

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

MARCH 13, 2026

The Legislature is another week closer to sine die, as lawmakers have completed their 10th week of session. With only three weeks remaining, the House and Senate are working steadily on clearing their calendars, sending bills to conference, and negotiating a state budget. Both chambers are ahead of schedule on appropriations bills, having already passed those measures back to the originating chamber ahead of next Tuesday's deadline. March 17 is also the deadline for revenue related bills to pass the opposite chamber, and we expect House Ways and Means and Senate Finance to pass several measures out of committee and off the floor ahead of that deadline.

CERTIFICATE OF NEED (CON) UPDATE

Lawmakers have reached a final agreement on a bill to make limited changes to Mississippi's Certificate of Need (CON) laws, and it now heads to the Governor for approval. The bill creates a pilot program that gives certain small or Delta-region hospitals a chance to add specific services, like geriatric psychiatric beds or other services that normally require special state approval, without going through the full CON process. There are limits on how many hospitals can qualify and on certain services, like dialysis. Hospitals must apply by June 30, 2027, or lose the opportunity. The State Health Officer's decisions on these approvals will largely be final, with only a short window for reconsideration and very limited court review. The bill also removes most CON restrictions in Issaquena and Humphreys Counties under certain conditions, requires the state to study whether caps on certain health facilities should continue, and adds a "loser pays" rule for certain court appeals beginning in July 2026.

EDUCATION AND SCHOOL CHOICE

Education issues continue to dominate the attention of leadership and tensions continue to intensify between the chambers. This week, the Senate responded to the House's latest teacher pay raise bill, with a proposal of their own. The Senate plan will increase K-12 teacher pay by \$6,000 over a three-year period. Under the proposal, special education teachers will receive an additional \$3,000 increase and assistant teachers will receive a \$2,000 raise. The Senate also included a \$2,000 raise for university and community college professors.

The total price tag for the Senate proposal will amount to \$328.5M with \$109.5M of that amount being allotted in the upcoming fiscal year. These competing pay raise bills will continue to be debated and could be adopted by the opposite chamber or sent to conference for further negotiations.

Additionally, as reported by the [Magnolia Tribune](#), Governor Tate Reeves has again raised the possibility of a special session being called to address the school choice issues that so far have not been passed by the Legislature this session and tying that issue to teacher pay raises. While he believes there is still time for the Legislature to act within the confines of the regular session, he conceded, "...I'm in year seven. I don't have much time left and so on items that are incredibly important to me like rewarding our teachers, like getting more options for our kids, those are the kind of things that I am very, very interested in the Legislature getting across the finish line."

FEDERAL PRIMARY ELECTION RESULTS

Primary Elections were held in Mississippi on Tuesday for one of our two U.S. Senate seats and all four congressional seats. Incumbent U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith faced opposition in the Republican primary from newcomer Sarah Adlakha. The race was called shortly after the polls closed and Sen. Hyde-Smith won with nearly 81% of the vote. She will now face off against Democrat nominee Scott Colom who easily won his primary with 73% of the vote in a three-candidate field. While expectations are that Colom will run an aggressive and serious campaign, Sen. Hyde-Smith remains a significant favorite to win another six-year term in November and President Trump is expected to help with her campaign.

The four Congressional races also went as planned with the following results:

District 1

Republican Congressman Trent Kelly was unopposed and will face off against Democrat nominee Cliff Johnson in November. Johnson won the nomination with nearly 64% of the vote. Congressman Kelly is favored to be re-elected.

District 2

Democrat Congressman Bennie Thompson cruised to the nomination with 86% of the vote in the three-way field. He will face opposition from Republican nominee Ron Eller who narrowly won his primary with 50.9% of the vote. Congressman Thompson holds the advantage for re-election in November.

District 3

Republican Congressman Michael Guest was unopposed in his bid for re-election and will face off against Democrat nominee Michael Chiaradio, who was also unopposed, in November. Congressman Guest should cruise to re-election.

District 4

Republican Congressman Mike Ezell easily won the Republican nomination with 84% of the vote. He will face off against state Rep. Jeffrey Hulum in November after Hulum secured the Democrat nomination with nearly 58% of the vote in a three-way race. Congressman Ezell is a heavy favorite to win another two-year term.

FINAL THREE WEEKS

As we enter the legislative conference season we wanted to provide a refresher on how the process works. Any piece of legislation that is not concurred on by the originating chamber and is thus sent to conference for further negotiation will be assigned three House members by the Speaker and three Senators by the Lt. Governor, known as conferees. It takes at least two conferees from each chamber to sign a conference report, for the report to be placed on each chamber's calendar, although typically all six conferees sign a conference report. Once the conference report is filed, the Senate and House must each pass it "as is" for it to be sent to the Governor or the bill dies. Conference reports may not be amended on the floor under normal rules, so if further changes are necessary then the reports must be recommitted for further conference and the process starts over, subject to the legislative deadlines. Each year there are bills that go to conference and never make it out.

As we enter the final budget negotiation time of the session, cracks are showing in the state economy which are threatening the final decisions of budget negotiators. Notably, Senate Appropriations Chairman Briggs Hopson has been working on a "clawback plan" for unexpended funds from previous sessions in an effort to re-appropriate those monies and thus not have to spend as much of today's dollars. There has still not been a commitment from either chamber to fund a local projects bill, despite sitting on billions of dollars in cash. Demands from members are heating up especially since legislators want to deliver for their districts and will be qualifying for election in less than a year. Amplifying the situation and making matters worse is the lack of communication between the leaders of the chambers as we near the end of session. Many do not want a repeat of last session when Governor Reeves had to call a Special Session for lawmakers to finish the state budget.

UPCOMING LEGISLATIVE DEADLINES:

- Tuesday, March 17 – Deadline for original floor action on appropriations and revenue bills originating in the other chamber
- Friday, March 20 - Deadline to concur or not concur in the amendments from the other chamber on appropriations and revenue bills
- Thursday, March 26 - Deadline to concur or not concur in amendments from other chamber to general bills and constitutional amendments
- Saturday, March 28 - Deadline for conference reports on appropriation and revenue bills to be filed