

Reeves is failing to provide the leadership Mississippi needs amid COVID crisis. He should resign.

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Guest columnist

Tate Reeves is an accomplished, articulate, dynamic man. He is savvy and amiable. He deserves credit for his commitment to his fellow citizens. Anyone who has served for nearly two decades in public office merits respect and gratitude.

But it is time to acknowledge the open secret spreading across the state. Reeves is a very nice man who is not up to his job.

He has failed time after time to provide the leadership, vision, urgency, and moral authority required for the fight we are in.

People look to a governor for guidance and reassurance in dire situations. Yet he has too often been absent from the public eye. Recent records show that he has often left the state in recent months.

Mississippi's pandemic performance has been abysmal. ICUs are [overflowing](#). Misinformation abounds. Our vaccination rates remain among the worst in the nation. This, despite the fact that we have an almost legendary willingness to sacrifice for others when called by faith or flag.

The [recent statement](#) from one of the foremost leaders, Dr. LouAnn Woodward, the chief executive of the University of Mississippi Medical Center, was damning. "We as a state, as a collective, have failed to respond in a unified way to a common threat. We have failed to use the tools that we have to protect ourselves, to protect our families, to protect our children, and to protect our state."

True leaders grow in stature by acknowledging failures, taking responsibility, and marshalling support for solutions. Reeves has failed to take even the first step: holding himself or others accountable.

True leaders understand that complex, slow-moving problems may be dull and time-consuming but need attention nonetheless. Reeves has done little if anything to address systemic problems in our statewide health care system. In particular, he has not supported Medicaid expansion, a self-defeating stance that puts partisan posturing over pragmatism.

The evidence could not be more compelling. Pre-existing conditions contribute to COVID-19 severity and fatalities. But he refuses to use one of the biggest, readymade solutions available.

Rather than [convene a special legislative session](#) to identify pandemic problems and solutions, Reeves has dithered. This cannot be an indication of mastery and accomplishment. It is the mark of an insecure leader fearful of others' ideas.

His stance on vaccinations has been craven. Even after he himself opted to get the vaccine, he has continued to give a [political wink to the unvaccinated](#) by stressing that they should consult their local doctor before getting theirs.

Such a suggestion, of course, adds unnecessary time, cost, and procrastination into the vaccination push. It implies that the nationwide scientific consensus in favor of vaccination is dubious or lacking. What could be more insulting and demoralizing to our health care professionals in the trenches?

When faced with a choice between short-term calculation or the long-term interests of the state, he has buckled. The lack of a statewide mandate for school masks is popular on his far-right flank, but it demonstrably failed.

As widely reported, some 20,000 students are now [quarantined](#) across the state. Mississippians rest in the graves of Arlington, Normandy, Iwo Jima and countless other war cemeteries because they were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the common good. Reeves is not willing to sacrifice his prospects for reelection.

Reeves' talents guarantee him a bright future. He could easily be a bank CEO or university president one day. We should all wish him well.

But he is not equal to the gravity of this tragic moment. Jaws dropped when — amid the flailing Hurricane Katrina cleanup in 2005 — President George W. Bush told then-FEMA Director Michael Brown, “Brownie, you’re doing a heckuva job.”

Reeves is our “Brownie.”

Lives are being lost daily, and Mississippi can no longer afford rudderless, counterproductive leadership. Gov. Reeves should step aside for the best interests of Mississippians.