to speak here
20 today.

21 My name is Rana Mitchell, and I'm here
22 today in support of Initiative 42 for better
23 schools.

24 Guys, I'm here tonight as a parent. I'm
25 not a lawyer; I'm not a politician; I'm not a

1 Lobbyist. I'm a mother. I'm a mother of two
2 boys who attend public school in Eupora.
3 There are many reasons that I'm here tonight
4 to speak to you, but they are two of the most
5 important reasons that I am here. And I am
6 about to embarrass them and make them stand up
7 and wave.

8 walker and woods, wave to everybody.

9 I'm also the assistant superintendent in
10 the Carroll County Public School District.
11 I'm partially responsible for the educational
12 success of over 1,000 students, so I do know
13 firsthand the importance of Initiative 42.

14 I think we can all agree that every
15 child in Mississippi has a fundamental right
16 to a free and appropriate public education.
17 That education means several things. It means
18 safe and modern buildings. It means
19 classrooms that don't leak when it rains. It
20 means up-to-date computers, technology, and
21 lab equipment, enough textbooks for every
22 child to take home to do their homework at
23 night. It means smaller class sizes, more
24 college prep classes, and safe buses.

25 In 1997 our legislature passed a law

1 called the Mississippi Adequate Education
2 Program to adequately fund K-12 education in
3 every school district in our state. Yet,
4 since 1997 the legislature has repeatedly
5 broken its own law and severely underfunded
6 every school in Mississippi.

7 The results are clear. Local school
8 districts are being shortchanged. Local
9 property taxes have gone up. Too many schools
10 have too few teachers, outdated textbooks, old
11 facilities, unsafe buses, and a lack of
12 computers.

13 The underfunding of our schools is
14 hurting our state's ability to attract
15 companies to move here. And our students,
16 they are not learning the skills companies are
17 looking for. The results of this is hurting
18 our ability to grow and attract good-paying
19 jobs.

20 In one school district facilities are in
21 such need of repair that, when it rains,
22 teachers have to put down wooden pallets so
23 kids can walk to class.

24 In my own school district our
25 superintendent pays money out of his own

1 pocket to supplement teacher salaries.

2 And all of you here in Lauderdale County
3 in Meridian, you have been shortchanged
4 \$44 million since 2008. That's enough money
5 for 127 new teachers for ten years. I just
6 want you to let that sink in. 127 new
7 teachers for ten years.

8 It's stories like these in schools all
9 across our state that harm our kids, that sell
10 us short, and scare companies away from doing
11 business with us in Mississippi, and they're
12 costing us jobs.

13 We can do better. We can have better
14 schools, better jobs, and a better future for
15 our kids and our state.

16 So I'm here tonight to talk to you about
17 Initiative 42. What is Initiative 42? Well,
18 nearly 200,000 Mississippians from every
19 county and both political parties signed
20 petitions to place Initiative 42 on this
21 year's ballot. As you know, this is a
22 bipartisan movement. Mothers, fathers,
23 teachers, business leaders -- everyone
24 understands that underfunding our schools
25 damages our state's economy and our future.

1 Initiative 42 will require the
2 legislature to adequately fund Mississippi's
3 public schools under the 1997 law they passed.
4 This will help every school in our state.

5 The opponents of 42, they'll tell you
6 that it means one judge in Hinds County, one
7 judge in Bolivar County, one judge in Forrest
8 County, one judge in any county could decide
9 how much money our schools will get. That's
10 simply not true. All the judge would do is
11 ensure that the legislature is spending the
12 money on education as required under their own
13 law. Your local school board, you, your
14 community, you get the funding; you set your
15 priorities; and this gives you local control
16 and helps you keep your property taxes down.

17 Initiative 42 would not require raising
18 taxes or cutting the state budget, period. As
19 stated on every petition signed by nearly
20 200,000 Mississippians last year, funding can
21 be phased in over seven years using the
22 general fund revenue from the state budget.
23 Those revenues, they have grown an average of
24 almost 5 percent each year over the last ten
25 years. Just a quarter of that growth, do you

1 know what it amounts to? \$37.5 million per
2 year. At that rate it would only take seven
3 years to fully fund the Mississippi Adequate
4 Education Program.

5 So it's time. It is time to start
6 giving every Mississippi child the education
7 they deserve. Our schools should have
8 sufficient funding to provide each and every
9 child with a 21st Century education so they
10 have the tools needed to either attend college
11 or go to technical school and just have the
12 skills that they need for these 21st Century
13 jobs.

14 Better schools will help our state grow.
15 When looking to relocate, y'all know companies
16 are increasingly looking for a highly educated
17 work force. Better schools will attract new
18 businesses to our state. It will help drive
19 economic growth and strengthen our
20 communities. Better schools will lead to
21 better jobs and higher wages.

22 In closing, in November you can decide
23 whether to increase funding for public
24 education or allow the legislature to continue
25 to underfund our schools.

1 42 is an investment in the future of our
2 children. 42 is an investment in our state.
3 42 means better jobs. It means better
4 schools, better jobs, higher wages, and more
5 economic growth for our state.

6 I urge you to study the facts. If you
7 haven't already, visit the 42 website at
8 42forbetterschools.org. And when you go
9 there, you can look and see exactly how much
10 your local schools are being underfunded.
11 Look that up. Then go get your property tax
12 bill. They're related. The more that the
13 state underfunds us, the more your local taxes
14 go up. The money has to come from somewhere.
15 we can fix that with 42.

16 Talk to your friends. Talk to your
17 neighbors. Democrats, Republicans -- it does
18 not matter. Everyone in Mississippi
19 understands that our schools have been
20 shortchanged, our kids have been shortchanged,
21 and our economy has been shortchanged. And 42
22 is our chance to really make a difference.

23 Thank you.

24 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Thank you,
25 Ms. Mitchell.

1 You need to remember those standing
2 ovations. You don't get very many of those.
3 I'm still waiting for mine.

4 Representative Greg Snowden is the
5 president pro tempore of the Mississippi House
6 of Representatives, and he speaks in -- are
7 you speaking opposed? You're speaking in
8 favor of -- you'll be speaking against
9 Amendment 42.

10 *REP. SNOWDEN:* That's correct. Thank
11 you, Mr. Secretary.

12 My name is Greg Snowden. I'm honored to
13 represent this state in the Mississippi
14 legislature for the last 16 years. For 12 of
15 those years I was in the minority; the last
16 four years I've been honored to serve as
17 speaker pro tempore, which is the second
18 highest office in the House of Representative.

19 Most of you know me. I'm from here in
20 Meridian. I grew up in the east end. I
21 attended Witherspoon Elementary School, Kate
22 Griffin Junior High School, and Meridian High
23 School. I am a product of public schools. My
24 children, both daughters, are a product of the
25 public schools. They attended public schools

1 all the way. Both graduated from Meridian
2 high school. My wife is from Birmingham,
3 Alabama, where she's a product of public
4 schools. She's been a teacher in the Meridian
5 Public Schools and now in Lauderdale County
6 schools for over 20 years. My oldest
7 daughter, Emily, is a school teacher in
8 Hamilton, Texas. She previously taught in the
9 Pearl River County Schools.

10 So I can stand before you without any
11 problem telling you I'm a product of public
12 schools, I'm a supporter of public schools,
13 and I'm a defender of public schools.

14 I come here tonight to speak against the
15 adoption of Initiative 42 and in favor of
16 Alternative Measure 42A. Let me say at the
17 outset I don't expect to persuade anybody
18 here. I don't expect to convince anyone here.
19 That's not the nature of these hearings.
20 There's nothing wrong with that. The truth is
21 it's not for that purpose, and nobody's
22 kidding themselves about that. The reason
23 we're here is to give our side and put this in
24 front of the community at large and hopefully
25 answer some questions as we move forward in

1 this process. I'm not here to convince you.
2 I'm not here to be convinced. The truth is
3 the petitioners have put the initiative on the
4 ballot, and the legislators have already done
5 all they're going to do. Everything now is up
6 to the voters. In November it's going to be
7 entirely up to the voters, and that's where we
8 are now. I promise to respect your opinions,
9 and I hope you will extend me the same
10 courtesy. If nothing else, we can agree to
11 disagree. We all have an equal voice and vote
12 in November.

13 And I'm going to tell you some things
14 tonight that maybe you've not heard before.
15 I'm certain there are some things you probably
16 will not like to hear -- some of you. All I
17 can do is state the truth as I believe it to
18 be.

19 I think it's instructive to begin with a
20 little bit of history of the funding of public
21 education this evening. You've been told --
22 and told tonight -- that the legislature has
23 shortchanged schools, cheated students, and
24 we've broken the law. None of that is true.
25 I'll say that again. None of that is true.

1 I'll explain why in a minute.

2 It is true the MAEP formula has only
3 been fully funded twice since its adoption.
4 The first time was in 2003, which was an
5 election year. I stand here before you and
6 say that was a mistake. There's no way the
7 legislature should have fully funded MAEP in
8 2003. We didn't have the money to do that.
9 And the proof is in the pudding, because when
10 Haley Barbour was elected in 2004, the very
11 next year, we had a \$700 million structural
12 deficit. We simply spent money we did not
13 have. That was the first time that we funded
14 MAEP and we shouldn't have. We didn't have
15 the money.

16 And in 2007 MAEP was fully funded, and
17 that was not a mistake. We had the money in
18 2007. The reason was somewhat of an anomaly,
19 but that was the Katrina bump and was before
20 the recession hit. We had a lot of revenue,
21 and we did fully fund the MAEP formula in
22 2007.

23 Something you probably have not been
24 told -- let me say this too. People sometimes
25 ask, "You haven't fully funded since 2007.

1 what haven't you changed it then?"

2 well, folks, I stand before you and tell
3 you we've not been trying to change the
4 formula; we've been trying to fund the
5 formula.

6 Here are some things you probably have
7 not heard: First of all, the legislature has
8 voted twice -- twice -- to fully fund MAEP
9 since 2007. You may have not heard that
10 before, but in 2008 and 2009, both of those
11 years the legislature voted to fully fund
12 MAEP. But you know what happened? Both of
13 those years in the middle of year the
14 revenues did not come in and cuts had to be
15 made. Not just MAEP, but everything else.

16 In fact, in 2009, which is fiscal year
17 2010, the revenues for that one fiscal year
18 were over \$400 million less than what we had
19 just the year before in 2008. Massive,
20 massive reduction in our revenues, and so it
21 was not fully funded.

22 Following that time, from fiscal year
23 2009 until fiscal year 2013 cumulatively,
24 state revenues were down over \$1.1 billion
25 from what they had been in fiscal year 2008.

1 Now, you've been told about being
2 shortchanged. Someone said tonight the amount
3 of money it was. You may have seen a "Know
4 these Numbers" sheet where it says Meridian
5 Public Schools underfunded \$17 million since
6 2008, Lauderdale County Schools \$21 million.

7 Well, folks, I can stand here and say
8 that's accurate when you talk about the amount
9 of underfunding, because the funds were not
10 there. There was over \$1 billion shortcoming
11 in our revenues. That's money that never
12 reached the state coffers. We didn't
13 shortchange the schools. We were trying to do
14 what we could do.

15 That's why I submit you need to look at
16 this history, because it is not true that the
17 legislature has shortchanged you. It's not
18 the case.

19 Now, over the past four years, since
20 fiscal year 2013, we finally were able to
21 achieve the record level we had in 2008.
22 Since that time in 2012 the legislature has
23 increased education funding at all levels by
24 \$395 million. Our per-student expenditures
25 are in the mid-40s -- 46, 47 -- in the

1 country. But as a percentage of income, we
2 rank 16th; 16th in this country. We're
3 struggling, but we're moving forward.

4 There was \$288 million in K through 12
5 increase over the last four years,
6 \$225 million increase in MAEP, which includes
7 the second largest teacher pay raise in our
8 state history increase of \$70 million to
9 universities and \$36 million increase to our
10 community junior colleges.

11 The allocation we passed this year for K
12 through 12 is \$106 million more than it was
13 last year. Highest expenditure of K through
14 12 education in the history, \$395 million, and
15 every Republican and every Democrat in the
16 House of Representatives voted for that
17 budget. And on behalf of the Senate there
18 were only two or three senators that voted
19 against that budget. Everyone in the House
20 chamber, when that budget was presented,
21 understood that was a good budget for K
22 through 12 education. It was a huge move
23 forward. We're proud of what we did. Okay?

24 I want you to understand if you look at
25 the total MAEP allocation locally -- okay --

1 Lauderdale County Schools, a total of
2 \$32.7 million. Now, that's up \$359,000 from
3 last year. I understand some teachers were,
4 told the legislature had cut K-12 funding.
5 That is not true. Lauderdale County Schools,
6 \$32.7 million. Meridian Public Schools
7 \$24.7 million. That's up \$558,000 from last
8 year. Much smaller districts, but Enterprise
9 and Quitman, they are all up.

10 I do want to make one point,
11 particularly to the classroom teachers that
12 are here. I hope you understand that if K
13 through 12 is funded and nothing else happens,
14 the amount of pay raise for teachers is
15 exactly zero. Increasing MAEP funding does
16 nothing for teacher salaries. We have to do
17 that separately. Now, we do fund it through
18 the formula, but separation is required. One
19 of the things Initiative 42 would do if it
20 passes and has the effect that proponents say
21 it does, resulting in fully funding MAEP,
22 teacher pay raises jumps to the end of the
23 line and are going to be much more difficult
24 to achieve with full funding. Now --

25 *AUDIENCE MEMBERS:* Oh, my God.

1 *REP. SNOWDEN:* Okay.

2 The MAEP formula is calculated, among
3 other things, calculated on four components:
4 Instruction component, which is the largest
5 component, administration cost, maintenance
6 and operations cost, and ancillary component.

7 In 2008 the administrative component of
8 MAEP Base Student Cost was \$686. In fiscal
9 year 2012 it jumped to \$1,003, an increase of
10 46.25 percent in the administrative component
11 of MAEP. Over that same period, instructional
12 costs raised 6.8 percent. That included
13 teacher pay raises.

14 I want you to consider what's funded
15 outside of the MAEP formula. \$155 million
16 goes to K through 12 that's not part of the
17 MAEP formula. One is teacher supplies and
18 instructional material. Okay? \$12 million
19 now. And interestingly, in 2012 that amount
20 was \$6 million. And what's really interesting
21 is the law says it's supposed to be
22 26 million. It was diverted from teacher
23 supplies into MAEP. The same thing happened
24 with ad valorem reduction fund. It was
25 \$46 million. We were not able to get that.

1 Public school building fund was \$40 million.
2 That money was diverted because MAEP was
3 considered so important they took that money.

4 Our need is to put more money in the
5 classroom. Some of you are probably national
6 board-certified teachers. That's not through
7 MAEP. The legislature has to fund that
8 separately. We can all do that if we have the
9 revenue to do it. We have to take the first
10 slice out of MAEP. That's not going to happen
11 likely.

12 So if you've heard nothing else I've
13 said tonight, I want you to hear this one
14 thing. The legislature has to reason to be
15 defensive and certainly not apologetic or
16 embarrassed by our support of K through 12
17 education, particularly over the last four
18 years. We're proud of it. I want you to know
19 that. We've taken some big steps to moving
20 forward. We've not shortchanged anybody;
21 we've not cheated anybody. Now, have we been
22 able to fully fund the formula? No, we
23 haven't, but we've been moving forward.

24 One important thing I want you to hang
25 on to: Over the last four years the

1 legislature has allocated an average of
2 28 percent of general fund revenue growth to K
3 through 12. We're ahead of the pace that the
4 proponents of Initiative 42 said they want.

5 I hope I've illustrated why Initiated 42
6 is unnecessary. I'm going to speak to 42A. I
7 don't know if Delbert wants me to sit down.

8 *MR. HOSEMANN:* You've got eight
9 minutes left.

10 *REP. SNOWDEN:* I'll just stay right
11 here.

12 I am standing before you as the primary
13 author of House Concurrent Resolution 9 which
14 established Alternative Measure 42A. You have
15 been told it is fake, some sort of trick, a
16 dirty trick. None of that is true. I want
17 you to know I'm grateful to have had the
18 opportunity to have written Alternative
19 Measure 42A and to lead the legislature to
20 adopt it. I want to explain to you why it was
21 absolutely necessary.

22 When Initiative 42 was filed by the
23 proponents, the ballot title as filed by the
24 proponent read: "Should the state be required
25 to provide for the support of an adequate and

1 efficient system of free public schools?"

2 That's all it said. Well, you might as
3 well have said "baseball, Mom, and apple pie."

4 Initiative 42 proponents never intended
5 to have this debate. They never intended to
6 explain their proposal. They gambled the
7 legislature would not have the political will
8 or have the good sense to propose an
9 alternative. They lost that gamble we did
10 bring it forward. We did it explicitly to
11 shine a light on the differences between 42
12 and 42A.

13 what does Initiative 42 really do?
14 You've got the language in front of you. It
15 says that the "state" -- not the
16 legislature -- "the state shall provide for
17 the establishment, maintenance, and support of
18 an adequate and efficient system of free
19 public schools. The chancery courts of this
20 state shall have the power to enforce this
21 section with appropriate injunctive relief."

22 Now, when you take "legislature" out of
23 the Constitution and you insert "state," and
24 one sentence later you give the courts
25 authority to enforce that, ladies and

1 gentlemen, you are literally ensuring
2 separation of powers, and you are granting
3 legislative authority to the judicial branch.
4 This is highly inappropriate and should not
5 happen. what it does is create a new right to
6 sue -- something that does not exist now -- a
7 new right to sue to enforce that adequate and
8 efficient system, which is whatever the court
9 may determine to be.

10 It says nothing about funding per se.
11 It certainly says nothing about the MAEP
12 formula. when you were told that all
13 Initiative 42 does is require the legislature
14 to fully fund MAEP formula, that's patently
15 false. It doesn't even relate to the MAEP
16 formula. what it does is give someone the
17 right to sue to say, among other things,
18 adequate funding is not there.

19 And you've been told several things
20 about Initiative 42 that are not true, which
21 you wouldn't know about except for 42A. One
22 of those things is all it does is force the
23 legislature to fully fund the formula. That's
24 not true. MAEP and funding are not even
25 mentioned.

1 You've also been told it allows for a
2 phase-in. That's only if the court allows it.
3 It has nothing to do with -- there's nothing
4 at all binding on the court about this
5 phase-in, this seven-year phase-in. It's just
6 not there. And as I said, the legislature is
7 already at a faster pace than Initiative 42
8 proponents said that they want.

9 Let's talk about funding. Okay? What
10 would Initiative 42 do about funding? The
11 short answer is we don't know. We don't know
12 because we can't know. Here's the official
13 fiscal analysis for the amendment: "Because
14 this proposed amendment shifts funding
15 decisions from the legislature to the court
16 system, it is impossible to provide a specific
17 fiscal impact of Initiative 42."

18 It goes on to say what the impact would
19 be if the court system assumes that the MAEP
20 formula is to be enforced, \$201 million above
21 the fiscal year budget.

22 Now, the chairman of appropriations in
23 the House recently asked state agencies to
24 bring forward a plan if the court orders that
25 we have to fully fund the MAEP formula, which

1 certainly they have the authority in
2 Initiative 42 if it passes. What are you
3 going to do?

4 well, I'm telling you, ladies and
5 gentlemen, it's not a pretty picture. I've
6 got in front of me. This is not from the
7 legislature. This is from various state
8 agencies. "What would you do if this passes
9 and you have to make these cuts?"

10 The Arts Commission says it will impact
11 136 arts organizations and 36 schools
12 receiving MAC grants. The attorney general
13 says it would jeopardize a program that
14 investigates and prosecutes Medicaid fraud.
15 Community colleges. Community colleges says
16 tuition would increase from 7 percent to
17 45 percent, cap enrollment, eliminate some
18 academic and workforce training programs, and
19 reduce remedial offerings. This is from
20 community colleges. The MDA, weaken support,
21 less staff. It will impact existing industry
22 and tourism. IHL, institutes of higher
23 learning -- tuition increase from 7.4 percent
24 to 15 percent, reduce class services, and so
25 on. Mental health, the largest employer we

1 have in the state agencies. In the IDD
2 programs they will terminate 363 employees,
3 impacting 225 clients, close beds, community
4 group homes, adult day programs. Close their
5 crisis centers, six of those, 68 chemical
6 dependency units. So on, so on, so on.

7 This is from every state agency, ladies
8 and gentlemen. The legislature didn't make
9 this up. The agencies were responding to what
10 impact this would have if this passes.

11 Let's get real here. If initiative 42
12 passes and we have to make these cuts, some of
13 your friends and neighbors who work at East
14 Mississippi State Hospital and some of these
15 other facilities are going to lose their jobs.
16 That's what we're looking at here. These are
17 not scare tactics, as Herb Frierson was
18 accused of.

19 I will read you what the *Clarion-Ledger*,
20 said about what Chairman Frierson did. He
21 said, "His calling for agency heads to prepare
22 an emergency budget solution in case of a
23 7.8 percent cut is him being a responsible
24 chairman. The alternative would be
25 disastrous: To sit idly by and risk a reality

1 in which voters approve the amendment and a
2 judge orders full funding of MAEP."

3 Ladies and gentlemen, it's not
4 politicians or legislators necessarily that
5 are calling for opposition to Initiative 42.
6 Your community college and university
7 presidents are actively doing that. State
8 employees and agency heads are actively doing
9 that. Mississippi Manufacturers Association,
10 Mississippi Farm Bureau, Mississippi
11 Hospitality and Restaurants Association,
12 Mississippi Association of Realtors, and
13 Mississippi Bankers Association.

14 All of these folks have already come out
15 in opposition to 42, and there will be more.
16 Just about every association in this state is
17 reviewing it, and most of them are weighing in
18 in opposition to Initiative 42.

19 Initiative 42A provides authority to the
20 legislature -- which is appropriate -- and it
21 provides for effective public schools.

22 Now, I don't know if you want to change
23 the Constitution or not, but if you do, please
24 consider the legislative alternative, 42A,
25 which requires effective schools and doesn't

1 measure success on the amount of money
2 received.

3 I'm not here to convince you, but there
4 are serious issues here at stake. The very
5 core of our representative democracy is at
6 stake.

7 I want to thank you for the opportunity.
8 I'm from Meridian. This is my hometown.
9 Those of you who are not from Meridian, I want
10 to welcome you here.

11 Thank you very much.

12 *MR. HOSEMANN:* Thank you.

13 *MS. MITCHELL:* Before I begin, I do
14 want to respond to a couple of issues that
15 were brought up by Representative Snowden.

16 In talking about the measure and the
17 constitutional amendment and the words "state,
18 funds, the legislature," and all of these
19 words, you know what? I'm tired of words.
20 I'm tired of words. words have done us no
21 good in public education for the past couple
22 of decades.

23 when a public bus is broke down in my
24 district and we couldn't take kids home and we
25 had to borrow buses from other school

1 districts, words didn't help us. words do not
2 help my two kids have a full-time librarian at
3 their high school and elementary school.

4 we need action. Action is what matters.
5 we all know actions speak louder than words.

6 Secondly, the words about the phase-in
7 in the constitutional amendment:

8 Representative Snowden is right; he's correct.
9 The seven-year phase-in plan is not in the
10 amendment. But do you know what else is not
11 in the Constitution? The fact that they have
12 to fund MAEP in one year as Herb Frierson said
13 and scared everybody about budget cuts and
14 firing people. That's not in the
15 Constitution. They don't have to do that. We
16 gave them a responsible option, a roadmap for
17 funding. Now, if they have a better idea that
18 doesn't involve budget cuts, doesn't involve
19 raising your taxes, I think we can all agree
20 that we're all for it. we're all ears.
21 Right?

22 And the scare tactics and the
23 fearmongering, they're just trying to put
24 every single one of us against each other.
25 It's K-12 versus community colleges. And now

1 it's K-12 against our teachers. I mean, trial
2 lawyers, consolidation, budget cuts -- these
3 are all scare tactics. I mean, I think they
4 would throw in the kitchen sink to defeat 42
5 if they thought it would make a difference.

6 Now, as part of the session I am
7 supposed to get up and speak against 42A and
8 why it's so bad, but the thing is I never
9 heard anybody really speak for 42A. I didn't
10 hear why it was so good. What does that tell
11 you?

12 I'm going to play by the rules, and I am
13 going to tell you why 42A is so bad. People,
14 never before in the 198-year history of our
15 state has the state legislature ever gone
16 against the will of the people by placing an
17 alternative to an initiative measure on the
18 ballot. All those that he mentioned, no
19 alternative. It didn't happen until nearly
20 200,000 Mississippians signed petitions to say
21 that they wanted the Constitution to be
22 amended to force the legislature to obey their
23 own law and fully fund our public schools.

24 42A was placed on the November ballot by
25 the legislature for one purpose and one

1 purpose only, and it was just to divide the
2 supporters of public education so that
3 Initiative 42 won't get the percentage of
4 votes that it needs to amend our Constitution.
5 In other words, yes, it is a trick. And I
6 don't want any of you to fall for it.

7 So, voters, you will have two choices
8 when you enter the voting booth on
9 November 3rd. Your first choice that you will
10 see is whether or not to amend the State
11 Constitution. The Constitution does need to
12 be amended because it gives the legislature
13 currently control over public school funding
14 with no accountability. None. Voters who
15 want that accountability -- who wants that
16 accountability? Voters that want that
17 accountability for full funding of our schools
18 must vote yes for this constitutional
19 amendment.

20 Then you have a second choice. Your
21 second choice is between Initiative 42 and the
22 legislative alternative, 42A. Again, voters
23 who want better public schools should vote for
24 Initiative 42, not 42A. It's easy. My kids
25 even know this. Just remember that 42A, the A

1 stands for against, as in against public
2 education.

3 The author here of 42A did not put it on
4 the ballot in the hopes that it would pass.
5 He's told us this. He did it to split our
6 votes, to split the vote of those in favor of
7 an amendment so that neither one of them is
8 even adopted. By putting 42A on the ballot,
9 the legislature thumbed its noses at you-all.
10 It thumbed its noses at the hundreds and
11 thousands of people who signed those petitions
12 for 42.

13 Don't be fooled. 42A keeps the status
14 quo. 42A allows the legislature to continue
15 to underfund our schools. 42A is against
16 adequate funding. 42A says yes to unsafe
17 buses, yes to leaky roofs, yes to less
18 textbooks, yes to less training for teachers.
19 It does nothing to improve our schools. In
20 fact, 42A budgets no additional money for
21 public education. It says so right here.
22 None.

23 Only Initiative 42 will hold our
24 legislators accountable to fulfill their
25 promise that they made to make education

1 funding a priority.

2 Now, these lawmakers, they'll tell you
3 some tall tales. Mr. Snowden and the
4 politicians in Jackson, they'll tell you that
5 throwing more money at public schools will not
6 solve our problems. But by not following
7 their own 1997 law, they've never even given
8 their own plan a chance to succeed.

9 Mr. Snowden and the politicians in
10 Jackson will tell you that one judge in Hinds
11 County, one judge here, one judge there will
12 decide how much money your school district
13 will get. Guys, the fact is one judge has
14 never had the say on anything that one side or
15 the other did not like. The nine-member State
16 Supreme Court has always had the final word.

17 But you know what? Every bit of this is
18 irrelevant if lawmakers will just follow their
19 own law. I wouldn't even be standing here
20 talking to you tonight. None of you would be
21 here tonight if these guys would follow their
22 own law. The fact is if you don't break the
23 law, guess what? You don't have to go to
24 court.

25 Mr. Snowden and the politicians in

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

9 Guys, the money is here for our schools.
10 It's there without cutting the budget. It's
11 there without raising our taxes. And it can
12 be done responsibly over seven years. But
13 it's a matter of priorities.

14 You should seriously go look at some of
15 the things that our lawmakers have wasted
16 money on. Millions and millions of dollars
17 wasted on projects that have gone bust. You
18 wouldn't believe the crazy things they've
19 spent money on -- money that should have gone
20 to our public schools. You know, maybe if
21 they can waste all that money, they could give
22 a teacher pay raise and a national board
23 certification teacher pay and fund education.
24 There's a thought.

25 Every single story Mr. Snowden and the

1 politicians in Jackson will tell you is based
2 on fear -- every single one of them. Scare
3 tactics that have zero basis in fact.
4 Because, everyone, ask yourself this question:
5 why would they work so hard to confuse all of
6 us on an issue as important as public
7 education? Maybe it's because they're scared
8 to death that they're going to lose their
9 control and their power to tell you how to run
10 your schools. I really do think sometimes
11 these politicians get confused about who works
12 for whom.

13 In closing, on November 3rd you have a
14 chance to take back control of your schools by
15 voting for Initiative 42. You have a chance
16 to tell the legislature that you won't be
17 fooled by 42A. You have a chance to hold
18 these politicians accountable for fully
19 funding our public schools just like they
20 promised. And you have the chance to show
21 these public school children there is nothing
22 more important than a good education. Because
23 better schools means better jobs, higher
24 wages, and more economic growth for our state.

25 So on November 3rd when you walk in that

1 voting booth, say yes to the only true choice
2 for public education, Initiative 42.

3 *MR. HOSEMANN:* We're going to go to
4 the public commentary now.

5 Lea Ann, if you would come up.

6 *MS. BRANDON:* Now we're going to move
7 to the public comments; so each of you who
8 signed up in the back to speak, we're going
9 to recognize you in the order in which you
10 turned in your cards. We're going to start
11 off with pro arguments for 42. Most of the
12 people who signed up to speak are speaking
13 in favor of 42. We have one speaker
14 against.

15 we'll start with Mr. Warren Woodrow from
16 Taylorsville. If you'll come forward, you
17 have three minutes to speak.

18 [COURT REPORTER NOTE: COULD NOT HEAR
19 PORTIONS OF SPEAKER'S COMMENTS AND MAY BE
20 INACCURACIES]

21 *MR. WOODROW:* Thank you. It'll
22 probably take five hours to refute
23 misinformation that I heard tonight.

24 I'm the superintendent of education for
25 West Jasper School District. My office is

1 located in Bay Springs, Mississippi. We are
2 in critical need there. I am one of the
3 superintendents in this state that's a
4 proponent of 42.

5 I'm a conservative. I handle the school
6 district money like it was my own. I've had
7 to ask for an increase in funding in two of my
8 eleven years as superintendent of education.

9 I'm going to have to get away from my
10 planned comments to refute some things. I
11 hate asking people for more money, but here's
12 the bottom line: If 42 passes, I won't have
13 to ask my taxpayers for any more money.

14 we will obligate all of the excess
15 revenue the state of Mississippi has taken in.
16 Excess revenue. we filled the rainy day fund
17 up this year. It's overflowing. And then for
18 some reason we proposed an income tax cut of
19 11.8 million, but we don't have enough money
20 to fund MAEP. Taxes are a separate thing.

21 Now, I mean no disrespect towards
22 anyone. I'm not a Republican anymore or a
23 Democrat. I'm Independent. I was elected one
24 time as a Democrat, thought I was a
25 Republican, and I don't know what I am now. I

1 just care about our schools.

2 I coached football for 20 years, won
3 four state championships. Very proud of that.
4 Let me tell you how you know you've got a
5 winning team: It's when the other team has to
6 cheat to win [inaudible] playing field.

7 If 42 is so bad, if it is so wrong, why
8 did the legislature create 42A to destroy the
9 amendment? If it was so bad, why are they
10 arguing in favor of 42? why did they propose
11 for the first time in history an alternate
12 amendment which they know will not pass, whose
13 only purpose is to confuse the voters? An
14 amendment is proposed by 200,000 registered
15 voters in this state who some are going around
16 saying, "Oh, they were just too ignorant to
17 know what they were signing." And I've heard
18 that many times. It's an insult.

19 42 is a well-thought-out proposal that
20 citizens of our state worked very hard to get
21 on the ballot. why do they oppose it?
22 Because they knew it was so good, and we knew
23 it was so good. why did they propose 42A?
24 Because they knew it was going to pass,
25 period. And now with 42A, you have a massive

1 organized misinformation campaign that they've
2 launched to further confuse the effort to
3 guarantee the school district has the
4 resources to give Mississippi students an
5 adequate education.

6 *MS. BRANDON:* Your time is up.

7 *MR. WOODROW:* I'm just getting
8 started. My cell number is (601) 670-0767.
9 And I'll just say this: The facts are 42
10 will not cause any state agency to lose
11 money. I have met with university
12 presidents. I'm going behind these folks
13 giving misinformation. I've met with IHL.
14 They are getting misinformation. 42 will
15 not cause any state agency to have any
16 budget cuts, period.

17 Thank you for your time.

18 *MS. BRANDON:* Next we have an argument
19 against 42 from Mr. Scott Elliott of
20 Meridian. You'll have three minutes.

21 *MR. ELLIOTT:* Knowing I had very
22 limited time tonight, I actually wrote out a
23 script because I didn't want to ramble, but
24 I'm not going to use that.

25 I just want to tell you that I am here

1 tonight representing myself, although I work
2 for one of those agencies that has been told
3 to plan for an 8 percent budget cut with the
4 appropriations chair's directive.

5 I was going to talk to you about not
6 what I was against, but what I was for because
7 I don't believe in talking against things.
8 You know, I feel like this nation suffers from
9 way too much negative and meanspirited
10 rhetoric and political campaigns and debates;
11 and I will tell you, folks, I'm just not going
12 to be a part of it.

13 But I'm going to go completely away from
14 my script because I just really want to say
15 one thing. I was going to talk to you
16 about -- I actually agree with Superintendent
17 Mitchell who spoke so eloquently about what we
18 need is economic development, and I will make
19 one point here.

20 I just think we need economic
21 development through a K through university
22 setting. I think we need to rise the tide for
23 all folks in education. And I hope that can
24 happen no matter what is voted on this.

25 But I will tell you this story real

1 quick. I hope I can do it in the next couple
2 of minutes. Representative Snowden has kind
3 of stood against the tide here tonight. And
4 being associated with the community college
5 and our funding has gone down something like
6 14 percent over the last 15 years on a
7 per-student basis, so we've kind of suffered
8 too.

9 But I went to him and I said,
10 "Representative Snowden" -- and he won't even
11 remember this conversation probably. It was
12 several years ago. -- because the K through
13 12 system, they were at least doing better
14 with the legislature than us at the community
15 college. So I said, "How can we become as
16 high a priority as the K through 12 system so
17 we can do good things too?"

18 You know what he said to me? He said,
19 "You can't, because we have to take care of
20 our children first."

21 And so, you know, some of the climate
22 that I've seen tonight seems congruent with
23 the conversations that I've had. I had to
24 swallow that, "well, you can't because we have
25 to take care of our children first." And that

1 came from Representative Snowden.

2 So, really, that's all I wanted to say.
3 I didn't come here tonight to be a pariah in
4 the room. I've got a granddaughter in the
5 public school system. Her brother is joining
6 her very soon. My daughter is a career public
7 school teacher. My wife worked in public
8 schools all her career. I'm a career educator
9 myself. I enjoy the K through 12 system, but
10 I just wanted to come here tonight to tell you
11 what I'm really for is K through the
12 university system. I think all these agencies
13 need to be funded adequately so that we can
14 get this job done, economic development, and
15 improve the quality of life for our citizens.

16 So that's all I want to say except God
17 bless you all and thank you for listening to
18 me.

19 *MS. BRANDON:* Mr. Elliott, you
20 mentioned you had written a script -- and
21 this is for everyone. If you're not
22 speaking tonight or you don't have enough
23 time to say what you want to say tonight, at
24 the back of the room is a little display
25 that has these cards. And this is something

1 that you're welcome to make a written
2 comment on, and we will post that to our
3 website as we do with the oral comments
4 tonight. Or if you don't want to do the
5 card and you want to go home and think about
6 it, you can e-mail it to the Secretary of
7 State's office at initiatives@sos.gov. That
8 way everyone in the state can read your
9 comments, and you can express yourself
10 without my time limits.

11 All right, moving forward. Another pro
12 argument will be presented by Mr. Richard
13 Coleman from Meridian.

14 *MR. COLEMAN:* I'd like to say to each
15 of you I'm not going to get up here and give
16 y'all the stats. Many of what you heard
17 tonight was a bunch of lies. And I'm sad
18 that our representatives is not truthful to
19 what's going on.

20 The NAACP -- I'm Richard Coleman. I'm a
21 native of Meridian. I now live in Newton,
22 Mississippi.

23 Now, I want to share something with you
24 all. In Meridian I was a city councilman for
25 two terms. I've been involved in the

1 community schools for years. This is nothing
2 new. I'm the president of the NAACP. I'm the
3 president of the NAACP here in Meridian. I'm
4 president of the Newton County NAACP.
5 Education is one of the primary missions of
6 the NAACP.

7 Now, I want to share something. If we
8 don't get adequate funding -- now, they want
9 to keep the jailhouse full. Okay? They fund
10 the penal institutions top dollars. And what
11 they want to do is push the kids out of school
12 into the jail system. And that is going on
13 and still going on in a lot of our school
14 districts because we don't have quality
15 people, quality funding to satisfy the needs
16 of all students. We have students that come
17 to school that need counsel, someone to work
18 with them.

19 Let me share this with you: Right here
20 in Meridian in 2006 -- many people thought
21 Meridian was all about everything. But we was
22 leading the nation -- one of the school
23 districts leading the nation as far as the
24 schoolhouse to jailhouse. Pushing our kids
25 out of schools because we didn't have

1 teachers -- administrators or teachers.
2 Expelling good kids with the wrong color
3 socks. But we can't get quality teachers or
4 quality administrators unless we pay them a
5 good salary. And they talk about child
6 [inaudible]. All that is about a profit
7 margin. It ain't about quality education.
8 Don't be fooled.

9 what we need to do is support this
10 change in our Constitution. 42, vote it.
11 Don't be tricked with 42A.

12 And I'm surprised that Representative
13 Snowden, he going to brag about he went to
14 public schools and his children went to public
15 schools. If the public schools served him so
16 well, why isn't he supporting funding of
17 public schools? Think about that. I'm a
18 realist. If we don't fully fund our school
19 system, we're not going to have a quality
20 education society. And the foundation of a
21 successful society or community is quality
22 education.

23 I'm going to say this and I'm going to
24 sit down. I remember as a child my dad
25 couldn't read. He went to second grade or

1 something. He was a farmer. He was a very
2 wise man. He would listen to a radio station
3 coming out of Memphis, Tennessee, 6:00 every
4 evening. And I started -- I was about 14 or
5 15 years old, and I started listening with my
6 dad. And it was a program that came on,
7 "world Moscow." Some of y'all might remember
8 it. That's when President Eisenhower was the
9 president, just came in as President. That's
10 when the Sputnik went up. The Russians sent
11 the Sputnik up with the dog. You remember
12 that? And America got all up in arms: "The
13 Russians done beat us. They done beat us to
14 space." Spending all kind of money. You know
15 what Khrushchev said? He's not worried about
16 America. America is going to defeat
17 themselves because they're going to rot away
18 at the core. And I see that. If we don't
19 have a quality education system for all
20 children, we going to rot away at the core.

21 Thank you.

22 *MS. BRANDON:* Speaking in favor of 42,
23 Camille Lesseig from Meridian.

24 *MS. LESSEIG:* My name is Camille
25 Lesseig, and I live here in Meridian. I

1 want to say a couple of things to you guys.

2 Initiative 42 is about one thing -- our
3 ability to hold our legislators accountable
4 for adequately funding public schools.
5 Mississippians have already taken steps to
6 achieve this goal to have the legislature
7 follow their law. Consider the time and
8 energy spent creating this petition that led
9 to this ballot initiative. Gathering the
10 required signatures, reaching out on social
11 media and in person, speaking at public forums
12 across the state, writing countless pieces in
13 state newspapers.

14 Despite these efforts, members of the
15 legislature -- including some of our own
16 representatives -- have attempted to obstruct
17 this simple accountability measure. It is up
18 to us to overcome this obstruction and take
19 the final step. Vote to pass Initiative 42 on
20 November 3rd.

21 when the legislature passed MAEP in
22 1997, they made a promise to the state of
23 Mississippi that they would fund public
24 schools through a formula they created. Since
25 its passage the legislature has fulfilled its

1 promise twice.

2 Legislators opposed to the initiative
3 have often cited "a faulty formula included in
4 MAEP" to justify their stance. My question to
5 those individuals would be "why haven't you
6 spent the last 18 years writing a new bill or
7 creating a new formula? why instead did you
8 write an alternative to this initiative to try
9 to confuse Mississippians?"

10 why does this issue matter now? It
11 matters because on November 3rd you will
12 decide if the legislature keeps its promise by
13 voting yes on Initiative 42.

14 Former Governor William Winter said "The
15 only road out of poverty runs by the
16 schoolhouse door." As a Meridian High School
17 teacher, I certainly agree with Winter. And I
18 work every day with the intention that I, in
19 some small way, am guiding students along that
20 road. However, how far along that road can my
21 students travel if we have two books to share
22 for 120 students? How far along that road can
23 we travel if we don't even have doors on all
24 the bathroom stalls, if we cannot pay to staff
25 the schools with the personnel needed by our

1 student body? How far can I travel down this
2 road if working in this state means I have to
3 forego starting a family and buying a house
4 because I have to dedicate my income to buying
5 supplies and paper for my classroom?

6 If we do not pass Initiative 42, if we
7 do not start holding our legislators and other
8 elected officials accountable for their
9 promises to fund our schools, what will we
10 have to say to future Mississippians? What
11 did we do to ensure a better future for them?
12 I for one hold them accountable. I will vote
13 yes for Initiative 42.

14 *MS. BRANDON:* Speaking in favor of 42
15 Lundy Brantley of Union, Mississippi.

16 [COURT REPORTER NOTE: COULD NOT HEAR
17 PORTIONS OF SPEAKER'S COMMENTS AND MAY BE
18 INACCURACIES]

19 *MR. BRANTLEY:* Good evening. I wish
20 they had let me go first because I hate
21 going after all of those great talks. I
22 don't know what I can do, but I'm going to
23 talk anyway.

24 I'm going to start out with a quote from
25 a friend of mine named [inaudible]. Some of

1 you may know her. She's president of the
2 [inaudible] School District Board of Trustees.
3 She said, "This is not a Republican issue;
4 it's not a Democrat issue; this is an issue of
5 funding." She is a staunch Republican. Okay?
6 She knows what it's all about. She knows that
7 education is for everybody -- not one party,
8 not another party. Who cares what party.

9 The judge in Hinds County, I'm getting
10 tired of hearing that. I didn't hear a lot
11 about any complaints against these so-called
12 leaders that we have when Governor Musgrove's
13 suit got thrown out by a Hinds County judge.
14 Did you? I didn't.

15 we're the only state without judicial
16 enforcement to fund public education. I guess
17 we got that one right.

18 I've heard a few people say the
19 amendments were not good government. Well,
20 when we tried to vote the abolition of
21 slavery, I think the amendment was pretty
22 good.

23 The legislature has had control. It's
24 time for a change now. It's time to vote 42
25 in.

1 In January of 2013 I saw this and I
2 heard it with my own ears from the
3 appropriations chairman. "It's going to get
4 better, and we're going to help you out." I'm
5 still waiting.

6 The most funding ever. And also our
7 buses cost more than ever; salaries cost more
8 than ever; insurance costs more than ever;
9 buildings, technology. We're not even talking
10 about educating kids yet. We're talking about
11 everything that we have to take care of on the
12 financial side.

13 An amendment was proposed \$25 million to
14 add. Said there was no money. That afternoon
15 they voted on a tax cut.

16 The administrative costs I referred to
17 just a few minutes ago, the administrative
18 costs not through MAEP. Superintendents not
19 MAEP. I don't know how many times we have to
20 say that, but we're not. We're not paid
21 through that. Administrative costs are not
22 just administrators. That's insurance; that's
23 teacher insurance and employee insurance, and
24 that's property insurance. That's business
25 property. We have to pay for secretaries. It

1 does pay for administrators, retirement,
2 workers' comp. That's where our money is
3 having to go. You have to do those things.

4 Here's a small example. Pearl Public
5 School District in 2013 had a hailstorm that
6 was unbelievable. Their insurance went from
7 \$60,000 per year to \$120,000. It doubled.
8 That's why we have to have more money. Things
9 cost more now.

10 Money wasted? I'm sure there is some.
11 I'm not going to disagree with that. But I
12 tell you anybody in here, any superintendent
13 in here would ask you to "Come look at my
14 budget, and I'll show you where our money is
15 going. I'll show you." The overwhelming
16 majority of districts in this state are
17 spending probably better than they've ever
18 spent because there's no money to really
19 spend. There's not a whole lot extra.

20 what will we do with the money? I'd
21 love to have some more classes. I'd love to
22 start an art course at Union High School. I'd
23 love to have one-on-one technology for each
24 one of my kids grade 7 through 12. I'd like
25 to have more vocation classes. That's what we

1 would do with the money. Will money solve our
2 problems? Not necessarily. But if we don't
3 fund our schools, I can assure you we will
4 continue to have problems.

5 I'm going to leave you with this one
6 other thing. We've got to fight this. We've
7 got groups called Empower Mississippi that is
8 trying to kill public education. They will do
9 everything they can to kill this amendment. I
10 promise you they are trying right now. I
11 promise you. All those representatives
12 mentioned, a lot of those are funded by
13 outside funding -- Washington, D.C., Michigan.
14 They want to kill our initiative so they can
15 get their charter schools in here and vouchers
16 to make money. That's what it's all about.

17 And one other thing: Are we going to
18 listen to lobbyists who could care less about
19 our kids, out-of-state money, or are we going
20 to make people listen to us? This is a
21 people's initiative. Ninety percent of our
22 children go to public schools in this state.

23 *MS. BRANDON:* Mr. Brantley.

24 *MR. BRANTLEY:* Hold on. One more
25 thing.

1 we have to make this happen, and it's up
2 to us, and it will happen.

3 Thank you.

4 *MS. BRANDON:* Next up is Sally Gray of
5 Meridian speaking in favor of Initiative 42.

6 *MS. GRAY:* I'm going to read today so
7 I can get it all in.

8 My name is Sally Gray. I'm here from
9 Meridian. I'm a Mississippi native. I've
10 lived in six different communities in
11 Mississippi in my lifetime.

12 I worked to gather those 200,000
13 signatures to place Initiative 42 on the
14 ballot. And why? Because it's way past time
15 for our schools to have the resources they
16 need to produce a well-educated work force.

17 Our legislators have had ample
18 opportunity since 1997 to fully fund our
19 schools, but they chose to do so only twice,
20 as you've heard. Meanwhile, our rainy day
21 fund overflows. And just this last spring our
22 leaders tried to outdo each other in proposing
23 bigger and bigger tax cuts in an election
24 year. And our public schools again came out
25 on the short end of that stick.

1 while some state agency budgets have
2 grown by more than 60 percent since the 2008
3 recession, the K-12 education budget has
4 actually increased only 2.5 percent.

5 why do we need Initiative 42? Here are
6 a few more reasons: Mississippi, my beloved
7 state, still comes in dead last, 50th in terms
8 of overall childhood well-being, and comes in
9 48th in education. Thirty-five percent of our
10 children -- think about that -- 35 percent of
11 our children live in poverty. And educators
12 will readily acknowledge it takes more
13 resources to educate economically
14 disadvantaged children.

15 Despite the opposition saying that
16 Mississippi spends so much money on public
17 schools, our state still ranks among the
18 bottom five in the nation in per-pupil
19 spending. Businesses and industries look at
20 this kind of data when they choose where to
21 invest.

22 It is time for us to have a seismic
23 shift in our thinking and priorities in
24 Mississippi and demonstrate to the world that
25 Mississippi is willing to invest in its

1 children, 90 percent of whom attend public
2 schools. And, yes, they are all our kids.
3 The future of all Mississippians is
4 intricately linked to their success or
5 failure.

6 The dawns of doom, as I like to call
7 them, will squawk and tell you there's no way
8 to fully fund our schools, the sky is falling,
9 and the court will be in charge of running our
10 schools. Don't believe them for a minute.
11 This can be done, and it must be done.

12 We voters must seal our determination to
13 give all our kids a quality education whether
14 they are from Meridian or Madison or Mound
15 Bayou. That was the original intent of the
16 adequate education formula after all -- to
17 ensure that for all Mississippi students. But
18 the legislature has consistently turned its
19 back on our children, choosing instead to cozy
20 up to the lobbyists who look at Mississippi
21 like a lion eyes raw meat.

22 To be sure, full funding does not
23 guarantee great results, but the shortchanging
24 of our schools leaves us at the bottom of the
25 ranks. And, personally, I'm fed up with being

1 50th.

2 If you're on the fence about how to vote
3 in November, I encourage you to pick up the
4 phone, call your local school superintendent,
5 talk with some teachers, check with your
6 school board members. Ask them how our
7 legislature's chronic shameful and consistent
8 underfunding of MAEP has affected our public
9 schools and our children's achievement. Since
10 our legislators lack the political backbone to
11 do what needs to be done, the people, the
12 voters of Mississippi will have to show them
13 the way by voting yes for Initiative 42 on
14 November 3rd.

15 Thank you.

16 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you.

17 Next is Randy Hodges from Collinsville,
18 speaking in favor of 42.

19 *MR. HODGES:* I'm Randy Hodges from the
20 Lauderdale County School District.

21 I'd like to first start out by pointing
22 out a few things to you that I think are very
23 important you need to understand.

24 First of all, in 1997 the Mississippi
25 Adequate Education Program was passed after a

1 lot of hard work by the superintendents,
2 educators, teachers, parents because it was
3 necessary. Why it was necessary is because
4 all children were not given the same
5 opportunity. The Mississippi Adequate
6 Education Program was to see that funding was
7 equal across this fine state of ours; to make
8 sure that in the Delta and in the rural areas
9 and places where the tax base is not as it
10 could be, that they got equal funds.

11 The only problem is it passed in 1997,
12 but it's only been fully funded twice in 18
13 years -- the first year it was passed and then
14 an election year.

15 Now, here's the way I see it: I think
16 we've let our students down and our children
17 in Mississippi. I think we've let our
18 communities down. And I'm going to take the
19 blame. I think as superintendents we should
20 have been having this dialogue many years ago,
21 not 2015, but much earlier than this. I think
22 I can give you reasons why: Our students
23 per-student expenditure in Mississippi is
24 behind all the other southern states -- behind
25 Alabama, behind Arkansas, behind Tennessee.

1 So why? why should our students be getting
2 less money than a student in any of our
3 southern states in comparison?

4 The other thing is our teachers. Now,
5 in Lauderdale County, if we had received full
6 funding since 2008, we would have received
7 \$21 million in addition to what we did. Now,
8 we know what to do with that. Number one
9 priority is safety, but number two is to get
10 good classroom teachers in every class. We
11 haven't been able to do that, so we could have
12 taken \$21 million, and we would have known how
13 to use it and what to do with it.

14 So I think we let our teachers down. I
15 think the superintendents did. I think the
16 principals need to do something more. I think
17 our legislators -- Democrats and Republicans.
18 I think superintendents, all of us, we let
19 them down because of those simple facts.

20 Our teachers' salary is 50th. The only
21 state below us is South Dakota. We let them
22 down. We let our teachers down. We waited
23 too long for this. We waited too long to have
24 this dialogue. It should have been much
25 earlier.

1 Here's what I want you to do: I want
2 you to look at the past at what made
3 Mississippi's improvement. I'll tell you what
4 it was. It was a governor called William
5 Winter. When William Winter worked as hard as
6 he did to see that kindergarten would be
7 implemented into our fine state, that meant
8 more than anything that I've seen in my 40
9 years of being a school administrator. So we
10 need to learn from that. We need to learn
11 from what he accomplished in '82. And we need
12 to fight as hard as we can between now and
13 November to see that the Mississippi Adequate
14 Education Program is fully funded in the
15 future and make a difference like William
16 Winter did.

17 So y'all join us. We'll do everything
18 we can. I'm going to give you the latest
19 polls. What I'm hearing is we're in trouble.
20 And we've got to get out and fight, because
21 from what I'm hearing, it's going to be hard
22 to pass it with all the reasons we heard
23 tonight. I don't like that. That bothers me.
24 I want to feel like we've got a chance to make
25 it up to our children and our teachers. We

1 don't want them to be paid last in the state,
2 with one state below us; and we want our
3 children to get a fair public education that's
4 funded no matter what your ZIP code may be, no
5 matter what the situation is. The Mississippi
6 Adequate Education Program can do that if it's
7 fully funded. So let's fight for 42.

8 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you, Mr. Hodges.

9 Next speaking in favor of Initiative 42
10 is Michael Van Veckhoven.

11 *MR. VAN VECKHOVEN:* Good evening.

12 My name is Michael Van Veckhoven. I'm a
13 business owner here in Meridian, and I'm a
14 member of the Meridian Public School District
15 Board of Trustees. I'm a proud father of two
16 students in the Meridian Public School
17 District.

18 Tonight I'm speaking in favor of
19 Initiative 42. There's a couple of things
20 I've learned since being appointed to the
21 school board. Number one is it takes money to
22 educate children. It takes real money. And
23 it takes even more money to educate the
24 thousands of children across our state who
25 come to our schools every day with issues that

1 are taking place outside the schools --
2 absentee parents, food insecurity, poor
3 healthcare, and on and on. And our public
4 schools welcome these children and all
5 children lovingly with open arms every day.
6 And it takes money to educate children.

7 Another thing I learned. I'm a
8 businessperson. Before I got involved with
9 public education, I would see how much the
10 schools were spending. I would think, "That's
11 so much money. They've got to be wasting that
12 money. It's such a large amount." But I got
13 on the school board and I had to approve buses
14 and look at financial statements. And I
15 educated myself and looked at the financial
16 data line by line with a microscope, and I
17 found out that the vast majority of this money
18 is not wasted. It does go towards bettering
19 our children. So I it takes money to educate
20 kids.

21 The legislature adopted MAEP in 1997.
22 The legislature promised the school districts
23 that they would be funded X amount of dollars
24 every year. It wasn't a verbal promise. They
25 actually passed a law saying they were going

1 to do this. They haven't kept their promise;
2 and they've broken the law, plain and simple.
3 It's not personal. I've got friends that are
4 representatives and senators. It's not
5 personal, but they've broken the law. It is
6 what it is.

7 And just jumping right through it all:
8 Four years ago political leadership in this
9 state declared an all-out war on public
10 education. They did. And they could go on
11 and on about the endless so-called reforms
12 they passed to help schools every year, but
13 the most significant of those is the
14 introduction of charter schools. I mean,
15 ignoring parents and educators across the
16 state that opposed charter schools, charter
17 schools are funded by taxpayers yet not
18 governed by appointed school board members.
19 Charter schools that rob neighboring public
20 schools of students and resources. And
21 charter schools that turn away students that
22 they don't want. That is what they do. These
23 are the facts.

24 Yet yesterday the elected leaders of our
25 state had a grand opening of Mississippi's

1 first charter school. They were so excited to
2 be there. "These are wonderful kids" is what
3 our governor said. And I'm sure the kids in
4 that charter school are wonderful; but I've
5 got news for the governor: The kids in
6 Meridian High School are wonderful. The kids
7 at Crestwood Elementary are wonderful. The
8 kids at [inaudible because of applause] are
9 wonderful. The kids at Newton County High
10 School, West Hills Elementary, Philadelphia,
11 Neshoba Central are wonderful kids too.

12 Now, maybe if the governor and his
13 legislative buddies would actually visit some
14 real public schools every now and then, maybe
15 they would recognize that too. Not to mention
16 the teachers, counselors, administrators, and
17 coaches who give their lives for these
18 children. And they ask for very little in
19 return. All they ask for is adequate funding.
20 That's all they ask for. The money has to
21 come from somewhere. It can come from the
22 state -- they've promised us the money -- or
23 it can come from our property taxes at the
24 local level and more bond issues down the
25 road.

1 I urge everyone to please vote for
2 Initiative 42. Thank you.

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

4 Alvin Taylor from Meridian, speaking in
5 fair of Initiative 42.

6 *MR. TAYLOR:* Good evening. I'm
7 superintendent of Meridian Public Schools.
8 I won't talk long.

9 Since 2008, as you heard earlier, our
10 district, the Meridian Public School District,
11 has been shortchanged by over \$20 million. I
12 know that what you heard is that we got a pay
13 raise and we're flush with money, but let me
14 tell you some real facts.

15 The average school building in the
16 Meridian Public School District is over 60
17 years old. We have one nearly 100 years old.
18 Our children have to ride on buses that, on
19 average, are 12 years or older. But yet we
20 keep hearing the story that we have enough
21 money.

22 Let me tell you some more facts. When
23 it comes to the state of Mississippi funding
24 public education, we are in the bottom
25 10 percent of this country. In the Southeast

1 we are dead last. Louisiana just went through
2 the devastation of Katrina. How are they
3 funded higher than we are? And yet they keep
4 telling you this. We keep getting the same
5 story about we need to do more with less when
6 it comes to your public education. But that's
7 only for public education. When it comes to
8 that, we need to do more with less.

9 How many people in here can look at
10 their own budgets in their own home and say,
11 "Hum, Honey, we need to do more with less"?

12 when it comes to our security or our
13 police force or our military, we don't hear
14 anybody saying, "we need to do more with
15 less." when it comes to our state leaders and
16 their campaign funds, you will never hear them
17 say, "we need to do more with less." But when
18 it comes to us, when it comes to our children,
19 we need to do more with less?

20 Let me give you one last fact. Our
21 state leadership just told you that if you
22 vote for Initiative 42, they will have to cut
23 IHL. But 15 minutes ago you just heard the
24 president of MCC say that his budget has been
25 cut for the last 14 years. The stenographer

1 got it.

2 Now, let me tell you I'm not the
3 sharpest knife in the drawer, but you just
4 said that if you vote for Initiative 42, then
5 you will have to cut IHL, but the president of
6 MCC just said he's been getting cut all along.
7 It's time to get through this snow job.

8 In November vote for Initiative 42 and
9 let's stop being last. Our children deserve
10 much more.

11 *MS. BRANDON:* William Tucker from
12 Meridian will rise to speak in favor of
13 Initiative 42.

14 *MR. TUCKER:* Good evening.

15 I am a teacher at Meridian High School,
16 just as Camille Lesseig is. Kimberly
17 Wilkerson, our librarian, is here as well.
18 Mr. Taylor is here. Thank you for being here.

19 what I want to talk to you about is not
20 whether you should vote for Initiative 42, but
21 I want to talk to you about is reality.

22 Reality. This right here, this is reality.

23 (Indicating textbook) Now, I graduated from
24 Meridian High in 2006. When I was in ninth
25 grade at Northwest Junior High School, we had

1 this same book, this same exact book. Now,
2 let's take a look inside. Oh, look, on the
3 front cover. Writing on every page.

4 Reality is when it comes to education,
5 they don't want to fully fund it. Now, I
6 teach human anatomy and physiology, botany and
7 zoology. The botany books that I use are from
8 2000. I don't even have zoology books. I
9 don't. The AP books that I have are 15 years
10 old. This is our science book. This is from
11 2002. The kids open this and they read it.
12 This is outdated information.

13 Now, a textbook costs maybe \$100. Take
14 a look at this nice background we have up
15 here. Where did that come from? From our tax
16 dollars. That's probably I'd say at least 3-
17 or \$400. Is it necessary? No, it's not. I'm
18 going to the Dollar Store. I'm getting poster
19 board. I'm not even going to print it on
20 paper. I'm going to handwrite it because I've
21 got to save that paper for my students. That
22 is reality.

23 Now, to say or even make the implication
24 that any of us become teachers for the money
25 is the most insulting thing I have ever, ever

1 heard. [Inaudible due to applause]

2 The classroom I teach in, Erwin High
3 school, you walk in there, it's going to look
4 exactly the same now as it did when you were
5 in school there. It has not changed, period.
6 I can't even teach [inaudible] in my class
7 because, guess what, it violates OSHA, period.
8 I can't do it. Don't tell somebody it's not
9 there because it is. Always, always, always.
10 And you lobbyists. Stop lying. You've been
11 caught with your hand in the jar, and enough
12 is enough.

13 *MS. BRANDON:* Lisa Kennedy Perkins
14 from Philadelphia will speak in favor of
15 Initiative 42.

16 *MS. PERKINS:* First of all, I'm so
17 fired up about this deal that I prayed about
18 it, openly prayed about it, and here I am.

19 First of all, I want to say our
20 children, our community cannot prosper without
21 us doing the right thing, which is to get busy
22 supporting and spreading the word to vote for
23 Initiative 42. We owe it to our ancestors who
24 worked hard to train us up as honorable
25 people. We, the people of all walks of life,

1 need to go -- to join hands in this fight for
2 justice for all children.

3 In my heart it's clear that the
4 legislators are scared that they are going to
5 lose control of their guarding of the school
6 funding and the fear of being held accountable
7 for their actions regarding the school
8 funding. All children deserve an equal
9 opportunity for a free excellent public
10 education. There should not be a need for
11 private schools. If we get funded like we're
12 supposed to, people in private schools are
13 going to want to come back to our public
14 schools. I've talked to them.

15 Our schools need money that we just
16 don't have for many things. A few things that
17 I'm passionate about are the need for
18 counselors, social workers on campus full
19 time -- I'm telling you -- not paper pushers
20 like they are now.

21 We need buses. The other day when I was
22 in the car rider line, y'all, I promise you I
23 saw a bus that looked like a bus -- it had to
24 be a bus that I rode on in the '70s. I'm 52
25 years old. I'm not kidding.

1 we need smaller classes. Last year I
2 volunteered to go in the classroom and help
3 out. Y'all, it was -- it broke my heart. The
4 principal sent me to three different
5 classrooms. By the time I got to the third
6 one, y'all, it was nothing but all -- it
7 doesn't matter, but I'm going to say it -- it
8 was all black children. And it was so sad.
9 My heart just broke. I couldn't do it again.
10 I'm telling you. These children were -- they
11 were so messed up. They just -- they were
12 just craving attention. They're acting out
13 because they need attention they're not
14 getting at home.

15 Teachers should not have to send lists
16 home for supplies. Teachers should not have
17 to buy books. They have to buy books for our
18 children to read because there are not enough
19 books in the library. They shouldn't have to
20 buy anything pertaining to our classrooms.

21 Our children are the ones that are
22 suffering, and our children are our future.

23 In closing, I'm just sick and tired of
24 being 50th in education. I want to stay in
25 Mississippi. I want my family to stay in

1 Mississippi. I just -- it's time for a
2 change.

3 Thank you. Vote for Initiative 42.

4 *MS. BRANDON:* Next is Representative
5 Charles Young to speak in favor of
6 Initiative 42.

7 *REPRESENTATIVE YOUNG:* Good evening,
8 everyone.

9 I look around, and I know quite a few of
10 the faces here, and all of you that know me
11 and know the Young family know that the Youngs
12 have always been a staunch supporter of
13 education.

14 During the william winter push for
15 adequate education, Mississippi achieved a
16 very significant foothold. Since then
17 Mississippi has regressed. In any setting
18 that you look at, it says that children are
19 more receptive at early ages up to five than
20 they are after five. Mississippi does not
21 want to support pre-K.

22 Head Start. My father lobbied Lyndon
23 Johnson right after the Kennedy assassination
24 Lyndon Johnson asked my dad did he want him to
25 join Kennedy in the grave by going to Congress

1 and asking for money for poor folks and
2 minorities to fund Head Start.

3 Lady Bird Johnson coined the phrase,
4 "Children getting a head start on life." And
5 the initial Head Start budget came through the
6 first lady. How many of us know what the
7 first lady's budget is? I've never heard of
8 the president's wife having a dollar amount on
9 the budget. When she needs an alcohol
10 treatment center, it's done. When she needs a
11 battered children's center, it's done. When
12 they need a library, it's done.

13 In Mississippi -- I don't know if you
14 listened tonight or not, but your leadership
15 said regardless of what takes place tonight,
16 regardless of what takes place on
17 November 3rd, the process will be
18 circumvented. Control will not be
19 relinquished.

20 The moneys that move in education are
21 large numbers. But as my friend Michael Van
22 Veckhoven said, we've introduced charter
23 schools. Charter schools already have
24 guaranteed appropriation of 3 percent of
25 whatever is on the budget, regardless.

1 when we talk about public schools, let's
2 be honest. MAEP was supposed to [inaudible].
3 That was to make certain we overcame a lot of
4 those impasses that we had on education not
5 being provided to certain people in certain
6 areas. Go to the Delta. They don't have
7 much. They don't have teachers. But when I
8 go to the Coast, they are able to spend
9 \$35,000 per child, and they've got nice
10 boards, and they're 100 percent digital. When
11 I go up to DeSoto County, they're above
12 \$50,000 per child, state of the art. But when
13 I come home to the Meridian Public School
14 District, my children have got old worn-out
15 books, they still on those same chalkboards
16 that I was accustomed to at Meridian High
17 School and Northwest and Magnolia and West
18 Newton. And we have not experienced those
19 opportunities.

20 The legislature wants this to die, and
21 it will die if we don't get out and vote.
22 Because with the introduction of Initiative
23 42, I want everyone to understand this --
24 you're not up yet. Good. I want everyone to
25 understand the process. The leadership in the

1 House of Representatives knew that anything
2 they get through the House, it was
3 automatically going to pass in the Senate. We
4 can call it conservative or whatever we want
5 to. The vote in the Senate doesn't matter
6 when it comes down to it. In the House of
7 Representatives we debated this for a very
8 long period of time, and let me explain why:

9 Number one, regarding the constitutional
10 amendment, as our Secretary of State explained
11 to you, on the top of that ballot it's going
12 to be designed to confuse you. It's going to
13 be a yes box and a no box. "Do you want to
14 vote for this constitutional amendment?"
15 That's the first choice.

16 The second choice is going to be, if you
17 check yes, then it's going to have a provision
18 for 42 and then for 42A.

19 Now, our state process for a
20 constitutional amendment, 40 percent of the
21 voter base has to support the initiative. So
22 number 1, if you don't check yes or no, your
23 vote is gone. Number 2, if you check no, your
24 vote is gone. Number 3, if you check
25 Initiative 42A, your vote is gone.

1 Forty percent of the total voter base. So
2 whatever that total turnout is, 40 percent of
3 that number. I want to make sure that
4 everybody understands that. I want you to
5 understand the trickery that's involved in the
6 process. So by adding the additional option,
7 it creates four opportunities for failure.

8 Thank you.

9 *MS. BRANDON:* Becky Glover from
10 Meridian. She will speak in favor of
11 Initiative 42.

12 *MS. GLOVER:* I'm Becky Glover, and I'm
13 from Meridian, Mississippi. I'm a proud
14 product of public schools. Daughter-in-law
15 of a public school teacher for almost 30
16 years in this district. And my son and our
17 only child is a proud produce of the
18 Meridian Public Schools.

19 I support Initiative 42 because I
20 strongly believe that Initiative 42 is a
21 bipartisan effort to improve not only
22 education, but also the quality of life for
23 all Mississippians, not just families who have
24 children in public schools.

25 As Governor William Winter has said many

1 times and we all now know, "The only road out
2 of poverty runs by" -- what? -- "the
3 schoolhouse."

4 I support Initiative 42 because I
5 believe we all know these four things beyond a
6 shadow of a doubt: Number 1, poverty is
7 Mississippi's greatest challenge. Number 2,
8 Mississippi's individuals, families, and state
9 itself are more impoverished and therefore
10 more economically dependent on others than
11 anyone anywhere in the United States. Number
12 3, education is the strongest tool in the
13 toolbox with which we can fix poverty and
14 economic dependency. Number 4, public schools
15 educate over 90 percent of Mississippi's
16 children.

17 Therefore, anything that impacts poverty
18 the way education does and anything that
19 impacts over 90 percent of Mississippi's
20 families the way public schools do
21 automatically holds the number one spot for
22 the potential to do the most good or the most
23 harm for all Mississippians.

24 I support Initiative 42 because it
25 establishes a mechanism to ensure a minimal

1 level funding. Right now that minimum is the
2 MAEP formula.

3 I support Initiative 42 because I have
4 no problem with a court requiring the
5 legislature to follow a law regarding a
6 minimal level of funding for our kindergarten
7 through 12th grade public schools. The
8 legislature will still have the freedom and
9 the authority to go above minimum, just not
10 below it.

11 I support Initiative 42 because I value
12 education so much that I believe it's
13 necessary to include this language in our
14 state's Constitution. We all know if nothing
15 changes, nothing changes. Without the
16 language in Initiative 42, nothing will
17 change.

18 Thank you.

19 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you very much.

20 Next Robert Turnage from Philadelphia,
21 another speaker in favor of Initiative 42.

22 [COURT REPORTER NOTE: COULD NOT HEAR
23 PORTIONS OF SPEAKER'S COMMENTS AND MAY BE
24 INACCURACIES]

25 *MR. TURNAGE:* On the way here tonight

1 I passed a school bus. The number on it was
2 9601. I drove in from Philadelphia tonight.
3 I saw a school bus, the number was 98. I
4 forget the last numbers. But what those
5 first numbers indicate, that's the year the
6 bus was purchased. The bus that was
7 purchased in '96, that bus is 19 years old.

8 Several years ago when I was in the
9 school district, it wasn't required then, but
10 they encouraged you to have buses be no more
11 than ten years old. I don't know what that is
12 now. They may have changed it. But the
13 bottom line is we need better buses.

14 In fact, our school buses in
15 Philadelphia, we were underfunded 20 percent.
16 [Inaudible]

17 I've got a friend. He said I was
18 watching TV one night, and Jerry Clower was on
19 there. And the talk show host said that the
20 debate was -- they had two guys on there, one
21 from each side. One was for [inaudible] and
22 one was for prosecuting to the fullest extent
23 of the law. And the host said, "we'll be back
24 in 30 seconds with Jerry Clower and ask him
25 what he thinks."

1 So he came back on, and Jerry Clower was
2 there. The guy said, "Jerry, what do you
3 think? Should we prosecute them to the
4 fullest extent of the law, or should we"
5 [inaudible]

6 [COURT REPORTER UNABLE TO HEAR COMMENTS
7 BY THIS SPEAKER]

8 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you, Mr. Turnage.
9 Joyce Helmick from Hernando. She gets
10 the prize for driving the furthest.

11 *MS. HELMICK:* My name is Joyce
12 Helmick, and I am a product of public
13 schools. My children are a product of
14 public school. My husband is a product of
15 public schools. And I have a grandson in
16 public school in kindergarten right now. I
17 am a 37-year-veteran of the English
18 classroom in public schools in Mississippi.

19 I rise tonight in support of Initiative
20 42 as president of the Mississippi Association
21 of Educators. And this is my fourth hearing.
22 I come to all the hearings to speak for the
23 thousands of educators who know firsthand that
24 Initiative 42 is the only way that our
25 lawmakers will fund our schools so that our

1 students receive the resources, tools, and
2 support that they need for their success.

3 For the last two years I've been
4 president of MAE, and I have visited school
5 after school where the needs are great.
6 seriously overcrowded classrooms. Just this
7 week one fifth grade had 37 students. Yes,
8 leaky classrooms.

9 In one I asked, "well, aren't they
10 supposed to be fixed by the maintenance man?"
11 So I remember clearly one time when my roof
12 was leaking, I asked the maintenance man,
13 "will you fix that leaky roof?"

14 And he said, "with what? Duct tape?"

15 Just this week I was in a building
16 similar to what we have outside today. The
17 principal came in to see me. His pants were
18 wet from knee down. His shoes were soaking.
19 He said, "I can't meet right now. I have
20 three classrooms that are flooding, and I just
21 had an awning fall down, and my students have
22 got to get to the buses. I have to make sure
23 they don't get hurt."

24 That's reality. We do have old
25 disgraceful books. And we have very minimal

1 if no technology in a lot of our schools, but
2 our students are achieving despite these
3 circumstance, and imagine what they could
4 achieve if their needs were truly met.
5 Initiative 42 will ensure that that will
6 happen.

7 At the first hearing I attended, a man
8 stood up and said, "I thought we came to learn
9 something." well, I have listened and
10 learned. As I said, this is my fourth. I
11 have learned from educators, from parents,
12 from community leaders and from lawmakers who
13 know that Initiative 42 is the only way that
14 state lawmakers will ever fund our schools so
15 that all of our children, no matter their ZIP
16 code, will have the resources they need to
17 succeed.

18 And as I have said before, a decoy is a
19 decoy is a decoy. And all of us in this room
20 know and we will agree a decoy, it does not
21 put meat on the table. And that is why the
22 Mississippi Association of Educators supports
23 Initiative 42.

24 Thank you.

25 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you. Weston

1 Lindermann from Meridian.

2 *MR. LINDERMANN:* My name is Weston
3 Lindermann. I was born and raised here in
4 Meridian. And I went to Meridian High
5 School, where I just graduated.

6 I was born in 1997, the same year that
7 the state legislature signed that they would
8 fully fund education. Unfortunately, though,
9 over the course of the 18 years -- and that's
10 how old I am -- they only fully funded it
11 twice. So basically my entire education has
12 been underfunded. And I don't think that's
13 sufficient.

14 But basically Mississippi is 50th in
15 education nationwide. We can do better. I
16 mean, we're 50th in so many categories from
17 childhood well-being to highest rate of
18 poverty. Surely we can do better than this.

19 The legislature does nothing to fix it.
20 You'd have to ask Representative Snowden, but
21 it could be that they send them to private
22 schools so they don't have to worry about it.
23 So, I mean, education is the bedrock --

24 *REP. SNOWDEN:* Did you say my kids
25 went to private school?

1 *MR. LINDERMANN:* No, sir. I said --

2 *REP. SNOWDEN:* Okay. I'm sorry. I
3 thought I made that clear. I want to make
4 sure I understood. My kids are a product of
5 public schools.

6 *MR. LINDERMANN:* I believe many of our
7 state legislators' kids go to private
8 schools, and I know several of the
9 legislators around here went to private
10 schools. But that's good to know, which
11 makes you a bit of a hypocrite for not fully
12 funding education.

13 The point is that education is the
14 bedrock --

15 *MS. BRANDON:* Excuse me. Let's keep
16 it on the subject.

17 *MR. LINDERMANN:* The point is
18 education is the bedrock of democracy. It
19 guarantees that the American dream is
20 accessible to everyone, that we all want the
21 same opportunity.

22 So for that reason we have to fight for
23 education, we have to fight for better
24 schools, and we have to continue to invest in
25 our future. And it starts with the children

1 in our schools. And then only way we can do
2 that is by voting out the people who don't
3 support this and tell us otherwise.

4 Thank you. And please support
5 Initiative 42 in November.

6 *MS. BRANDON:* Representative Johnny
7 Stringer of Montrose.

8 *REPRESENTATIVE STRINGER:* Thank you.
9 I'm State Representative Johnny
10 Stringer. I've served in the House of
11 Representatives for 36 years. I was 16 when I
12 first got elected, maybe 17. It's been so
13 long ago.

14 But, anyway, I knew the chairman of the
15 House Appropriations Committee who lost his
16 job four years ago. But I was there when we
17 fully funded adequate education in '97. We
18 fully funded it in '08. When we left out, it
19 was fully funded; but, as you well know, it
20 was cut. And then we fully funded again in
21 '09. We went into a recession, and we thought
22 it was fully funded, but it was cut. It
23 hasn't been funded since.

24 I tell you some of the budgets that have
25 been raised for your conservative movements is

1 the House and Senate budget. It has been
2 increased 22 percent -- 22 percent -- \$5
3 million. I know that sounds like a lot, but
4 it's a lot when you've got just a few number
5 of people, 22 percent.

6 what happened to this money? well, some
7 nice trips to Alaska, you know. wouldn't you
8 love to be up there right now? I've got a
9 real nice new laptop computer. we could have
10 bought schoolbooks instead. But that's the
11 way the law -- you know, the money went. You
12 know, you've got to put this money where it
13 does the most good. And I don't think the
14 House and the Senate buying laptops did the
15 most good.

16 But, anyway, the only way that you're
17 going to fund education is through 42. I can
18 tell you that. I've been there 36 years. It
19 is the only way you're going to fund it is
20 through 42.

21 So I want to speak a little on another
22 subject because we've had so many good
23 speakers here today. You know, I've heard all
24 my life "death and taxes." And it's in that
25 order, you know. After you die, you still got

1 to pay taxes. But I can guarantee you here
2 tonight -- just mark it on the wall -- if 42
3 doesn't pass, your ad valorem car tags,
4 business taxes are all going up. It's going
5 to be the schools are funded on the local
6 level instead of from Jackson.

7 So please go out and support 42.

8 *MS. BRANDON:* Brandon Presley from
9 Nettleton. Mr. Presley.

10 *MR. PRESLEY:* Thank you very much.
11 Thank you, Secretary of State Hosemann for
12 putting this on. He did a good job.

13 I have a lot of respect for
14 Representative Snowden who made his remarks
15 today. He's a wise man. We simply disagree
16 on this.

17 This is not a Republican issue or a
18 Democratic issue. I want to quote you one
19 from both parties, one from each party.

20 Harry Truman, my favorite of all, said,
21 "If you can't convince them, confuse them."

22 And Teddy Roosevelt, my favorite
23 Republican president, said that "The
24 Constitution was made for people. The people
25 weren't made for the Constitution."

1 Our Constitution in Mississippi exists
2 for us, for the people of all 82 counties.
3 For the Mississippians here in 2015, but also
4 for the Mississippians that aren't here yet,
5 that aren't born. Because Initiative 42 and
6 the issues that we're here to talk about
7 tonight and we're going to decide in this
8 election isn't just about 2015. It's about
9 2035. It's about 2055. It's about those
10 generations of Mississippians just like me and
11 you who are tired of the "ain't it awful."
12 All of the "ain't it awful" stories. Ain't it
13 awful that our kids have got to go to schools
14 [inaudible]. Ain't it awful they have
15 schoolbooks that look like they got in a yard
16 sale?

17 The children in our public school
18 district and those in the other school
19 districts -- and I get tired of it and the
20 mamas and daddies get tired of it -- when they
21 go around selling candles and cookie dough or
22 candy bars to try to raise money for school.
23 Those hours and those minutes and those
24 efforts and those steps could be spent on
25 homework with Mama and Daddy and Grandmama and

1 Granddaddy learning about that.

2 The fact of the matter is we're behind.
3 we all know that. we all know that. And the
4 only issue that cuts across everything from
5 crime to poverty to our [inaudible] is
6 education. It is the one thing we can do
7 something about. we can't do nothing about
8 our natural resources. We've got to preserve
9 them. There's a lot of things we can't fix,
10 but we can fix this problem.

11 John Foster Douglas used to be the
12 Secretary of State of this country. He wanted
13 to get out of town. He went up to the pilot,
14 and the pilot said, "where to, Mr. Secretary?"

15 And he said, "It don't matter. we've
16 got trouble all over."

17 And I know that we feel that way. I
18 know the legislature and the Republicans, the
19 Democrats, the Conservators, the Liberals, the
20 Senate and the House all feel that way
21 sometimes. They're not bad people. They're
22 not bad folks. we see this issue differently.

23 But Douglas also said, "The measure of
24 our problems is not whether or not we have
25 them, but it's whether or not we have that

1 same problem this year as we had last year and
2 the year before that and the year before that
3 and the year before that."

4 Now, President Roosevelt said that the
5 Constitution is made for the people; the
6 people aren't made for the Constitution. We,
7 the citizens of this state, the people, are
8 solid. The people, the unelected people, are
9 solid in Mississippi. We have the right to
10 tell our government what it's going to do and
11 what it's not going to do. That's why we said
12 we're going to have voter ID. That's why we
13 said you're not going to be able to take
14 private land for private purposes. It's why
15 we have initiative referendums in the state,
16 and it's why the people have the right to have
17 their voices heard.

18 Never before has there been an
19 alternative measure put on the ballot. I was
20 disappointed to see that happen. You can't
21 argue with the legislature's right to do it.
22 The law says they can. But our job is to go
23 out and tell a story. And it's to tell a
24 story about a little girl that got on a school
25 bus on a gravel road in rural Mississippi this

1 morning or that little boy in north Jackson or
2 that little girl or boy here in Meridian
3 downtown who got on the school bus to go to
4 school in Mississippi. That what this is all
5 about. It's not about politics below the
6 Golden Eagle in Jackson. It's not about
7 what's conservative and liberal. It's about
8 what is right and wrong. It's about the
9 children of Mississippi.

10 William Winter got it done. Can't we
11 find that will among ourselves to do good
12 things again when our future is at stake?
13 Can't we find amongst ourselves that will to
14 get this fixed once and for all? Let's just
15 be honest. Hold the legislature's feet to the
16 fire and make sure that promises made are
17 promises kept and make sure that we make
18 education a priority. Make sure that
19 education comes before lobbyists. Make sure
20 education of our school children is fully
21 funded. It takes guts to stand up to the
22 lobbyists.

23 Vote for 42. There are some good people
24 in this state and good folks on both sides.
25 Do the right thing and vote for 42.

1 *MS. BRANDON:* Thank you.

2 If everything has been said, on behalf
3 of Secretary Hosemann, I want to thank you
4 very much for coming out tonight. You are
5 among almost 1,000 people who have shown up
6 for our four hearings to express your opinion
7 on public education funding in Mississippi.
8 we'll have four more hearings. We'll be in
9 Cleveland, Gulfport, Brookhaven, and
10 Hattiesburg. Next Tuesday we will not have a
11 hearing. That's a runoff day, so I encourage
12 you to get out and vote. And we'll see you at
13 the polls on November 3rd.

14 Be safe traveling home.

15 (PROCEEDINGS CONCLUDED AT 7:33 P.M.)

16 * * * * *

17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

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 93 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 28th day of September, 2015.

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

My Commission Expires:

November 5, 2015