

Good afternoon and thank you! It is a pleasure to meet with you today to briefly discuss Governor Ronnie Musgrove's educational initiatives and to discuss the wonderful experience that I am having by having the opportunity to serve on the Governor's staff.

The Governor is passionate about and dedicated to setting unprecedented goals and achieving unparalleled progress in Mississippi's public education system. Our state and our children deserve progress. Mississippi's citizens demand results. Together we can achieve our goals.

I'd like to take just a moment to share with you some of Mississippi's educational achievements in 2000 and then we'll look at Governor Musgrove's education agenda for the 2001 Legislative Session.

1- Raised teacher pay in Mississippi to the Southeastern Average

Mississippi cannot be expected to attract and retain qualified teachers to educate our children if we are not willing to pay a competitive salary for such qualified teachers. Mississippi's 1998-1999 classroom teachers' average salary was \$29,500, while the southeastern average was \$35,817.

Governor Musgrove signed HB 1134 into law on May 1. This legislation provides for a \$337.9 million plan to raise Mississippi teacher pay to the Southeastern average by the 2005-2006 school year. Mississippi's teachers will start seeing larger paychecks during the 2001-2002 school year. Mississippi's teacher pay average will go from the present \$31,900 to the predicted Southeastern average of approximately \$41,000 by the 2005-2006 school year. This is an approximate 30% raise.

Governor Musgrove believes we must pay our teachers competitive salaries so that we don't lose experienced educators to neighboring states and so that top students are encouraged to go into teaching. We must make the commitment to improving and building upon Mississippi's public education system so that we may develop the workforce that will attract new business and economic growth to our state.

2- Established Taskforce for Classroom Technology

During his gubernatorial campaign, Governor Musgrove dared Mississippians to imagine computers at the fingertips of every Mississippi school child. With the advancements in technology, the

world is literally at our fingertips with the use of the Internet. Governor Musgrove knows that we must take the steps necessary to ensure that every schoolchild in Mississippi's public schools has the opportunity to take advantage of and to learn from the resources offered by the Internet. In addition, it is almost required in today's workforce that you have computer skills. To provide a public education to the children of our state which does not provide them with the experience and skills associated with working on computers would be an injustice to them. Governor Musgrove is working hard to ensure that Mississippi provides effective education for our children, education which will stimulate them, which require them to learn and which will prepare them for the future.

Governor Musgrove created the Governor's Task Force for Classroom Technology via Executive Order 831 in order to accomplish his goal of placing an Internet-accessible computer in every public elementary and secondary classroom in Mississippi by the end of 2002. To date, no other state has accomplished such an endeavor. The task force is comprised of representatives of teachers, school administrators,

state agencies, private foundations and interests, and professional associations.

The task force is charged with supporting administrative initiatives to fund the project, raising private sector awareness and financial support of the project, and executing the initiative. The Legislature appropriated \$2 million for this initiative during last year's session and private fundraising has also been extremely successful.

3 – Launched Fast Forward Mississippi Website

www.fastforwardms.com

Fast Forward Mississippi is funded through Mississippi's School-to-Work Partnership. This partnership is led by 9 agencies and educational organizations, including the Governor's Office, the Public Education Forum, the Department of Education, IHL, SBCJC and the PTA. The partnership is implemented in 50 local partnerships throughout the state.

Fast Forward Mississippi is designed to provide students of all ages with career choice information. After choosing a career path, Fast Forward Mississippi continues to assist students and parents by providing information on apprenticeships, post-secondary education

and training opportunities, as well as information on financial assistance available for obtaining that post-secondary education.

4- Improved School Accountability

Governor Musgrove also signed SB 2488, the 2000 Educational Accountability Bill, which provides for schools to be evaluated based on: 1) students achieving a grade-level proficiency or, 2) students exceeding an annual growth expectation in the number of students not testing at grade-level proficiency, but who are showing improvement. Schools not meeting established growth expectations or grade-level proficiency standards will be designated Priority Schools. 7-member evaluation teams (appointed by the State Superintendent and approved by the State Board of Education) will be sent to these Priority Schools to identify personnel in need of professional development and to assist in the development and evaluation of improvement plans for the school. Identified personnel will be given two years to improve and may be dismissed after two years if improvement is not made.

Now, let's take a look at where we want to go.

1 – Funding

HB 1134 , that I mentioned earlier, provides that teachers only receive the raises each year if the state economy grows by at least five percent a year. Governor Musgrove is opposed to the 5% growth provision and will work with the legislature this session to remove this growth provision to ensure that we provide this raise regardless of the growth of Mississippi's economy. HB 75 has been introduced and does eliminate this 5% growth provision.

Governor Musgrove is also going to work diligently with the Legislature to provide funding for the Mississippi Adequate Education Program and the Critical Needs Teacher Shortage Act.

2- Require Appointed Superintendents of Education

How important is the leadership of every school to the students' success? How important is it to make sure that politics doesn't bleed into the classroom? The Legislature did not share the Governor's support during last year's session for requiring that all school superintendents be appointed. Governor Musgrove supports appointed superintendents in order to ensure qualified and trained administrators

in our schools. Some have argued that this denies the electorate's vote to be heard. This is why Governor Musgrove believes that we can elect our school boards and appoint our superintendents. As you know, many school districts have a system of an appointed superintendent and appointed board members which works fine. However, in order to ensure that every district's day-to-day operations are managed by an effective administrator, the Governor will continue to support this initiative.

- HB 64 provides for elected school boards and appointed superintendents**
- SB 2170 and SB 2196 require all superintendents to be appointed after 1/1/04.**

Leave for parents participating in parent-teacher conferences

Business, education, communities and parents must work together to produce students who will be able to succeed in the work place and who will be prepared to meet the challenges of the world. Parents are critical to the success of any educational system. Governor Musgrove is working to ensure authorized leave for parents participating in parent teacher conferences.

What do I do?

I have the wonderful opportunity of serving on the Governor's staff. For the past year, I have served in the Governor's Policy and Planning Division as a Policy Liaison. Governor Musgrove asked me just before Christmas to serve as his Education Advisor and I must admit that I was a little apprehensive to accept his offer when he is so passionate about and knowledgeable of education. But, I look at this position as a challenge and a wonderful opportunity to make a difference. And, as the daughter of a public school teacher and a product of Mississippi public schools, this is an area near and dear to my heart.

My day-to-day responsibilities include serving as a liaison between the Governor and the Department of Education and other educational associations and organizations. I take constituent phone calls and I respond to correspondence received by our office regarding educational matters.

I am also serving as the Governor's Liaison to the House Education, Universities and Colleges and Transportation Committees, as well as their Senate counterparts. This means that I read, track and

monitor the status of all bills in these areas and keep the Governor posted as to developments in legislation. I also attend legislative Committee meetings and work with Committee members on behalf of the Governor.

I also staff meetings that the Governor holds with visitors regarding education. I've had the wonderful experience of coordinating special projects in our office such as the U.S. Department of Treasury's U.S. Savings Bond Poster Contest where I had the thrilling opportunity to host an awards ceremony at the Governor's Mansions for our three top artists – one who was home-schooled, one who attended private school, and one who attended a public school without many resource. This last young man's art teacher drove the young student and his mother 2 ½ hours to the reception in Jackson. That is the type of dedicated teacher who makes a difference that I wish every student in Mississippi could have.

I am in the process of organizing a reception next Thursday evening hosted by Governor Musgrove in honor of Mississippi's 389 new National Board Certified Teachers.

As the Governor stated in his inaugural address last year, the opportunity belongs to us to forget excuses and focus instead on solutions. He mentioned last week in his State-of-the-State address that the state of Mississippi is opportunity. I hope that I have shared with you today, a few of the Governor's solutions. It is not enough, however, to just say these words. We must take calculated risks when the rewards are great. Our state stands on a rock-solid foundation of faith. We build with the strength of the men and women who have come and gone, who dared to look ahead and to think about us. We must do that for our children and for their children. We must look to the future of promise and potential that together we can seize if we will not turn a blind eye to our challenges. For it is through challenges and the experiences that they provide, that we grow.

Thank you again for your invitation. On behalf of the Governor, please allow me to offer best wishes for Delta Kappa Gamma's continued success and for its continued dedication to education and to service.

