



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE**

ANDY GIPSON
COMMISSIONER

PRESS RELEASE

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Money-Grab by Mississippi Legislature Threatens Most State Fairgrounds, Ag Museum Events

JACKSON, Miss. – Commissioner Andy Gipson announced today that a pair of bills moving through the Mississippi Legislature this Session are threatening to end a large number of events traditionally held at the Mississippi State Fairgrounds and the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum, both in Jackson, Mississippi. House Bill 1357 and Senate Bill 2631 would restrict or prevent Fairgrounds and Ag Museum private event funds in the form of sponsorships, advertising and naming rights, sweeping private funds into the “control” of the State Legislature effective July 1. Currently, these voluntary private sector dollars fund Fairgrounds and Ag Museum operations, improvements, and repairs.

Commissioner Andy Gipson said, “I have already been contacted by the main Dixie National Rodeo and State Fair sponsors, as well as by dozens of other event promoters who are adamantly opposed to these bills. They see this as a money-grab by the Legislature; a true attempt to confiscate their voluntary private sponsorship dollars by the State. The result of this legislation will either be diminished investment in the Mississippi State Fairgrounds and the Agriculture and Forestry Museum, or an increase in taxpayer dollars going toward those facilities instead of private sector dollars. Both outcomes are unnecessary. Past legislatures have created laws and policies for the Fairgrounds and Museum to operate under state control but in the mode of a business to save taxpayer dollars.”

The passage of these bills would threaten not only the existence of the Dixie National Rodeo and Livestock Shows, but also the Mississippi State Fair and livestock shows and all the sponsored Fair activities and sponsored Ag Museum activities in Jackson.

In addition, most other private events on the Fairgrounds would be in jeopardy or have services and facilities diminished because the Mississippi State Fair and Dixie National Rodeo pay most of the operational and repair costs of the State Fairgrounds.

Commissioner Gipson continued, “All of our great livestock shows and horse shows would be at risk, plus any Trade Mart, Fordice Equine Center and Coliseum events. I do not believe our Legislators really want to jeopardize the future of the Mississippi State Fairgrounds and Ag Museum.”

The Commissioner observed, “It’s bad enough our Legislature has refused to fund the needed facilities repairs on the Fairgrounds and Ag Museum the last three years. But now, they want to remove MDAC’s ability to partner with our private sector sponsors to pay for what the Legislature cannot or will not.”

All affected livestock show and horse show families and promoters, 4-H and FFA youth and all our private event sponsors should be deeply concerned if these bills become law.

The House of Representatives passed House Bill 1357 on Monday, March 11, so now both it and Senate Bill 2631 are in the state Senate where only Lt. Governor Delbert Hosemann has the power to make necessary corrections to the bills.

Commissioner Gipson said, “I urge everyone affected to contact Lt. Governor Delbert Hosemann at (601) 359-3200 or e-mail ltgov@senate.ms.gov, and also contact your local State Senator and tell them to stop this money grab and support our ongoing Fairgrounds and Ag Museum events. Ask them all to stop these bills, or work with the Commissioner to amend HB 1357 and SB 2631.”

Commissioner Gipson concluded, “If the Legislature persists in passing these bills as introduced, I can guarantee both the Fairgrounds and Ag Museum will lose many valuable private sponsors. As a result, there will be fewer events, less revenue generated, and less economic development for the City of Jackson and the State of Mississippi. Rental rates will be forced up by the Legislature on all Fairgrounds venues. And, instead of a destination for thousands of schoolchildren, the Ag Museum could quickly become a ghost town. I remain cautiously optimistic that our elected Legislators will listen to the concerns of our great event promoters as well as our 4-H and FFA livestock and horse show families, before it is too late.”

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Media Note: Commissioner Andy Gipson will be available for interviews between 10:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. today, Tuesday, March 12, at the Biscuit Booth on the Mississippi State Fairgrounds.