

*Remarks for the
AGB Press Conference
January 7, 2002*

Good morning. It's my pleasure to be here today to unveil a report on priorities for moving our state forward.

After much hard work and with the support of the Association of Governor Boards, the Steering Committee for the Mississippi Leadership Summit on Higher Education is proud to present its plan for "Building Opportunity in Mississippi Through Higher Education."

You are all well aware that education is a top priority of my administration. We have worked hard to improve every aspect of education – from raising teacher pay to putting internet-accessible computers in every public school classroom.

Today, we are taking another step forward in our work.

Our report outlines six specific priorities designed to help improve our competitiveness and quality of life.

The priorities include:

- raising the educational hopes of our people;
- sending our children to school ready to learn;
- improving the quality of teaching and learning in elementary and secondary schools;
- increasing college and university graduation rates;
- expanding adult learning, workforce training and professional development;
- and increasing university research and development efforts.

These priorities are an outline for our future. They are part of the road map we are following for changing the way Mississippi operates.

By investing in human capital, we are positioning ourselves to be competitive in an increasingly competitive world. We no longer compete with Alabama, Louisiana and Tennessee.

We're competing with Canada, Mexico and countries in Asia. We're competing with labor markets around the world.

And we make ourselves competitive by making our people competitive. The best economic development packages in the world don't mean a thing if we don't have a workforce ready to back them up.

In the 4th century BC, the philosopher Diogenes said “the foundation of every state is the education of its youth.” In the 21st century, that statement still rings true.

Our success, our competitiveness, our quality of life is based on our commitment to the education of our people.

Mississippi is gaining national attention for the work being done here, and rightfully so. We are sending a very clear message beyond our borders – a message that says we're serious about rising to the top, about setting new standards for others to follow.

Part of the work of crafting that message is done by the Steering Committee for the Mississippi Leadership Summit. The work of the 40 members of this committee is evident in this report we are unveiling today, and I want to thank them for their dedication to improving education in our state.

At this time, I'd like to ask Aubrey Patterson, Chairman and CEO of Bancorp South and my co-chair for the Steering Committee, to make a few remarks.

Aubrey?

(Aubrey Patterson speaks)

What we want to do with education in Mississippi is to light some fires for learning, from preschool to adult education. We want the people of Mississippi to have a burning desire to learn and improve their quality of life.

We can make a commitment to education, or we can choose not to. The decision makes a difference for all of us. I, for one, am committed to education and the great things it can do for our people and our state.

We'll be glad to take your questions.