



STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE
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COMMISSIONER

Opinion Column

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Restoring Public Safety in Mississippi

By Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson

How do you hold the State's largest event in one of the most dangerous cities in America? How do you host over half a million visitors annually, with no major security incidents?

The answer comes down to making an executive decision to prioritize public safety. It started by making an intentional executive decision to hire and deploy an overwhelming presence of law enforcement, creating a multi-agency security task force, and putting in place a plan that is proven to work.

And I believe the same plan that made our Mississippi State Fair safe again is the prototype of a plan that will make our Mississippi communities safe again.

Our Mississippi State Fair is held annually on the State Fairgrounds in Jackson, Mississippi. The Fair welcomes over half a million visitors from Mississippi, and beyond. Livestock exhibitors and their families fill the show barns. Families and children come from all backgrounds and all walks of life. Vendors come and offer a wide variety of products.

At the State Fair, parents enjoy bringing their children for special foods, games and rides that will form memories to last a lifetime; memories like stopping by the Biscuit Booth for a fresh, hot homemade buttermilk biscuit and Blackburn's syrup. Just like I did with my parents, as a boy.

But the State Fairgrounds is located in Jackson, Mississippi, a city known year after year to be one of the most dangerous places in America. With the highest number of homicides for its population size, as of January 2026 reports showed Jackson still held the position as the deadliest city in the nation per capita for the fifth year running, despite a recent drop in crime.

2021 was recorded as the most dangerous year in Jackson history, and early 2022 brought juvenile gang activity to the State Fairgrounds during a spring festival where several juveniles showed up who had been in and out of the juvenile justice system for years. Thankfully, the shooter was stopped in his tracks by an off-duty police officer working the event for the Fairgrounds. Lives were saved, but more preventive measures needed to be done.

That's when I declared war on crime. That summer on the Fairgrounds we hosted a Rebuilding the Walls of Safety crime summit and announced a new approach for the approaching 2022 State Fair. Under our new approach, we would bring together a multi-agency law enforcement task force, including state level law enforcement, to keep the Mississippi State Fairgrounds safe during the State's largest event. I hired an experienced former state trooper, James Herzog, to head up security and develop a security plan, in

partnership with county and municipal law enforcement as well as private security agencies. Five years later, I'm providing a brief outline of our plan.

First, we secure the perimeter of the State Fair Midway with only a limited number of entry points. Law enforcement is visibly present everywhere, with State Troopers, other state agency law enforcement officers, Capitol Police, Hinds County Sheriff's Office, Jackson Police, as well as other off-duty police from numerous jurisdictions. Undercover agents also patrol the Midway.

We deploy armed security to each entry point as well as the parking areas, with routine patrols in every sector of the 115-acre campus. Metal detectors are implemented and used for every person entering the Midway. We found that most would-be criminals turn away when they see metal detectors at the checkpoint and decide not to enter the event. Those who proceed know they will be arrested. Law abiding citizens showing approved ID are permitted to conceal carry for their personal protection.

Drones and other camera surveillance techniques are used to monitor activities during the event.

But perhaps the most significant decision we made was to impose a requirement that no juveniles - no underage youth - are allowed to attend the Mississippi State Fair without parental supervision or a responsible adult present. This had the intentional result of reducing our attendance numbers, while simultaneously creating a safer, more family-friendly environment.

In 2022, the first year we implemented this plan, we witnessed numerous attempts by would-be criminals to sneak in or get around the checkpoints. We saw weapons and other contraband thrown over the fence for apparent pick up later. But our surveillance systems caught them, and they were arrested. The word spread. After several arrests, the criminals stopped coming.

Today, we are five years into this new plan, and I believe our team has successfully changed the culture of our Mississippi State Fair, for the good. I want to thank everyone who made this year's State Fair the safest ever.

A lot of investment, planning and hard work goes on behind the scenes to keep the Mississippi State Fair safe for our annual visitors. The result is a safer, more family-friendly Mississippi State Fair.

I believe we can implement a public safety plan to restore safety and change the culture in high crime communities throughout Mississippi. By working with local sheriffs and police chiefs, by supporting all our law enforcement, by enforcing the law, arresting and holding criminals accountable, we can restore public safety to all communities in Mississippi. Because if we can do this at the State Fair in Jackson, there's no doubt we can get it done for the safety of your neighborhood.

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Photo Attached:

