

***Millsaps College/Chism Strategies State of the State Survey
Summary of Findings—January 2019***

➤ **A slight plurality of Mississippians (42%) believe the state is heading in the wrong direction, with 36% saying the state is heading in the right direction.** This represents a reversal from the way voters have perceived the state’s direction over the past calendar year. Several divisions exist within the electorate that impact the right direction/wrong direction measurement. First, men are more likely to sense that Mississippi is on the right track (+11%), while women respondents are more likely to sense that the state is on the wrong track (-7%). Second, there is a pronounced age gap when it comes to viewpoints concerning the state’s direction, with younger votes showing a greater sense of pessimism than older voters. Those who are ages 18 to 34 (-24%), 35 to 44 (-30%), and 45 to 54 (-17%) believe Mississippi is heading in the wrong direction, while those 55 to 64 (+8%) and 65 and older (+13) are more positive about the state’s direction.

Likewise, there are gaps that form between voters based on variables such as party affiliation, educational attainment, and race. Those who identify as Strong Republicans (+54%) and Republican Leaners (+31%) feel more optimistic about the state than Independents (-34%), Democratic Leaners (-58%), and Strong Democrats (-59%). Voters with less than a high school education (+18%) and those with a high school degree (+16%) are more likely than those with an advance degree (-16%) and those who attended but did not graduate from college (-3%) to believe the state is heading in the wrong direction. A similar pattern can be found among white voters (+20%) and black voters (-38%) when considering their sense of the state’s direction at this time.

Do you believe that Mississippi is headed in the right direction or the wrong direction?

Date of Poll	Right Direction	Wrong Direction	Unsure	Net Right/Wrong Direction
17-Sep	37%	40%	23%	-3%
18-Jan	42%	36%	22%	6%
18-Apr	44%	37%	20%	7%
18-Jul	35%	29%	37%	6%
18-Sep	43%	30%	27%	13%
19-Jan	36%	42%	22%	-6%
Average	40%	36%	25%	4%

These divisions regarding the electorate’s perceptions of Mississippi’s trajectory come at an interesting time given the state of the legislative session and the upcoming state elections this November. Candidates seeking statewide or legislative offices will need to determine how best to address the aforementioned divisions within the state’s electorate

and the apparent perception of a slide in the wrong direction, especially as it relates to their own electoral and policy constituencies throughout 2019.

- **Voters continue to emphasize the importance of road and bridge repair.** For the sixth consecutive State of the State Survey, voters have indicated their top priority for the state’s elected leaders is to fix roads and bridges. Our October 2018 survey indicated voters were largely satisfied with the compromises that led to the enactment of a new state lottery with funds targeting infrastructure repair, but it appears as if the electorate saw this as only a starting point for road and bridge repair. Support for fixing Mississippi’s roads and bridges is an especially popular priority with both white voters (32%) and black voters (31%), voters 55 to 64 (35%) and older than 65 (43%), Strong Republicans (36%) and Republican Leaners (+39%), Strong Democrats (34%), those with a high school degree (46%), and those without a high school degree (41%).

What should be the top priority for Mississippi’s elected leaders working in Jackson?

Policy Priority	17-Sep	18-Jan	18-Apr	18-Jul	18-Sep	19-Jan	Running Average
Reducing the size of state government	16%	11%	12%	8%	12%	11%	12%
Fixing roads and bridges	27%	23%	29%	25%	27%	28%	27%
Giving tax incentives and grants for companies that create jobs	13%	10%	9%	12%	8%	8%	10%
Making healthcare more accessible and affordable	14%	21%	14%	18%	18%	18%	17%
More funding for public schools	14%	19%	20%	22%	20%	21%	19%
More funding for universities and community colleges	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Protecting traditional family values	6%	7%	11%	8%	8%	8%	8%
Other	7%	6%	2%	4%	4%	4%	5%

- **65% of Mississippi voters believe public school funding in the state is too low,** an increase from the 56% who said the same in the September 2017 State of the State Survey. Meanwhile, just 10% say that Mississippi’s public school funding is too high, while 20% say that it is about right at current levels.

Voters overwhelmingly say public school funding in the state is too low, regardless of their level of educational attainment. However, voters are more likely to say school funding is too low as their years of formal education increase. Those saying public school funding is too low includes 44% of those with less than a high school degree, 53% of high school graduates, 59% of voters who attended college but did not graduate, 63% of graduates of two-year colleges, 61% of four year college graduates, and 70% of voters with an advanced degree. Three quarters of black voters agree that Mississippi’s public school funding is too low, although that number drops to 55% among white voters.

Additionally, nearly 30% of white voters say school funding in Mississippi is “about right,” a position shared by just 11% of black voters and 20% of the electorate as a whole. Majorities of those who identify as Strong Democrats (83%), Democratic Leaners (84%), Independents (61%), and Republican Leaners (54%) all agree that public school funding is too low, along with a plurality of Strong Republicans (45%).

- **Also related to public education. Mississippians strongly support a pay raise for the state’s public school teachers.** Over 75% of those surveyed say they back a plan currently being discussed by executive and legislative branch leaders to provide for a 3% pay raise for public school teachers at the cost of \$50 million per year. Only 14% oppose raising teacher pay in this manner. Voters overwhelmingly back the plan, regardless of their political party affiliation, which is supported by Strong Republicans (+34%), Republican Leaners (+54%), Independents (+60%), Democratic Leaners (92%), and Strong Democrats (+83%). The teacher pay raise is also supported by women (+63%) and men (+54%), as well as black (+74%) and white voters (+53%) alike. This issue appears to be one in which members of the legislature can come together without risking a political backlash following the legislative session, when the members of both chambers return to their districts to campaign for re-election.
- **Mississippi voters overwhelmingly favor expanding Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.** Over 60% of respondents voiced support for Medicaid expansion that would increase insurance coverage for low-income and uninsured citizens while bringing greater financial stability to rural and small-town hospitals. Mississippi is currently one of only 14 states that has not expanded Medicaid under the ACA. Only 29% of Mississippians oppose Medicaid expansion while 11% are unsure. Despite the lack of support for Medicaid expansion during previous sessions among Republican leaders, there are some signs that their hardened stance against expansion may be thawing. State Representative Robert Foster, a declared gubernatorial candidate who is among the most conservative members of the House of Representatives, has indicated that he is open to support a limited form of expansion this year. The Jackson Free Press reported on January 11 that Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann, who has announced his candidacy for Lieutenant Governor is also reevaluating some form of Medicaid Expansion.

Legislators may also find that there is a political benefit to expansion as well, given the +31% margin of support for such a policy change. Additionally, Medicaid expansion is popular among both women (+30%) and men (+18%) within the electorate, strongly supported by black voters (+77%) and narrowly by white voters (+1%), and voters in all age groups ranging from +9% with those 65 and older to +38% with those who are 35 to 44. Independents (+27%), Democratic Leaners (+85%), and Strong Democrats (+92%) all back Medicaid expansion while Republican Leaners (-15%) and Strong Republicans (-19%) are opposed.

- **Early voting is becoming increasingly popular with Mississippi voters.** Over 70% of voters say they support allowing eligible Mississippi voters to participate in early voting at their county Circuit Clerk’s offices 14 days before an election. Such a policy change

would put Mississippi in alignment with 38 other states that already allow for early voting, although the number of days of early voting availability varies from state-to-state. These findings represent an even greater shift among the public in favor of early voting when compared to the findings of the July 2018 State of the State Survey, which found that 57% supported the concept at that time. Six months later, we see a 14% increase in support for early voting combined with a 4% decline among those who say they are opposed to such a policy. Additionally, there was a 10% drop over this six month period among those who were unsure about early voting.

Support Grows for Early Voting in Mississippi

	Jul-18	Jan-19	Change
Support	57%	71%	14%
Oppose	25%	21%	-4%
Unsure	18%	8%	-10%

Although it would be highly unlikely for the legislature to enact an early voting bill that would take effect for the 2019 elections, legislation enacting early voting could be passed in time for the 2020 presidential primary and general elections next year. The data show that broad support for early voting exists among the Mississippi electorate, as the idea is backed by Strong Republicans (+17%), Republican Leaners (+19%), Independents (+42%), Democratic Leaners (+76%), and Strong Democrats (+78%) alike. Support for early voting is found among voters of all levels of educational attainment, both men and women, and all age classifications. Black and white voters also voice enthusiastic support for early voting by margins of +67% and +31%, respectively.

- **The proposal to allow rural electric cooperatives to provide high speed internet access to customers is extremely popular with the public.** Overall, 83% favor such a plan while just 6% are opposed. According to the Mississippi Public Service Commission, the Magnolia State ranks 49th in the nation in access to high speed internet connectivity. Presently, only cable and phone companies are allowed to provide high speed internet services in the state.

The October 2018 State of the State Survey found that Mississippi voters are anxious to see greater compromise and cooperation among the state’s elected leaders in order to get things done. The rural broadband proposal may be a good example of an issue that could unite political leaders around an idea that is well-liked among voters of all political stripes. Support for allowing rural electric cooperatives to provide high speed internet services tests very well with Strong Republicans (+67%), Republican Leaners (+73%), Strong Democrats (+76%), Democratic Leaners (+76%), and Independents (+70%).

- **Voters endorse Attorney General Jim Hood’s recently announced lawsuit against three of the country’s largest manufacturers of opioids.** Nearly 70% support Hood’s lawsuit, while 16% are opposed. If successful, the consumer protection suit would reduce the amount of opioids coming into the state and being sold illegally while requiring

opioid manufacturers to reimburse the state for various costs associated with combating drug addiction. The data show the suit's popularity cuts across large swaths of the electorate, including women (+52%), men (+54%), black voters (+47%), white voters (+58%). There is also bipartisan support for Hood's suit, which is backed by Strong Democrats (+59%), Democratic Leaners (+66%), Strong Republicans (+51%), Republican Leaners (+48%), and Independents (+53%).

- **Nearly 55% of voters prefer to address the \$75 million annual shortfall in the Public Employees Retirement System by funding the additional costs rather than changing or reducing benefits and pensions for new state workers.** Just 24% of respondents said that their preferred approach would be to change the type of benefits plan currently provided to new state employees and reduce their pensions to address the shortfall. Another 22% were unsure which option they found to be most preferable. Although Republicans overall tend to favor funding the costs of the pension system, they are considerably less likely to approve of this approach than Democrats within the electorate. Among Republicans, 43% back funding the pension plan while 32% would rather change the benefit plan and reduce pensions. Meanwhile, 67% of Democrats favor funding the pension plan, while just 17% support changing the plan and reducing pensions for new employees.
- **Voters strongly support allowing certain patients to use medical marijuana.** Looking ahead to 2020, an organization called Medical Marijuana 2020 is currently collecting signatures for a ballot initiative to be held in November of that year which would allow qualified patients with debilitating medical conditions, as certified by Mississippi licensed physicians, to use medical marijuana. If enacted, this process would be regulated by the State Health Department. 67% of respondents said they support the concept behind this possible ballot initiative, while 24% are opposed.

Support for the measure is especially high among black voters (+42%), Democratic Leaners (+66%), Strong Democrats (+52%), those with advanced degrees (+39%), two-year college graduates (+42%), and voters ages 18-34 (+43%), 35 to 44 (+64%), 45 to 54 (+42%), and 55 to 64 (+51%). The weakest overall support comes from voters 65 and older (+4%) and Strong Republicans (+6%). The only identifiable subgroup within the electorate opposed to the initiative are voters with less than a high school education (-6%).
- **The Mississippi Legislature's approval rating has hit its lowest point in any of the first six State of the State Surveys,** with 46% saying they disapprove of the legislature's work and just 24% approving. The legislature's current net approval stands at -22%, which is quite low when compared to the six-survey average of -13%, indicating that last fall's bump in legislative approval following the fall special session has reversed itself. It is also possible that the recent, high-profile DUI arrests of two of the legislature's top leaders has helped to further sour the public's impression of the legislative branch of state government.

Mississippi State Legislature Approval Rating

Date of Poll	Approve	Disapprove	Unsure	Net Approve/ Disapprove
17-Sep	27%	45%	28%	-18%
18-Jan	26%	38%	36%	-12%
18-Apr	30%	41%	26%	-11%
18-Jul	22%	35%	43%	-12%
18-Sep	32%	34%	34%	-2%
19-Jan	24%	46%	30%	-22%
Average	27%	40%	33%	-13%

The legislature’s collectively low approval rating is dragged down by particularly weak marks from Strong Democrats (-48%), Democratic Leaners (-48%), Independents (-29%), black voters (-29%), voters ages 18-34 (-28%), 35-44 (-27%), and 45-54 (-25%). The legislature is also struggling with both men and women alike (-22% and -19%, respectively). Voters with advance degrees (-37%), those who attended but did not graduate from college (-25%), and those with a four-year college degree (-24%) are also quite pessimistic about the legislature’s performance. The only real bright spot for the legislature is that they have a net approval rating of +8% among Strong Republicans and an equal share of approval and disapproval among those with less than a high school degree.

➤ **United States Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith’s approval rating stands at -12%.**

Following a grueling 2018 campaign, 38% approve of Hyde-Smith’s performance, 50% disapprove, and 13% are unsure. Hyde-Smith, who must run again in 2020 should she desire to seek a full term in the Senate, struggles with some constituency groups within the state. In particular, she posts high disapproval ratings from voters ages 18 to 34 (-32%), 35 to 44 (-31%), 45 to 54 (-23%), and 55 to 64 (-3%). Varying levels of disapproval are also found among women voters (-14%), those with less than a high school education (-9%), college attendees (-4%), two-year college graduates (-7%), four-year college graduates (-5%), those with advanced degrees (-23%), black voters (-66%), Independents (-32%), Democratic Leaners (-89%), and Strong Democrats (-87%). Hyde-Smith’s highest marks come from Strong Republicans (+59%), Republican Leaners (+38%), white voters (+25%), high school graduates (+17%), male voters (+5%), and voters 65 and older (+9%).

➤ **Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann—an announced candidate for lieutenant governor—remains an extremely popular figure in Mississippi politics.**

Hosemann enjoys a net approval rating of +30%, which is very close to the average of all three measurements of Hosemann since last January, which stands at +32%. As the most popular public official included in the January 2019 State of the State Survey, approval for Hosemann is not limited to members of his party, although Strong Republicans and Republican Leaners both voice their strong approval of his work (+58% and +56%, respectively). Hosemann also receives good marks from Independents (+28%),

Democratic Leaners (+12%), and draws even among Strong Democrats. Hosemann is also met with high approval ratings among white voters (+46%) and black voters (+13%) alike. His net approval ranges from +15% to +45% across all age groups and stands at +37% among men and +35% among women.

Do you approve or disapprove of Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann?

Date of Poll	Approve	Disapprove	Unsure	Net Approval
18-Jan	53%	19%	38%	34%
18-Jul	48%	15%	38%	33%
19-Jan	50%	20%	30%	30%
Average	50%	18%	35%	32%

- **More voters today approve of State Treasurer Lynn Fitch’s performance in office than they did six months ago.** However, a similar share of voters also disapproves more so than they did at that time. Fitch—an announced candidate for Mississippi attorney general—has seen an increase of 5% in her overall approval rating from July and a 6% increase in her disapproval rating. Those who were unable to make up their mind about Fitch last summer have been moving in one direction or the other as they see and hear more from the sitting treasurer.

Fitch enjoys high marks from Strong Republicans (+47%) and Republican Leaners (+54%) but is underwater with Independents (-2%) and Strong Democrats (-14%). Democratic Leaners approve of Fitch’s job performance by a slim margin (+6%). Overall, both female and male voters approve of Fitch’s work, +21% and +22%, respectively. She also receives high marks from those with less than a high school education (+29%) and those who attended but did not complete college (+27%). White voters are considerably more likely to approve of Fitch’s work (+34%) than black voters (-2%).

Do you approve or disapprove of State Treasurer Lynn Fitch?

Date of Poll	Approve	Disapprove	Unsure	Net Approval
18-Jan	42%	23%	34%	19%
18-Jul	37%	17%	46%	20%
19-Jan	42%	23%	35%	19%

Average	40%	21%	38%	19%
----------------	-----	-----	-----	-----

- **Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney continues to post a positive net approval rating of 10%, but many voters are still unsure about how to evaluate his work.** 31% of Mississippi voters approve of Chaney’s job performance, compared to 21% who disapprove. Nearly half of the electorate is unsure of how to evaluate Chaney, although this is considerably less than the 56% majority who were unsure of him in the July 2018 State of the State Survey. Chaney remains well-liked by Strong Republicans (+34%), Republican Leaners (+21%), voters 65 and older (+24%), white voters (+20%), male voters (+17%), high school graduates (+17%), college attendees (+17%), and four-year college graduates (+15%). The incumbent insurance commissioner struggles with Strong Democrats (-11%), Independents (+/-0), black voters (-3%), and those 35 to 44 (+/-0). Meanwhile, the majority of voters ages 18 to 34 and 35 to 44, Democratic Leaners, those with less than a high school education, and two-year college graduates were unsure as to whether they approve or disapprove of Chaney.

Do you approve or disapprove of Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney?

Date of Poll	Approve	Disapprove	Unsure	Net Approval
18-Jul	31%	14%	56%	17%
19-Jan	31%	21%	48%	10%
Average	31%	18%	52%	14%

- **An increasing share of voters are aware of Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson, but his net approval rating has declined since July.** Appointed to fill the seat vacated by Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith nearly ten months ago, Commissioner Andy Gipson is becoming more widely known to Mississippi voters. Gipson—who has announced he will seek a full term as Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce this year—posted a 13% net approval rating in the January survey, a decline of 5% since July. Gipson’s approval rating has increased by four points in seven months, yet his disapproval score has increased by 9%. Gipson receives high marks from Strong Republicans (+37%), Republican Leaners (+46%), college attendees (+23%), those with less than a high school degree (+20%), four-year college graduates (+20%), male voters (+21%), voters 55 to 64 (+15%), voters 65 and older (+24%), and white voters (+24%). Gipson struggles with Democratic Leaners (-17%), Strong Democrats (-6%), and Independents (-3%). A majority of women voters, those with less than a high school education, two-year college graduates, black voters, Democratic Leaners, and Strong Democrats still are unsure of Gipson’s overall performance.

Do you approve or disapprove of Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson?

Date of Poll	Approve	Disapprove	Unsure	Net Approval
18-Jul	29%	11%	59%	18%

19-Jan	33%	20%	47%	13%
Average	31%	16%	53%	16%