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Marshall Ramsey on a professor's dream job.
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Waller was 'transition' leader for Mississippi

More than any other late 20th century Mississippi politician, Bill Waller's career effectively served as the bridge or transition from a state politics that was defined by segregation and that was controlled by a few very powerful men to one we recognize today.



Jere Nash
Guest Columnist

Waller, who died Wednesday at 85, joined the attack on segregation when he put Byron de la Beckwith on trial for the 1963 murder of Edgar Evers. As district attorney, Waller didn't give up when the first trial ended in a mistrial. He did it again. Then, in spite of the reaction he received from the white establishment, Waller ran for governor in 1967. There's little doubt that Waller's decision to prosecute Beckwith contributed to his loss in the Democratic primary that year.

Didn't give up

But Waller didn't give up. He came back four years later and did two things that had never been done before in Mississippi. First, he ran against the establishment. Waller's campaign coined the term "Capitol Street Gang" as a shorthand way of capturing for the average voter the collection of good ol' boys, lobbyists, legislative leaders, and power brokers who had controlled state government for decades.

Waller attributed Mississippi's underdevelopment to the proposition that "while we change the name of the governor the same old political machine remains in power." He promised to return power to the "people." In the post 1965 Voting Rights Act era, that implied black Mississippians as well as white, a message that was brand new to campaigns in the state. Second, Waller used paid media to deliver this message to the voters that, also, had never been done before, ignoring many county power brokers candidates had used for years.

Path is followed

As governor, Waller not only became the first governor to appoint African Americans to state agency positions, but he began the process of identifying the Legislature as source of Mississippi's problems. Plenty of candidates, both statewide and legislative, have followed Waller's path, arguing that Mississippi could do better than the status quo. Being

Economic security

Ends are not meeting

Basic needs elusive for Mississippi's families in new fiscal climate

By Sarah Welker
Guest columnist

Mississippi's new and returning political leaders face an economic climate substantially different than four years ago. Relative to 2007, Mississippi has fewer jobs, higher unemployment and more children living in extreme economic vulnerability. Stagnant wages and job loss continue to impact working families. Moving into the next term, steps to enhance child care and health care, to build support of non-traditional students and to promote the development of career pathways across the educational spectrum remain essential for the state to compete.



Welker

The Basic Economic Security Tables for Mississippi underscore the need for Mississippi's families to earn incomes well above the basic poverty level to live without public assistance and to cover basic needs such as housing, utilities, food, transportation, child care and healthcare and set aside modest savings. To reach basic economic security, the average Mississippi worker must earn \$26,664 per year or \$12.63 per hour.

For families with young children, the cost of child care remains one of a family's largest expenses. In Mississippi, a family with two working parents, a preschooler and a schoolchild must earn \$55,584 to cover basic expenses and have money available to save for emergencies and retirement. This family would spend \$549 on child care of modest quality each month for their children. For a family with two preschoolers, the cost of child care rises to \$772 each month — more than housing, food or healthcare.

Access to affordable, quality child care is critical for working families to have a job and sustain employment. In October, Blueprint Mississippi made "creating a quality early childhood education and development system" a key priority. Mississippi's efforts to build a quality early childhood learning environment are important not only for the

state's youngest Mississippians, but also for their parents who are trying to make ends meet and provide a safe environment for their children. The two priorities — workforce supports and high quality opportunities for children — are inextricably connected.

The scenarios outlined above — \$26,664 for a single worker and \$55,584 for a family of four — assume workers receive employment-based benefits like health insurance, retirement and unemployment insurance. Families without these benefits will spend more out of pocket on health insurance, retirement and emergencies — or forgo them altogether.

Affordable health insurance ensures workers can access medical care regularly and are insulated from a large medical bill or medical emergency. For Mississippi workers, employer-sponsored health insurance takes up \$143 of their monthly budget. However, work-

ers buying similar plans through the private market would spend \$266 more — a total of \$409 per month. For Mississippi's families and adults, the rising cost of medical care can limit their ability to afford coverage, and it is reflected in the large portion of working adults who lack insurance.

Twenty percent of Mississippi's workers age 18 to 64 lacked any form of health insurance in 2010. In August, Mississippi received \$20 million from the federal government to set up the state health exchange — one of the critical components of health care reform. Health care reform represents one of the single most effective opportunities to support working families and to create health care jobs that pay economic security wages. While pending litigation may or may not affect the implementation of the new law, it remains important that Mississippians work together to improve access to health

care.

Over the next few months, Mississippi's new and returning leaders will also make critical decisions that will shape opportunities available to families to build economic security through the FY 2013 budget. The fall budget hearings showed that many state agencies need substantial increases in funding as years of limited resources have taken their toll on the state's ability to maintain adequate resources for public structures.

Funding across the education spectrum remains a critical need. As stated earlier, a sincere effort to fund early education must emerge and better progress should be made in reaching full funding levels for the Mississippi

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SUNDAY MORNING WITH

Q&A

Tell us about your background.

I've worked in broadcasting since my college days, both radio and television. During the summer after my second year of college I was lucky enough to land my two dream jobs — working the counter at Wright Music Company during the week and then spinning records on the weekend at WJXN, one of two country radio stations in Jackson at the time. I worked in radio and television news for 10 years, but have been involved in broadcast sales since 1985. My association with MPB dates back to 1989, when I was hired as the

Bill Ellison

Executive Director, Foundation for Public Broadcasting in Miss., 57, Madison



Brian Albert Broom/The Clarion-Ledger

better job in going out there and finding those companies that are interested in partnering with MPB. Ronnie Agnew, the new MPB executive director, has brought a lot of energy over here, and I think we'll make a good team. We're getting our staff in place and plan to hit the deck running before the end of the year to try and take this thing to the next level.

Who contributes?

Individuals who contribute during "pledge" on television and "drive-time" on radio become members of the Foundation for Public Broadcasting in Mississippi and these are people from every walk of life. I helped answer the phones during our radio drive in Octo-

Democrats should take a 'tip' from Tip

A recent article by Elizabeth Crisp ("Miss. Democratic Party down and out (of most big races)," Oct. 26) seemed to lament the fact that there are not more viable Democratic candidates for state offices.

Heavy artillery is imported in the person of party national chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz and state party executive director Rickey Cole told a September rally at Battlefield Park: "You have to be a good Republican (in Mississippi) to get a job, or you will be on the last train leaving."

There may well be reasons for Democrat concern. Former Massachusetts representative and House Speaker Tip O'Neill once made the famous statement that all politics is local. And so they are.

Why is the party in trouble? As a famous English poetess once wrote, "Let me count the ways."

Mississippi is a conservative state. Most voters are concerned with the extremely liberal policies of the current administration in Washington.

Local Democratic politicians have exploited the manufactured crisis and distorted the facts about the state retirement system (PERS) to the point of fantasy.

Racial remarks by a Jackson city councilman ("It's time Hinds County had a black sheriff") go unchallenged by the local press.

The bidding and fiscal policies of the Democratic controlled Hinds County Board of Supervisors defy the imagination.

The media wring their hands that voters are allowed to vote on Initiative 27 (Voter ID) because, if passed, seniors will be too frightened to go to the polls. Isn't it strange they are not frightened in the 28 states which currently have some type voter ID?

Significant numbers of potential Democratic voters in the state oppose voter ID along with charter schools, the tea party, right to life, right to work laws and election reform. Then they accuse the Republicans of being

the "triple effect."

Americans today spend, on average, about 6 to 7 cents out of every dollar of earned income on food far less than most people around the world and most people historically. Relatively inexpensive and abundant food gives all of us the freedom and flexibility to spend or invest in other parts of the economy.

In writing the new Farm Bill, Congress must look for ways to do more with less. They need to simplify programs and find innovative solutions to future challenges, while still making targeted investments to keep agriculture productive and rural communities vibrant.

Congress should focus on the same three core principles that have contributed to the past success of the American farmer: maintaining a strong safety net, supporting sustainable productivity and promoting vibrant markets.

In a business as risky as agriculture, a strong safety net can keep high input costs compounded by natural disasters from putting farm families out of business and jeopardizing our future food supply.

The safety net should provide assistance to producers of all types and sizes when they need it — and only when they need it. The existing programs that comprise the safety net need to change. As Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack stated recently, "The programs that comprise the safety net have got to be simple and understandable. Programs shouldn't discourage farmers from applying, they

even have to mention Noxubee County.

The state Democratic Party does seem to be running in place these days. Maybe they should take a tip from Tip. After all, he, too, was a Democrat.



Sullivan

means continuing investments in research to maintain our farmers' leadership as the most productive in the world and investing in conservation to support healthy, productive soil and a clean, plentiful water supply.

Finally, the Farm Bill should continue to promote vibrant, fair and diverse markets — at home and abroad — for farmers, ranchers and growers of all types and sizes. We should continue efforts to expand markets for "Grown in America" goods abroad, which supported more than 1 million American jobs this year. At the same time, we should look to expand opportunities here at home for producers interested in local and regional markets.

And the Farm Bill legislation must address the needs of rural America, as well as to encourage the farmers of the future. In part, that means making it easier for people to access USDA support, ensuring that emerging rural businesses have the capital they need to grow and create jobs, and investing in rural communities and infrastructure.

Today, the future for American agriculture is bright. It is my hope that the new Farm Bill will help move our nation and our economy forward by meeting the needs of the agricultural sector while being accountable and justifiable to the 98 percent of Americans who do not farm. It is my hope that it will support rural communities and build on the incredible success, productivity and strength of American agriculture.

Michael R. Sullivan
State Executive Director
USDA Mississippi Farm Service Agency
Jackson

The anti-Initiative 26 group was worried that the initiative and its language would be taken to the "extreme." Are none of them worried that the Roe v. Wade ruling, and the resulting unconstitutional abortion law changes, can lead to the same "extremes?"

Next on the agenda will be the call for partial-birth abortions. Then, genetic testing will be needed to determine if the child will be a burden on the health-care system because of the chance of a costly disease at some point in its lifespan. If so, abortion will be mandatory.

Next, a roll of the dice will decide whether the child could become a criminal, with the same outcome.

Far-fetched you say? Not if you apply the same rule of extremes to abortion as to 26.

Miko Walker
Brandon

DOE a Carter-era relic ripe for cutting

President Jimmy Carter created the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) back in the 1970s with a mission of ensuring our security and prosperity by addressing America's energy needs. It hasn't worked. This bloated bureaucracy has seen its mission evolve from basic research and development to spending billions to promote technologies that aren't yet viable — and might never be.

Despite funding numerous projects that never got off the ground such as the costly and President Barack Obama endorsed failed solar energy company Solyndra, DOE has seen its budget grow by more than \$11 billion in the last 10 years — a 76 percent increase.

Because America desperately needs to cut spending, DOE would be a good place to start. Instead of focusing on making it easier to tap into our known energy resources like oil, natural gas and coal, the DOE stubbornly pushes politically correct pet projects that are expensed to the American people. Some ideas are best left in the 1970s.

Bill Harvey
Jackson

Mark Mayfield
Ridgeland.

grass that appeals to you?

I mentioned dream jobs earlier, but combining radio and bluegrass is pretty much as good as it gets, for me anyway. The show actually is more than just bluegrass. We play a variety of acoustic and folk music, everything from string bands from the 1930s to early Bob Dylan to whatever Chris Thile is experimenting with at the moment. But, the lion's share of what I play falls into the category of bluegrass. I'm proud of the show. It was a part of MPB radio's Saturday night line-up from the beginning and I'll soon be celebrating 20 years as the host. We've won a Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts and I've accumulated enough mail to write a book. As far as bluegrass, I don't know exactly, maybe that it's just so genuine and true to life.

You are an accomplished bluegrass musician yourself. What are you working on now?

I've been spending a good bit of time lately practicing Christmas songs on my family so I can try to remember the words! Some of them go away from year to year. Our trio, Temperance Babcock, Jeff Perkins and I played the Mississippi Delta Holiday event at Delta State University and have a couple of other Christmas shows, so I have to make sure I'm up to speed.

Who has most influenced you in your career?

Boy, that would be a tough one. I've been mighty lucky to work with some wonderful people. I remember reading the news one Saturday morning on WZZQ and Bruce Owen pulled me aside and said "quit saying guff for gulf — there's an L in there!" It's funny what you remember. But, I'd probably say Bob O'Brien helped me the most. Bob was the owner/manager of WTYX and later Lovecomm. He passed away in 2005. He gave me my first sales job and taught me an awful lot, especially about building relationships and trust with people you do business with. He also had a knack for getting the best from people and making them feel good about themselves. I think about him a lot.

Anything to add?

Just thanks for the opportunity to talk about the foundation and MPB — and tune in Saturday nights.

— Editorial Director David Hampton

Security: Bolstering education structures vital

From 6B
Adequate Education Program. For community colleges and universities, state funding levels impact tuition and the cost of pursuing higher education for students. For young adults entering the workforce, post-secondary training is increasingly essential for careers that provide long-term financial security. Keeping tuition low at Mississippi's community colleges and universities remains important. Adequate state funding of universities and two-year colleges is also critical to ensuring that the colleges have the resources needed to keep college accessible to everyone preparing to attend. Preserving Pell Grants at the national level also must continue to be a priority for our congressional delegation.

High school students are not alone in needing post-sec-

ondary coursework. Many working parents need additional education to reach occupations like a nurse, dental hygienist, electrician, industrial mechanic or welder that are likely to provide security for a two-worker household.

Across Mississippi, efforts are being made to intentionally design two-year college training, so it is more accessible to adults trying to balance work, school and family. Colleges need to have the resources that enable them to meet the diverse needs of their students — from recent high school graduates to working adults in their mid-fifties.

During the fall budget hearings, the Community College Board asked state leaders for additional support for GED programs through "Dropout Recovery Funds." Strengthening GED programs is a step in

WHAT IT TAKES	
The basic monthly expenses and income needed for a 2-worker family with preschooler and schoolchild:	
Housing	\$518
Utilities	162
Food	712
Transportation	1,206
Child Care	549
Household Items	375
Health care	497
Emergency savings	148
Retirement savings	68
Net taxes	397
Hourly total (per worker)	\$13.16
Annual total	55,584
Additional savings	
Children's college	\$48
Home ownership	57

the right direction as employers need workers with skills well beyond a high school degree to strengthen their competitiveness and recover from the economic recession. The request would strengthen GED courses for students building toward high school equivalency and provide an avenue for increasing the skill level of Mississippi's workforce

in every community. Over the next few months, dedicating additional resources to meet the Dropout Recovery Fund request in the FY2013 budget should be a priority.

Mississippi's leaders will make decisions that affect the economic security of thousands of working families that struggle to cover their basic expenses, save for college,

emergencies and retirement. The choices made need to intentionally strengthen programs and policies that help families bridge the gap between what they currently earn and what they need to move toward lifelong financial security. A key piece of opening doors to prosperity remains enhancing resources across the education spectrum. Having the resources to build up the state's education structures — from early childhood to post-secondary training — is vital to the state's economic competitiveness and growth in the years ahead.

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