

Bryant vetoes Common Core bill; Reeves criticizes move

POLITICAL LEDGER

Geoff Pender, The Clarion-Ledger

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(Photo: Special to The Clarion-Ledger)

Gov. Phil Bryant on Thursday vetoed an "anti-Common Core" bill passed by the Legislature, saying it doesn't guarantee the national education standards won't be used in Mississippi schools.

"I remain firmly committed to ending Common Core in Mississippi," Republican Bryant said in a statement on Thursday. "This bill does not accomplish that goal, and I cannot in good conscience sign it into law."

His veto was applauded by tea party and other Common Core opponents, but panned by fellow Republican Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves. Reeves had championed Senate bill 2161, which was approved by 93 of 99 Republicans in the Legislature (with three absent and not voting).

Reeves had billed the measure as a way to end Common Core, and said Bryant's veto leaves the standards in place.

"Gov. Bryant's veto of a bill that 93 legislative Republicans supported ensures that Common Core will remain in Mississippi schools," Reeves said. "SB2161 ensured that student privacy would be protected, prohibited school districts from administering psychological or socio-emotional surveys, put in state law that PARCC tests could not be demanded by the state Department of Education and created a group of Mississippians – of which the governor had more appointments than anyone – to create a set of high standards for Mississippi school children."

The measure created a 15-member commission to study and make recommendations to the state Board of Education about what academic standards the state should use. A House provision that would have required the board to adopt at least 75 percent of the commission's recommendations was nixed by the Senate.

Common Core opponents, including a group called Stop Common Core in Mississippi and tea party leaders decried the bill as an election-year half measure and noted the board isn't required to follow the recommendations. They have been calling for Bryant to veto the bill and urge the Legislature to pass stronger legislation that prohibits use of Common Core in Mississippi schools. There have been petition drives and a social media campaign urging people to call Bryant's office has had the governor's phones ringing.

Bryant said he would have signed the original version of the bill authored by Sen. Videt Carmichael, but it was watered down in legislative negotiations.

"This bill provides no requirement that the Mississippi Board of Education or the Mississippi Department of Education must do anything to abandon Common Core," Bryant said.

Those who called for the veto want Bryant to call a special legislative session for anti-Common Core legislation, or add the issue to any special session he calls. Bryant has said he's made no decision about calling a special session this year. A legislative override of Bryant's veto would require a 2/3 supermajority vote.

The anti-Common Core movement has become an irresistible force in GOP politics on the local, state and national level. It's become a major issue for likely Republican presidential candidates next year. It's an issue for state candidates this election year.

Common Core standards are new guidelines for math and English that were initially adopted by most states. Supporters, including state Education Superintendent Carey Wright, say they will help make U.S. students ready for college and careers and more competitive with other countries.

Mississippi's education leaders adopted the national standards in 2010 and have spent years and millions of dollars implementing them.

The Mississippi Economic Council, the state's chamber of commerce, had championed common core as a way to help Mississippi's students – and workforce – compete nationally. But MEC has fallen quiet with its support since the standards have become such a partisan, political hot potato.

Common Core was initially considered a bipartisan, state-led movement to improve and standardize education standards. But opponents say they were co-opted by the Obama Administration. The standards have since come to represent federal overreach into states' public education for conservative leaders.

Reeves, who had long appeared reticent to join Common Core opposition, announced late last year that he viewed the standards as federal overreach and would work to thwart them in Mississippi. When Senate Bill 2161 passed, he lauded it as a measure that would end the standards in Mississippi schools.

Tea party-backed state Sen. Chris McDaniel, R-Ellisville, often at political odds with Reeves in the Senate, helped lead the drive for Bryant to veto the bill. He said the bill was an election year dodge to give cover to Republicans -- including legislative leaders in the House and Senate -- who had supported Common Core.

"I commend Gov. Bryant for being willing to stand up and state his position against Common Core and to veto this terrible legislation," McDaniel said Thursday. "... Ultimately, the credit for this goes to the thousands of parents, grandparents, teachers and citizens of the state who took the time to make their voices heard. Now we must stay united and get to work to kill Common Core in Mississippi, once and for all."

Other bills Bryant vetoed on Thursday are:

House Bill 1047

Bryant said this bill includes legally problematic changes to the Tort Claims Act. The bill would grant protection to members of specifically named government boards which, in turn, could support a legal argument that members serving on government boards already covered under the Tort Claims Act but that are not specifically named do not have lawsuit protection.

Senate Bill 2269

This bill would grant more local control over the Mississippi Coast Coliseum, which is a publicly governed entity. But Bryant said the bill also includes language that decreases transparency requirements related to coliseum contracts by changing a previous legal requirement that information regarding contracts be publicly published in a local newspaper.

Senate Bill 2370

Bryant said this bill duplicates language about the frequency of meetings conducted by the Medicaid Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee. That issue is addressed in House Bill 545, which has already been signed into law. The law specifies that the committee may meet as needed.

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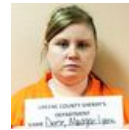
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