

*Remarks to the
Mississippi Association of Community and Junior Colleges
February 7, 2002*

Thank you, Dr. Morgan, and thanks for the invitation to join you here this morning. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about one of Mississippi's greatest assets, and that is our community and junior colleges.

I have to preface my remarks this morning with a very specific "thank you" to someone whose commitment to education in Mississippi has been demonstrated at every level.

Forty years ago, this individual began his career in education in Mississippi, and this year he is bringing that career to a close. I want to say “thank you” to Dr. Olon Ray for his good work.

Olon Ray and everyone in this room knows all too well the issues facing education in Mississippi, and specifically the issues facing our community and junior colleges.

Recently, we held a Higher Education Summit that outlined the priorities we have to focus on for the future. From making sure children are ready to learn to increasing adult learning, these priorities are a map for us to follow.

The role of community and junior colleges in realizing these priorities is vital. We have to have a strong focus on the work you do; the results of that focus will strengthen the state for years to come.

That's why, in my budget presentation for Fiscal Year 03, I call for a pay raise for those working in higher education. We have to make an investment in our people – in you – so that the dividends we reap in the future are that much larger.

Simply, we are building our foundation as strong and secure as we can. We are all aware of the biblical proverb about building a house on sand. We are building ours on the most stable rock we can, and that rock is education.

It's exciting to think about what we can do with education as a priority. There is no limit to what can happen. Horizons are broadened, the sky is the limit.

Mississippians have the chance to build a future never dreamt of by past generations.

In Mississippi, we've chosen a path covered with challenges and surrounded by opportunity. How we walk that path and use our resources will determine our success for generations to come.

I feel good about what those generations
will say about our work.

Thank you.