

Lafayette County Democratic Party

**Listening Sessions Summary**

**February 13, 2017**



# Table of Contents

<b>Prologue.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Education.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Healthcare.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Voting Issues.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Civil Rights.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Economy.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>State Issues.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Local Issues.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Issues for Lafayette Democratic Party.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Miscellaneous Issues.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Resources.....</b>	<b>19</b>

# Prologue

The Listening Sessions promoted by the Lafayette County Democratic Party comprised five sessions held at the Oxford Public Library, College Hill Community Center, Gordon Cultural and Community Center in Abbeville, Lafayette Civic Center and Taylor Community Center. At each session, a moderator, a recorder, and a registrar were present. All notes were recorded and are summarized as a collective record here to help guide the local Democratic Party, provide direction for future actions, and to help candidates with their platforms addressing the issues.

*"Regardless of anyone's partisan affiliation or political ideology, we should all try to spend more time listening to each other. These listening sessions were a great example of open community dialogue that should become more common."* **Marvin King, Moderator, Oxford Public Library**

*"It was wonderful to see active, concerned citizens come out to discuss issues that affect their daily lives as residents of Lafayette County. I really enjoyed moderating the lively discussion that was open, positive, and wide-ranging. I learned a great deal about issues in the county that I had not thought of before that night."* **Dianne Fergusson, Moderator, College Hill Community Center**

Listening Meeting Planning Committee members were Grace Mathis, Gail Tapscott, Paula Farese, Eunice Benton, Vanessa Brashier, Patricia Overstreet-Miller, and Johnny Lott.

## **Education**

Education at all levels was the most common topic of the listening sessions.

### **Nationally**

The biggest single issue was the nomination and approval of Betsy DeVos as the Secretary of Education in Washington, D.C. There are many worries about public education under her leadership in the United States Department of Education.

### **State**

State issues include the direction of public education under the leadership of Governor Phil Bryant with the actions taken by the supermajority in the state congress. In all of these discussions, one comment was that “public school is and has been the glue that keeps a community together and there is a growing concern that with current funding levels, it may become increasingly unavailable.” State issues include the following:

1. Funding for Education—The lack of transparency in the state houses over funding of education was amplified by the dummy bill (HB 1924) voted down after the listening sessions ended, but it is noted that the funding formula will likely be decided in a Special Session that can be called at any time, including while the legislature is in session. In that case, the formula may be decided by committee with little input. The issue is the change in funding from the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP) to one proposed by EdBuild under a semi-secret contract issued by leaders in the Mississippi Congress (Gunn and Reeves). For information about MAEP and EdBuild, see <http://www.tpcref.org/policy-issues/school-funding/topics-funding/mississippi-adequate-education-program-maep/> and google EdBuild\_MS\_10272016.pdf.
2. Special education is a primary concern and needs not to be overlooked in funding.

3. State bills over vouchers, school superintendents and requirements as well as charter schools are of primary concern.

## **Local**

1. Choosing and running good candidates for school boards is a major concern.
2. Continued concerns are that private schools, charter schools, and special schools are methods of segregation.
3. A Community School, as found in Knoxville, TN, might be something that could be used in Lafayette County. See <http://www.greatschoolspartnership.com/community-schools/>.
4. There is a need for childcare and adult care facilities in the county. To meet this need, zoning which allows such facilities is needed, decent pay for workers is needed, and a mandated kindergarten starting at age 5 are needed. For childcare, we need to invest in the young from birth to ages 3-4.



## Healthcare

Healthcare and worries about what is happening to healthcare on the national level with the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant's refusal to accept federal money to expand Medicaid are major concerns in this area.

### National

1. Many concerns were raised about changes being enacted in Washington, D.C. causing changes in funding under Medicare. Of special interest are the expected changes in costs for Medicare, what happens to insurance for those who have pre-existing conditions.
2. The single suggestion for changes to Medicare is to have a single payer system.
3. Any and all changes to the ACA must be publicized.
4. Women's health issues are a major concern on both the national and state level. These include efforts to defund Planned Parenthood funding and possible changes to Roe versus Wade through the Supreme Court.
5. Mental health care is a concern with current changes in ACA, especially changes to Medicare Part B including: (a) clinical research, (b) ambulance services, (c) durable medical equipment, (d) mental health including both inpatient and outpatient as well as partial hospitalization.

### State

1. Mississippi did not accept federal Medicaid expansion that resulted in the following in June 2016: (a) 692,191 people are covered by Medicaid and CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program); (2) 333,000 would have been covered had Mississippi accepted expansion; (c) 108,000 people have no realistic access to health insurance without Medicaid expansion; and (d) \$14.5 billion is federal money that Mississippi left on the table over the next decade by not expanding Medicaid. Source:  
<https://www.healthinsurance.org/mississippi-medicaid/>
2. There is concern over Planned Parenthood and its programs as well as the closing of women's health clinics in the state.

3. Mental health issues in the state are problematic with the cutting of funding and its affects locally in the North Mississippi Regional Center.

**Local**

1. There is no local wellness center in Lafayette County. The closest is in Tupelo at 1030 South Madison Street. There is a need here. The issue of who has control and how the building of one impact parks and recreation and the activity center seems problematic.
2. A different issue is what happens to the old Baptist Hospital building and parking structure. This could be a great resource for the city and county if properly utilized.

## **Voting Issues**

Voting issues arose in every listening site and include national, state and local components. Concerns arose over the election of an unqualified candidate.

### **National**

1. How the Electoral College works is an issue and all participants were sent a reference: <https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/about.html> . This site may need to be publicized on the Lafayette County Democratic Party page.
2. Many questions about the 2016 presidential election and how the Democratic Party works in a state using a state grassroots effort arose.
3. Gridlock in Washington, D.C. is the result of elections and not specifically a voting issue, but is a result of voting across the nation.
4. Off-year elections are super important. Voters not paying attention to off-year elections lessen chances to have an impact in presidential elections.

### **State**

1. Gerrymandering is a big issue in the state and the next census is in 3 years. Influence in Jackson is needed when the voting districts are re-drawn.
2. There is a dire need for state candidates. Candidates once had to appeal to the middle but that is changing. Especially needed are women candidates and black candidates for all offices.
3. Transparent state government is of prime importance. Examples where transparency are and have been needed are the EdBuild contract where even legislators could not see it; the mechanical reading of bills that no one can follow; dummy funding bills for educational funding; grossly misunderstood funding bills that have been passed resulting in millions of dollars cut in the 2017 fiscal year and the return of \$400 million in corporate taxes while state budgets for agencies and education were cut.
4. Voter ID is one form of voter suppression in the state. It is not easy for some people to obtain original birth certificates and social security cards, or the equivalent for registration. Older individuals may have neither a valid birth certificate nor an



original social security card, and in some cases cannot get them; it takes time to get replacements; passports are allowed but, especially in poorer communities, are not available. The cost for an ID is minimal but is still a barrier for poorer individuals.

5. Voting rights for released prisoners are mysterious and cannot be obtained if one has been convicted of any of 21 felonies in MS. This is less rigid if felonies were committed elsewhere and many need explanation and help. A pamphlet is available on the Secretary of State website in MS but it was noted that young blacks who have been in the system will not go find that information.
6. All people are needed in the Democratic Party. There must be a massive effort on voter registration in the state. Young people must not only register but also vote.
7. The State Democratic Party needs more infrastructure.
8. People cannot be treated as disposable by any party or government, especially but not only, people in poverty and homeless people.

### **Local**

1. The Lafayette County Democratic Party must be a party of inclusion.
2. The Lafayette County Democratic Party must get voters involved on all types of levels
3. To educate the community, we have to make information available and take it to where people are, local communities.

## **Civil Rights**

Civil rights concentrated on women's rights, rights of LGBTQ, released prisoners, and on the need for criminal justice reform. These issues are not identified as national, state and local issues but are listed here together.

### **Women's Rights**

1. Planned Parenthood is an issue nationally and in the state. It is been a source of information, medical help, and parent planning. It has been threatened on all levels and continues to be.
2. With a new Supreme Court member being considered and the previous nominee not considered nationally at all, there is much concern over state bills restricting women's choices and Roe versus Wade.
3. Equal pay for equal work is an issue noted both here and in the economy section. The Mississippi legislature voted down such a bill in the current session already.

### **Rights of LGBTQ**

1. A major issue is overcoming past history in the state.
2. Additional concerns involve marriage equality, the right to adopt, and threats to these on different levels.
3. Questions are where are the safe places in the state and could one be established locally.

### **Rights of Released Prisoners and Need for Criminal Justice Reform**

1. As noted in the Voting Rights section, there are many issues involving rights of released prisoners. There is also a need for information about housing and jobs to help people become a part of the populace.
2. There is a need to help educate released prisoners and to work in communities to help before laws are broken.
3. Reform in the criminal justice system is needed to make sure that punishments fit crimes. For example, older sentencing requirements for what is now considered minor drug crimes must be changed. Mississippi has a history of sentencing that demands change against mass incarceration of a population.

## **Economy**

Economic issues identified were primarily at the local level and are listed here.

1. The mix of development issues, both residential and commercial, is recognized as prime in Lafayette County and in the city of Oxford: Of prime importance is the lack of infrastructure to handle a rapidly growing population and business community.
2. Zoning is a massive problem in the city and in the county. People recognize that there is a plan for the future but it is dated before implementation.
3. There is an need for wage adjustment in the city and county including a recognized need for an increase in the minimum wage, the need for a living wage, and concerns over the wages for non-academic workers at the University of Mississippi. Additionally equal pay for equal work was rejected in the current legislature causing more concern.
4. The cost of housing in the city and county has outpaced raises in wages, making housing non-affordable for many.
5. Startup businesses in Oxford are almost impossible. The cost of land, building, leasing and renting as well as building are prohibitive
6. There is a demand for jobs that employ people in the city and county. Jobs for local people are needed. One positive example mentioned was the Winchester Company.
7. It was noted that the readiness for employment is changing with people not ready for robotics as an example.
8. A major question about who brokers deals locally and in the state giving tax breaks to companies that move or build here was posed. What input can be given to those brokers? Who negotiates for example the tax base that sometimes removes companies from school tax bases?
9. Tax breaks in the previous legislature took away corporate taxes at a time then the state fiscal year budget has been slashed several times.
10. Having tax breaks frequently removes tax money needed for infrastructure like roads and schools.

## **State Issues**

State issues are mostly included in other spots but a few did not fit in with others. They are listed below.

### **1. Gerrymandering**

There are many gerrymandered districts in Mississippi that marginalize people's votes. This is found at all levels in the state and in counties. With the 2020 census in only three years, this issue must be on the horizon for the Democratic Party.

### **2. Infrastructure**

Much work needs to be done on maintaining roads and bridges in the state. Additionally, the maintenance of clean water is of prime importance; state and local governments must protect the water at all costs.

### **3. Arts**

Funding and protections of the arts in Mississippi is of prime importance. There was a threat early in the current legislature to allow Governor Phil Bryant to have more power in this arena, and it was defeated. All must be vigilant to guarantee that this does not recur.

### **4. Transparency**

Transparency in state government is of prime importance. Secret contracts by the legislature (EdBuild), bills read incomprehensibly by machine, unannounced budget errors, and decisions made in private committees in the legislature are all examples of reasons for the public's need to know.

### **5. Campaign Funding Accounts**

Campaign funding accounts are problematic at every level. How they are managed and the need for audits have been mentioned frequently in the news. For more information, see the following stories because there was not action in this regard in this term.

\*<http://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/politics/2016/02/20/personal-campaign-spending/80400584/>

\*<http://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/politics/2017/02/01/campaign-finance-future/97336078/>

\*<https://mississippitoday.org/2017/01/31/bryant-transfers-campaign-funds-to-pac/>

## **Local Issues**

Many local issues were identified in the listening meetings. Zoning, infrastructure, and affordable housing are the main ones, but related issues arose in the economy (noted elsewhere). It was noted that a comprehensive plan was developed in Lafayette County but concerns are still widespread.

### **1. County/city management of growth and infrastructure**

Some have predicted that there will be 90,000 people in Lafayette County in the 2020 census. With this massive growth and the continued increase in the number of students at The University of Mississippi, issues include the following:

- a. The infrastructure is barely handling issues in 2017 with overcrowded roads. Examples are West Jackson Avenue in the city, Highway 6, and Old Taylor Road continuing to Taylor, Mississippi. West Jackson is a continual problem with the overbuilding, the number of people trying to turn left in all directions, the conglomeration of lights trying to handle traffic off of Anderson Road and West Oxford Loop as examples. The massive number of apartments and condominiums on Old Taylor Road with the prospect of many more to be built has increased pressure on the road and is moving out to the town of Taylor. A two-lane road simply cannot handle the continued growth in that direction.
- b. The infrastructure for parking in the city and city traffic have outgrown any identified solutions. The parking structure is planned after years of discussion but is still months or years away from being built. Timely action seems impossible for both city and county.
- c. Littering is a growing problem for both city and county.
- d. Equal access to services is simply not happening in the city and county. Examples are natural gas and rapid Internet.

### **2. Zoning in both city and county**

- a. The constant struggle between residential and commercial zoning is expected to continue. It is a major concern for many people. Both city and county seem to allow land to be clear-cut for



building, which propagates drainage and other issues for the future. Little apparent regard for the ability to manage traffic on most two-lane streets and roads is problematic.

- b. The struggle between residential and commercial zoning exacerbates the need for affordable housing in the city and county. The cost of land locally has reached the point that many young people have no hope of finding and owning affordable housing in the city and near to the city.

### **3. Affordable Housing in both city and county**

- a. Stable housing is needed in the community at all economic levels.
- b. This area is touted as a retirement community and area but retirement friendly housing is needed where the units are primarily one story and equipped for handicapped access.
- c. The city has been pushing out lower income housing. The example was Riverside where vouchers are made available but housing with access to buses and services is not readily available.
- d. There is a growing homeless population that needs attention.
- e. There are many immigrants working in this county and they need housing consideration.

### **4. Additional questions**

- a. Who brokers deals bringing businesses to the city and county?
- b. Who applies for grants for the city and county?
- c. Though corners of city streets around the square are handicap accessible, the many steps and uneven sidewalks are problematic.
- d. Why has the city not taken action as a sanctuary?

## **Issues for Lafayette Democratic Party**

The Lafayette Democratic Party is recognized as a group with a small Executive Committee, no paid staff, no office, and little funding. It is also recognized that it has been active in promoting issues. The listening sessions showed that people in the city and county are interested in more. It is acknowledged that the state and local parties receive little help from outside sources.

- 1. Get more organized to become more efficient.**
- 2. Broaden the base.**
- 3. Partner with like-minded groups.**
- 4. Become a model for other counties to follow.**
- 5. Publicize local, state and national Democratic actions.**
- 6. Identify and reach county voters.**
- 7. Prioritize issues.**
- 8. Make office holders accountable.**
- 9. Demand town hall meetings of elected officials.**

## **Miscellaneous Issues**

Several issues did not fit under any specific category above.

### **1. Environmental Issues**

Climate change and protection of water were both mentioned several times in the sessions.

### **2. Social Security**

The protection of Social Security and an expansion of it were mentioned several times.

### **3. Scientific Inquiry**

The continuing use of science to find solutions to problems is needed and should be protected and encouraged.

## Resources

1. <http://www.popvox.com>  
a nonpartisan advocacy platform that meshes legislative data with personal stories and public sentiment
2. [lafayettetdems.org](http://lafayettetdems.org)  
add yourself to the mailing list for updates  
leave message at 662-259-0708
3. Facebook—Lafayette County Dems
4. Released Prisoner rights  
<http://www.sos.ms.gov/Pages/SearchResults.aspx?q=released%20prisoner%20rights>
5. Many voting issues and other issues can be found in booklets at the MS Secretary of State site.  
<http://www.sos.ms.gov/Education-Publications/Pages/Publications.aspx>
6. Action Group Network  
The Action Group Network is a nationwide network of action groups dedicated to moving the country progressively forward in the wake of a divisive election.  
Can be found on Facebook  
Meeting February 19, 7:00 PM in the Powerhouse
7. Contact Information  
**US Representative Trent Kelly (R)**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
House of Representatives  
1721 Longworth H.O.B.  
Washington, DC 20515  
[202- 225-4306](tel:202-225-4306)  
**Columbus Office**  
318 North 7th Street, Suite D  
Columbus, MS 39701  
[662-327-0748](tel:662-327-0748)  
**Eupora, MS**  
855 South Dunn Street  
Eupora, MS 39744  
[\(662\) 258-7240](tel:662-258-7240)  
**Tupelo Office**  
431 West Main Street  
Tupelo, MS 38804  
P: (662) 841-8808  
**Farmington Office**

4135 County Road 200  
Corinth, MS 38834  
662- 687-1525

**Hernando Office**

2565 Caffey Street, #200  
P.O. Box 218  
Hernando, MS 38632  
662- 449-3090

**US Senator Roger Wicker (R)**

**Washington, DC Office**

United States Senate  
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
Main: (202) 224-6253

**Jackson Office**

U.S. Federal Courthouse  
501 East Court Street, Suite 3-500  
Jackson, MS 39201  
Main: (601) 965-4644

**Hernando Office**

321 Loshier Street  
PO Box 385

**Tupelo Office**

330 West Jefferson Street, Suite B  
Tupelo, MS 38804  
P.O. Box 3777  
Tupelo, MS 38803  
Main: (662) 844-5010

**Gulfport Office**

2909 13th Street  
3rd Floor, Suite 303  
Gulfport, MS 39501  
Main: (228) 871-7017

**US Senator Thad Cochran (R)**

**Washington Office**

United States Senate  
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510-2402  
[202-224-5054](tel:202-224-5054)

**Jackson Office**

190 East Capitol Street  
Suite 550  
Jackson, Mississippi 39201  
[601-965-4459](tel:601-965-4459)

**Oxford Office**

911 East Jackson Avenue  
Suite 249  
Oxford, Mississippi 38655  
[662-236-1018](tel:662-236-1018)

**Gulf Coast Office**

2012 15th Street  
Suite 451  
Gulfport, Mississippi 39501  
[228-867-9710](tel:228-867-9710)

**State****Senator Gray Tollison (R)**Capitol:

Room: 404 A  
P. O. Box 1018  
Jackson, MS 39215  
(601)359-2395

Home:

P. O. Box 1216  
Oxford, MS 38655  
(662)234-7070 (W)

Email:

[gtollison@senate.ms.gov](mailto:gtollison@senate.ms.gov)

**Representative Jay Hughes (D)**Capitol:

Room: 400-F  
P. O. Box 1018  
Jackson, MS 39215  
(601)359-3339

Home:

1300 Access RD Suite 100  
Oxford, MS 38655  
(662)234-6080 (W)  
(662)816-2888 (C)

Email: [repjayhughes@gmail.com](mailto:repjayhughes@gmail.com)

Twitter: Jay4district12

Facebook: Jay Hughes

**Representative Steve Massengill (R)**Capitol:

Room: 400-E  
P. O. Box 1018  
Jackson, MS 39215  
(601)359-3353



Home:

424 Massengill Road  
Hickory Flat, MS 38633  
(662)815-5000 (W)  
Email: [smassengill@house.ms.gov](mailto:smassengill@house.ms.gov)

**Representative Nolan Mettetal (R)**

Capitol:

Room: 205-A  
P. O. Box 1018  
Jackson, MS 39215  
(601)359-3331

Home:

P. O. Box 414  
Sardis, MS 38666  
(662)487-1512 (H)  
Email: [nmettetal@house.ms.gov](mailto:nmettetal@house.ms.gov)

**Representative Charles Jim Beckett (R)**

Capitol:

Room: 205-C  
P. O. Box 1018  
Jackson, MS 39215  
(601)359-3335

Home:

P. O. Box 722  
Bruce, MS 38915  
(662)983-2451 (H)  
(662)983-7358 (W)  
Email: [jbeckett@house.ms.gov](mailto:jbeckett@house.ms.gov)

8. TEXT 228466 to receive daily information about a daily federal action; this can take you straight to your representative.