

To: Mississippi Economic Council

From: Ed Goeas and Brian Nienaber

Re: Key findings from the latest statewide poll of likely voters in Mississippi on the State Flag issue

The Tarrance Group fielded a statewide poll among N=500 likely voters in Mississippi on June 16-18, 2020 looking at current voter opinions surrounding the state flag issue. This was the first statewide poll conducted by the Tarrance Group addressing the state flag issue since January 13-15, 2019. With both polls, the sample size was N=500 and the margin of error is $\pm 4.5\%$ at the 95% confidence level.

The Tarrance Group has periodically looked at the State Flag issue over the last twenty years and this was the first time a majority of Mississippians favor changing the state flag with fifty-five percent (55%) of likely voters saying they would vote to change the flag, and forty-one percent (41%) saying they would vote against such a measure. This represents a substantial shift from just eighteen months ago when fifty-four percent (54%) of the respondents said they would vote against changing the state flag and forty-three percent (43%) said they would support changing the state flag.

For the most predictive data on where future support will be gained, we looked not at which groups had the highest support levels, but which demographic groups gained the most over the last eighteen months in supporting a change in the state flag. For example, we found no gender gap in the growth of support for changing the state flag. Men's support went up 12-points and women's support grew by 13-points. While support by age is certainly stronger amongst younger voters (18-44), their support only grew 7-points, while 45-64-year old voters grew by 11-points, and seniors grew by 15-points moving both those age cohorts into the majority support column.

There is no question that the traditional groups we have seen in recent years are strong in their support of changing the state flag – minority voters, younger voters, college educated voters, but the gap is closing with other groups. What we found in this most recent survey is the proposal to change to the state seal flag, which bears our national motto, “In God We Trust” may have the potential to truly close that gap and unify Mississippi voters around this issue in a way never thought possible a few short years ago.

The “In God We Trust” flag is not only popular but moves voters from no to yes on the question of changing the flag. We first saw the potential in the January 2019 survey when sixty-one percent (61%)

of Mississippi voters said they would vote to change the flag if it had the state seal with “In God We Trust” as part of the design. Today, in the latest Tarrance Group survey, that support has grown to seventy-two percent (72%). Support for the state seal is consistent across the state, with 70% of all four of Mississippi’s Congressional Districts responding they favor the state seal flag. Virtually two-thirds or more of every demographic group supports the “In God We Trust” state seal flag – Seniors (69%), High School Graduates (67%), Republicans (63%), Conservatives (71%), Born-again Evangelicals (74%), even voters who said initially they would vote against changing the state flag (57%).

In this latest survey we also tested the Stennis flag as an option for changing the state flag in Mississippi. However, a plurality of Mississippians opposes the Stennis Flag as an alternative (37% to 42%), almost half the support level of voter support of the “In God We Trust” flag.

In another question we asked voters if they felt that the current state flag was offensive to a significant number of Mississippians. A majority (57%) of voters agree that the state flag is offensive to a significant number of Mississippians. Even twenty-three percent (23%) of voters who were not open to changing the state flag agree that the flag is offensive to many of their fellow citizens.

In sum, a majority of voters we interviewed for this latest survey would support a ballot initiative to change the flag. More than one-quarter of those who voted no on the 2001 flag referendum have changed their position and it appears that those changing positions are only accelerating.