

# EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK: 'Dear Legislator...'

*By William Perkins*

*Editor*

The 2022 regular session of the Mississippi Legislature was gaveled into life on the morning of January 4. As anyone knows who even casually tracks the work of the Legislature, many bills are introduced but relatively few make it into law. The complex set of checks and balances both inside the legislative process and in the broader branches of state government have a tendency to winnow the hundreds and hundreds of bills that are filed and pre-filed for each session.

Legislators absorb their share of criticism, cynicism, and caricature during their time under the hoary domes of the New Capitol in downtown Jackson. Some of the ridicule showered on them is deserved (by some of them, anyway), but a fair amount is not. They are, after all, our fellow Mississippians.

For every citizen who couldn't find their way to either chamber in the Capitol but feels free to regularly slam legislators, there are at least a few of us who realize most legislators are well-meaning people who put aside their families, businesses, and community activities for several months to come to Jackson.

That's no small sacrifice, so it would behoove us to occasionally tell them how much we appreciate the effort even as we loudly complain about what we perceive they are doing or not doing.

Legislators will be addressing a number of critical issues in the 2022 session, not least of which is the steamroller-speed momentum to permit medical marijuana in the state. For whatever reasons, supportive legislators are working hard to

get medical marijuana legalized, while the Governor is holding out over what he considers to be an excessive daily number of joints allowed in the legislation.

There will be many other important actions undertaken by legislators. Mississippi Baptists need to pay attention and get involved.

The Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission (CAC) has some helpful hints on how to contact legislators, get a point across without dooming favored legislation, and follow up on the progress of important measures:

–The best communicating is done face-to-face. Make an appointment and be on time. Bring an outline of the one or two main issues you want to discuss. Be brief, recommend specific solutions, and hand your legislator(s) a written summary of your important points that includes your full name, e-mail and “snail mail” addresses, and telephone number.

It’s fair to ask a legislator for his/her position on the bills in which you are interested. Don’t take it personally if the legislator disagrees with you. Rather than argue, discuss differences in an appropriate manner while standing your ground.

–If a personal visit is not possible, write your legislator. Writing can save a legislator’s time (a plus in your favor) and provides a record of your position on proposed legislation. Include your full name, e-mail and “snail mail” addresses, and telephone number. Individual addresses can be accessed at <http://legislature.ms.gov/>.

–Do your research. Thoroughly study the bills in which you are interested. Include any specific information you have such as the bill number and details. Bill status can be attained by visiting <http://legislature.ms.gov/>.

–Telephone calls do not substitute for personal visits and

written correspondence. When telephoning legislators, however, make efficient use of your time with them. Identify yourself and the bills you are for or against (again, one or two main issues is a good limit). Explain your reasoning and let them know how you want them to vote.

The telephone numbers for legislators while both in session and out of session can be located at <http://legislature.ms.gov/>. Just as with personal visits and letters, end the conversation by expressing your thanks for their time.

–Citizens can request to testify before committees about bills they strongly support or oppose. Find out the name of the appropriate committee chairman and contact him/her as soon as possible. If given the opportunity to testify, get to the point quickly and be prepared to answer any questions legislators may have about your position.

The CAC, a ministry funded by the Mississippi Cooperative Program, stands ready to assist Mississippi Baptists who want to get involved in this grand process of self-governance we enjoy in our state and nation. They can be reached at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3329. E-mail: [rpeavy@christianaction.com](mailto:rpeavy@christianaction.com).

Take the time to get involved, or else just be content with whatever comes out of the legislative pipeline. Those are really our only two choices.