

Remarks for WLBT "Best of the Class"
Thursday, May 24, 2001

Good morning, and thank you for the invitation to be a part of today's celebration.

It's an exciting time for you, as you come to the end of your high school years and prepare for the next stage of your education.

Making this transition can be difficult, but you have proven yourselves to be up to the challenge.

You are the best and brightest Mississippi has to offer. You have taken on obstacles and turned them into opportunities. You are the “Best of the Class.”

Hodding Carter, a native Mississippian, once said that the greatest gifts we can give our children are roots and wings. What exactly did he mean by that?

Through the work of your parents, teachers and friends, you’ve been given your roots. They are the foundation for your life and how you live it.

The strength of those roots will determine how you use your wings. The deeper and stronger your roots, the farther and higher you can soar on your wings.

Use your wings well; use them to explore... learn... enjoy.

You are moving on to new things that will continue to shape you. Your lives are individual textbooks, still being written through the experiences of each new day.

Fill those books; pack the pages with memories and refer to them often.

They will be your reference source, the library you return to again and again for information, for recollection and for reflection.

As an educator, I have stood at the front of a classroom and seen those “lightbulb” moments when a student recognizes the point being made. That’s what learning is all about.

As the valedictorians and salutatorians of the Class of 2001, you have reached the pinnacle of your educational experience so far.

Now, there's another higher level for you to achieve, and I know you will not only achieve it, you will surpass it.

In 1899, the head of the U. S. Patent Office was quoted as saying, "Everything that can be invented has been invented."

A century later, we are still envisioning and creating new things – and you are the next generation of creators.

There is a poem written by a man named Edward Guest, and I want to share the last few lines as a challenge to you today.

“The things that haven’t been done before
Are the tasks worthwhile today;
Are you one of the flock that follows, or
Are you one that shall lead the way?”

Are you one of the timid souls that quail
At the jeers of a doubting crew,
Or dare you, whether you win or fail,
Strike out for a goal that's new?"

Think about the things that haven't been done
before. Take a chance.

Make the most of your lives as you climb to the
next level. Make a difference.

If anyone can do this, I believe it's you.

Congratulations, and I wish you all the best.