

## **Governor's Column – 03/31/02**

We're not just putting computers in our classrooms; we're giving our children the keys to a brighter future. We're giving our teachers better tools for teaching. We're demonstrating to the world that Mississippi means business and we're going to challenge our competition like never before.

This past Thursday, the technological advancement of Mississippi's schools took another step forward, propelled by students themselves.

Students from around the state gathered in the Capitol building for a "Computer Blitz Build." With support from ExplorNet Mississippi and a host of corporate sponsors, these students constructed 100 computers for distribution to schools.

ExplorNet is a non-profit organization established to teach students how to build computers and troubleshoot problems in computer systems. I appreciate the work they are doing to help make a difference for students in the state.

What an amazing sight – these young people actually building computers that will help teach a new generation.

This effort took place in coordination with our "Computers in the Classrooms" initiative focusing on placing an Internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state by the end of 2002.

At the onset of this new millennium, our world is becoming increasingly dependent on technology. More and more people are using hand-held computers for keeping up with their schedules. State-of-the-art audio and video equipment is becoming commonplace in homes and businesses. Knowing how to use this technology is, more than ever before, playing a key role in the business of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Every child in Mississippi needs to have access to the latest technology and information, and that's what the "Computers in the Classrooms" initiative is all about.

In every corner of the state, from the smallest town to the largest metropolitan area, our children will be able to utilize the Internet to research, to learn and to become familiar with this amazing technology.

We are more than halfway to meeting our goal of being the first state in the nation to have an Internet-accessible computer in every classroom, and that's exciting for our students and our future.

Much has been said recently about investing in workforce training for Mississippi. Our investment in "Computers in the Classroom" is an early commitment to workforce training. By giving students the tools and the technology to begin learning now, we can produce a more highly-skilled workforce for the future.

Business and industry don't look at Mississippi like they used to. They see the computers going into classrooms, they see the most aggressive economic development program in the country, and they see a commitment to not giving in without first giving our very best effort.

The best of our work begins with a single program, a single initiative designed to maximize the potential found in our people. The "Computers in the Classroom" initiative is just such a program.

The science fiction author Isaac Asimov once wrote, "I do not fear computers. I fear the lack of them." We're working to make sure Mississippi's students do not suffer from a lack of them, and the work is going well.