

# Voter ID defense snags in Senate

## ■ Legal funds fail to pass vote

By Phil West

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**JACKSON** — State senators balked Thursday at giving Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann \$395,000 to spend on lawyers from former governor Haley Barbour's law firm to defend Mississippi's Voter ID law.

Republicans were caught off guard when they didn't have enough members in the Senate chamber to pass the \$15.3 million budget that included \$395,000 for private lawyers in the 2014 fiscal year that begins July 1.

The bill failed on a vote of 23-17. The state Constitution requires a majority of elected members — the Senate has 52, but one seat is vacant — must vote for approval before a measure can pass.

Supporters plan to try again next week.

Hosemann, a Republican, and state Atty. Gen. Jim Hood, a Democrat, signed a contract with the Butler, Snow, O'Mara, Stevens and Cannada law firm in September that authorizes the outside lawyers to represent the state "on all issues related to preclearance of

that legislation and any related legislation, rules or regulations and all litigation that may arise or be instituted in connection with preclearance."

Matters involving voting in Mississippi must be approved — or precleared — by the U.S. Department of Justice before they can be implemented due to the state's history of racial discrimination.

State legislators, following a November 2011 referendum, last year approved requiring potential voters to produce a photo ID before they could vote.

That law is still awaiting preclearance from the Justice Department.

Meantime, legislators approved \$395,000 last year for legal fees and were poised to do so again

**See ID, 8DSA**

when Democrats balked.

"We're spending extra money for Voter ID?" said Sen. David Jordan, D-Greenwood, a 78-year-old retired teacher and a veteran of civil rights struggles.

"We're spending this kind of money to disen-

franchise voters.... It's not right."

Senate Appropriations Committee chairman Buck Clarke, R-Hollendale, responded that legislators had approved the same amount a year ago, and Hosemann spent only \$40,000.

Sen. David Blount, D-Jackson, said taxpayers could wind up paying \$1.8 million to outside lawyers to defend a bill that should be defended by Hood, the attorney general.

"Whether you're for Voter ID or not, I don't think you should pay somebody for doing a job that's already being done," Blount said.

Advocates say photo identification of voters should be required to ensure voter fraud is kept in check.

Opponents say a photo ID is unnecessary and pushes elderly and black voters away.

