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**Millsaps College-Chism Strategies State of the State Survey:
Mississippians Evaluate Policies, Political Figures
as Legislative Session Convenes**

***Voters Strongly Favor Creating State Lottery and Directing Proceeds to Public
Education***

JACKSON—Magnolia State voters are concerned about the direction of their state, disapprove of the work being done by the state legislature, and rank infrastructure, healthcare access and cost, and increasing public school funding as their top priorities. Nearly 70% of voters favor creating a state lottery with a majority saying that lottery revenue should be directed to the public schools. These and other findings are detailed in the newest Millsaps College-Chism Strategies State of the State Survey.

Administered through a partnership between Millsaps College and Chism Strategies, the second State of the State Survey was designed to more clearly comprehend the viewpoints of voters about important issues in state government, particularly since the 2018 Legislative Session convened one week ago. The survey also tests the approval of several major political figures such as Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann, State Treasurer Lynn Fitch*, U.S. Senator Roger Wicker, State Senator Chris McDaniel, and Public Service Commissioner Brandon Presley in a year with a U.S. Senate race on the ballot and just one year before all statewide positions and state legislative seats are up for grabs.

“The State of the State Survey finds that although voters are concerned about the state’s current direction, there are several clear-cut policy priorities that may help improve their perceptions of state government and the legislature,” said Dr. Nathan R. Shrader, assistant professor of political science at Millsaps. “These priorities include immense support for creating a state lottery and the need to address very tangible problems like infrastructure and the lack of accessible, affordable health care. In addition to these things, we learned from this survey that several key state officials such as Delbert Hosemann and Lynn Fitch are quite popular with the voters and should be taken seriously as potential candidates for higher office.”

(more)

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The survey also found some contradictions within the electorate's views, particularly when it comes to fixing the roads and bridges. While nearly a quarter of all respondents ranked infrastructure improvements as their top policy priority, just 38% favor increasing the state's gasoline tax to finance the repairs. Likewise, only 29% of voters believe that lottery revenue should be directed to fixing road and bridge repairs compared to 51% who feel that this money should go towards funding public education.

“We are excited to continue our relationship with Millsaps as the College invests in this polling series,” said Brad Chism, senior partner at Chism Strategies. “Millsaps is uniquely positioned to offer credible public opinion research and lead informed discussion about key public policy matters in our state.”

The State of the State Survey involves a partnership between the Millsaps College Political Science Department, the Institute for Civic and Professional Engagement at Millsaps, and Chism Strategies. The survey was conducted December 15-19th. Sample size of 578 with 29% cell phone interviews. MOE of 4.08%. Results weighted to reflect 2015 general election turnout for age, race, gender and partisanship.

A summary analysis of the survey results is provided on the following pages. Detailed survey information is available upon request.

**Disclaimer: State Treasurer Lynn Fitch will be serving as an adjunct faculty member and teaching a course in the spring 2018 semester at Millsaps College.*

Millsaps College-Chism Strategies State of the State Survey

Summary of Findings

January 9, 2018

Mississippians are split on the direction of the state, and the split falls along partisan lines. Republicans view the state as heading in the right direction, 64%-16%. Democrats see the state as headed in the wrong direction, 63%-14% while independent voters also see the state heading in the wrong direction, 50%-25%. There are also sharp differences in the perceptions of voters of differing races with a majority of white voters suggesting the state is heading in the right direction, 52%-26% while African American voters believe the state is heading in the wrong direction, 55-21%. Additionally, voters between the ages of 18-44 were the most likely to say that the state is heading in the wrong direction while voters between 45-54 and those 65 and older were the most likely to say that the state is heading in the right direction.

Delbert Hosemann is the most popular elected official we asked voters about. Hosemann's approval sits at +34%. His approval among Republicans is +58%. Hosemann is particularly popular with older voters: voters age 55 and older approve of Hosemann 60%-19%. Among African American voters, Hosemann is the most popular of the Republican elected officials included in the survey. He also enjoys a +16 mark among independents.

State Treasurer Lynn Fitch* also drew high marks from voters. Her approval rating sits at +19% overall. Among Republican voters, 56% approve of Fitch's job performance, while 12% disapprove. Fitch's weakest evaluations come from voters between the ages of 18-34 (-11%) while her strongest evaluations are from voters between 45-54 (+29%).

Public Service Commissioner Brandon Presley is still a relatively unknown figure in the state, with 48% of voters saying they were unable to rate him. Still, Presley got impressive marks among Republican voters for a Democrat, with a +22% approval rating among GOP respondents. Presley is currently being courted by some Democrats in the state to run against Roger Wicker in next year's Senate race, and his popularity among Republicans suggests he could be a strong contender if he decides to run.

Roger Wicker's approval rating is at +11%. Among Republicans, 63% approve, while 21% disapprove. Wicker's likely 2018 primary challenger, Chris McDaniel, is slightly less popular than Wicker, with only a +7% approval rating overall and a +28% approval rating among Republicans. Still, less than half of all voters say they approve of Wicker's performance in Washington, and that is not where the senator would like to be as he gears up for reelection in 2018.

Only 20% of voters say they are definitely voting to reelect Wicker in 2018. Another 28% say they are probably voting for the incumbent senator. 38% say they are probably or definitely voting for someone else. Among Republicans, only 31% say they are definitely voting for Wicker, 35% say they will probably vote for him, and 20% say they are likely to vote for someone else. This suggests that while Republican voters approve of Wicker overall, they do not have strong feelings for the senator and would be willing to consider other options if Wicker faces a primary challenger in 2018.

The Mississippi Legislature—which convened the new 90-day session last week—is largely unpopular with voters. Collectively, the legislature’s approval rating is underwater at -12%. Voters across all ethnic, gender, and age groups disapprove of the legislature’s performance. Only those who identify as Strong Republicans give positive marks to the legislative branch of government.

Fixing our state’s roads and bridges was the top priority for respondents. 23% of respondents listed infrastructure as their top priority, followed by making health care more accessible and affordable at 21%. Health care was the top priority for African-Americans, while fixing roads and bridges was the top priority for white respondents. Making healthcare more affordable was also a much bigger issue for women in our survey, with 28% of female respondents listing it as their top priority, compared to just 13% of men. Men—and particularly white men—were much more likely to consider reducing the size of state government to be the most important issue: 20% of white men said reducing the size of government should be the top priority for our leaders in Jackson.

Mississippi voters overwhelmingly support creating a state lottery 69%-23%. This includes support from 62% of Republicans, 77% of Democrats, and 66% of independents. A slim majority of voters (51%) say the proceeds from the lottery should go to support public education, although this is considerably higher than the second most popular option of using the proceeds to fund roads and bridges (29%). Women were more likely to support using the proceeds for public schools by eleven points (54% for women, compared to 43% for men). A solid majority of African American voters (63%) and a plurality of white voters (44%) were also more likely to favor directing this new revenue to public schools than to other spending priorities.

Voters oppose authorizing a higher state gasoline tax to support infrastructure improvements, with 38% in support and 50% opposed. A plurality of Democrats (44%) said they would support the tax, compared to only 36% of Republicans and 31% of independents.

68% of voters said they think all school board members should be elected. 10% said they thought members should be appointed, while 14% thought they should vary by type of district. Republicans were slightly more likely to say school members should be elected (72%, compared to 62% of Democrats).

A majority of voters oppose reducing the cost of living adjustment for retirees from state and local government jobs. Voters age 18-54 were more likely to oppose the reduction (59% compared to 48% of voters 55 or older).

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Q1 Do you believe Mississippi is headed in the right direction or the wrong direction?	
Q1-Direction	%
1 Right Direction	41.70%
2 Wrong Direction	36.28%
3 Unsure	22.02%
Grand Total	100.00%

Q2 Delbert Hosemann Approval	
Q2-Hosemann	%
1 Approve	53.40%
2 Disapprove	18.72%
3 Unsure	27.88%
Grand Total	100.00%

Q3 Lynn Fitch Approval	
Q3-Fitch	%
1 Approve	42.41%
2 Disapprove	23.12%
3 Unsure	34.47%
Grand Total	100.00%

Q4 Brandon Presley Approval	
Q4-Presley	%
1 Approve	31.18%
2 Disapprove	21.31%
3 Unsure	47.51%
Grand Total	100.00%

Q5 Roger Wicker Approval	
Q5-Wicker	%
1 Approve	45.52%
2 Disapprove	34.94%
3 Unsure	19.54%
Grand Total	100.00%

Q6 Chris McDaniel Approval	
Q6-McDaniel	%
1 Approve	36.96%
2 Disapprove	30.02%
3 Unsure	33.02%
Grand Total	100.00%

Q7 Legislature Approval	
Q7-Legislature	%
1 Approve	26.31%
2 Disapprove	38.19%
3 Unsure	35.50%
Grand Total	100.00%

Q8 United States Senator Roger Wicker is planning to seek reelection in 2018. Are you definitely voting to reelect Wicker, probably voting to reelect Wicker, probably voting for someone else, or definitely voting for someone else?	
Q8-Reelect	%
1 Definitely voting to reelect Wicker	20.0%
2 Probably voting to reelect Wicker	27.9%
3 Probably voting for someone else	17.7%
4 Definitely voting for someone else	19.8%
5 Unsure	14.5%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q9 What should be the top priority for Mississippi's elected leaders working in Jackson?

Q9-Priority	%
1 Reducing the size of state government	10.9%
2 Fixing our state's roads and bridges	23.4%
3 Giving tax incentives and grants for companies that promise to create jobs	10.1%
4 Making healthcare more accessible and affordable	20.8%
5 More funding for public schools	19.3%
6 More funding for universities and community colleges	3.3%
7 Protecting traditional family values	6.5%
8 Some other issue not mentioned here	5.6%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q10 Do you support or oppose the creation of a lottery in the state?

Q10-Lottery	%
1 Support	68.8%
2 Oppose	22.8%
3 Unsure	8.4%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q11 If we adopt a state lottery, there are different ideas about how to spend the money. They include public education, roads and bridges, offsetting the recently enacted corporate income taxes, and restoring other budget cuts made during recent legislative sessions. What do you think should be the priority?

Q11-Ideas	%
1 Public education	50.6%
2 Roads and bridges	28.6%
3 Offsetting corporate tax cuts	5.5%
4 Restoring budget cuts	5.9%
5 Something else	9.4%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q12 Would you support or oppose the authorization of a higher state gasoline tax to fund improvements in roads, bridges, and general infrastructure in Mississippi?

Q12-Gas Tax	%
1 Support	38.0%
2 Oppose	50.0%
3 Unsure	12.0%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q13 Should all school boards in Mississippi should be elected, appointed, or should it continue to vary by type of school district?

Q13-School Board	%
1 Elected	68.5%
2 Appointed	10.4%
3 Vary by type of school district	13.5%
4 Unsure	7.6%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q14 Do you support reducing the cost of living adjustments for retirees from state and local government and public schools, colleges and universities?

Q14-PERS	%
1 Support	32.7%
2 Oppose	53.5%
3 Unsure	13.7%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q15 Age

Q15-Age	%
1 18-34	10.6%
2 35-44	15.2%
3 45-54	19.9%
4 55-64	24.0%
5 65 or older	30.3%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q16 Ethnicity	
Q16-Ethnicity	%
1 African-American	29.3%
2 Asian-American	0.6%
3 White	66.9%
4 Hispanic or Latino	0.4%
5 Other	2.8%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q17 Gender	
Q17-Gender	%
1 Male	47.1%
2 Female	52.9%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q18 Education	
Q18-Education	%
1 Less than high school	6.2%
2 High school graduate	20.9%
3 Attended college but did not graduate	18.5%
4 Graduated from two year college	16.9%
5 Graduated from four year college	18.4%
6 Obtained an advanced degree	19.0%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q19 Partisanship	
Q19-Partisanship	%
1 Strong Republican	34.4%
2 Lean Republican	17.2%
3 Neither Democrat nor Republican	20.2%
4 Lean Democrat	8.4%
5 Strong Democrat	19.3%
9 Refused	0.6%
Grand Total	100.0%