

STATE POLITICS

PERS board wants system funding

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Mississippi Clarion Ledger
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After a recent volley of requests from local leaders across the state to establish annual state funding for the Public Employment Retirement System of Mississippi, the PERS Board of Trustees is reiterating that concern to Republican Gov. Tate Reeves.

On Wednesday, April 23, the board voted to direct PERS Executive Director Ray Higgins to send Reeves a letter pleading with him to in the upcoming special session include a proposal to establish recurring funding for the state retirement system, which currently had \$26.5 billion in unfunded liabilities. The letter was supposed to be written and mailed by end of business on Friday.

PERS funding and reforms became one of several political sticking points during the 2025 Legislative Session between House and Senate leadership. At the midpoint of the session, it seemed PERS was, as a negotiation tactic by Lt. Gov. Delbert Hosemann, wedged into another debate over whether to establish a path toward full income tax elimination or phase it down.

The House had earlier proposed taking nearly \$100 million in lottery tax revenue currently going to the Mississippi Department of Transportation and giving it to PERS to address the retirement system's unfunded liabilities. The proposal was early in the session placed into a huge House tax restructure bill that sought to eliminate the income tax, restructure sales tax revenues to cities and raise the gas tax.

The Senate didn't take it and proposed its own tax cut bill without a PERS funding element, opting instead to restructure public employee benefits via other legislation. The House later killed those proposals as well.

As a result, Hosemann said he would not cut taxes without those retirement benefit reforms. The Senate later released and passed a new "measured" income tax elimination bill that also included controversial PERS benefit reforms. What Senate leadership didn't know was that the bill included several



The Mississippi State Capitol building as seen from West Street.

SARAH WARNOCK/CLARION LEDGER

typo that sped up the rate of income tax elimination faster than intended.

The House, realizing what happened, took it and passed it anyway, hoping to use it as leverage for several other legislative items the Senate had previously killed. Reeves later signed the bill into law.

One of those legislative items, House Speaker Jason White, R-West, said during the session was annual PERS funding.

As a result of the political drama that ensued and bled into state budget talks, leadership on both sides left PERS funding, as well as the \$7 billion state budget, on the cutting room floor.

This leaves it up to Reeves to call a

special session to pass a budget before June 30, when the state's current fiscal year ends, but also an opening to discuss other political items he may want lawmakers to address.

Reeves in an interview with reporters in early April did not disclose what he was specifically looking to tack onto the special session, but he did not rule out anything out.

MS SNAP program likely to remain unimpacted by USDA letter

Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued a letter to state agencies overseeing SNAP benefit programs, stating it would review those

states that do not require certain beneficiaries of the program to work.

A spokesperson for the Mississippi Department of Human Services, which oversees Mississippi's SNAP program, said the state would likely remain unaffected by a federal government review or the letter.

On April 17, the USDA issued a letter reminding states that did not have an active work requirement that abled-bodied adults without dependents, or ABAWDs, should be working or taking steps toward employment.

"Many states have abused the system by requesting work requirement waivers," said U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins in the letter. "Today marks the start of a new era for SNAP — prioritizing work, career and technical education, and volunteering rather than idleness, excess spending, and misapplication of the law."

MDHS spokesperson Mark Jones told the Clarion Ledger that the state's SNAP program would likely remain unimpacted due to an already active work requirement imposed by the state on ABAWDs.

SNAP benefits, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, are benefits issued to help low-income individuals and families purchase food. The benefits, supplied electronically, can be used like cash at approved stores buy food items.

Of all the beneficiaries of Mississippi's program as of March, 22% of those receiving SNAP assistance are ABAWDs, Jones said. The work requirement generally requires beneficiaries to work 80 hours per month to maintain eligibility, unless they become exempt from it. Those receiving benefits can also participate in a work program called SNAP E&T to satisfy the work requirement.

USDA already annually reviews state's SNAP programs. In addition, the federal agency also provides approvals of waivers to forego the work requirement in special circumstances.

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LEGAL NOTICE

SOUTHEAST COMPRESSION UTILITY AND RELIABILITY EXPANSION PROJECT

FORREST COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

NOTICE OF PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION OF INTERSTATE NATURAL GAS PIPELINE FACILITIES

On April 16th, 2025, Gulf South Pipeline Company, LLC (Gulf South), filed an application for its Southeast Compression Utility and Reliability Expansion Project ("SECURE Project" or "Project") with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) under Section 7(c) of the Natural Gas Act in Docket No. CP25-219.

As part of the SECURE Project, Gulf South is requesting approval to make improvements at four locations to help maintain reliable natural gas service in the Southeastern United States. The proposed work includes adding new compressor units and equipment at Gulf South's existing Tallulah Compressor Station in Madison Parish, LA, and Jasper Compressor Station in Jasper County, MS; upgrading Gulf South's Forrest Compressor Station in Forrest County, MS by adding a new compressor unit, modifying an existing unit, and installing ancillary equipment; and building a new compressor station in Hinds County, MS, which will include one compressor unit and ancillary equipment.

The Project is more fully described in Gulf South's application to the FERC. A copy of the application is available at The Library of Hattiesburg Petal and Forrest County – Petal Library (714 S Main Street Petal, MS 39465) and can be accessed on the FERC's eLibrary at <https://elibrary.ferc.gov/eLibrary/search>. Search in the eLibrary by entering the docket number in the Reference Number field to access the Project documents. Gulf South has also mailed Project notices to landowners who are considered directly affected by the Project, per the FERC's regulations, and to relevant governing entities.

Gulf South's Project website (SECURE.gulfsouthpl.com) addresses general information about the Project, including Frequently Asked Questions, the regulatory process, environmental protection, safety, how to contact Gulf South, and how to access the FERC's website to review and obtain copies of public filings.

For information on becoming involved in the FERC review of this Project or to obtain the FERC pamphlet, "An Interstate Natural Gas Facility on My Land? What Do I Need to Know?," go to the FERC's website at www.ferc.gov or call the FERC Office of External Affairs at (202) 502-8004, or toll free at (866) 208-3372.

For additional information about the Project, you may contact Gulf South via its Project hotline or Project email address.

Hotline: (877-972-8533)

Email: community.voices@bwpipelines.com

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