

*Remarks to the
MS Ducks Unlimited State Convention
March 16, 2002*

(open with duck / hunting story)

One of the things that makes for successful hunting is being able to sight in on a target and hit it dead on. That's what we're doing today in Mississippi – we're sighting in on targets, we're aiming carefully, and our percentage of hits is pretty good.

We're hitting targets because we're setting priorities.

We've been doing it in education. I think we would all agree that the commitment we make to education is part of our legacy for our children. We've been fighting hard for what's right for our schools and our kids.

It has been a difficult year for education in this state, but it didn't have to be. Things can and will be better, when our budget is crafted with education as a priority.

I'm not going to talk about who's right or who's wrong in this situation; that won't solve anything. But, I will say that we simply can't afford to continue building a budget on false hopes instead of realistic numbers.

Our schools, our teachers and our children shouldn't have to endure another year like this one, and I'm going to fight to make sure they don't.

A couple of weeks ago, an editorial about education in the Clarion-Ledger stated that “it’s the lack of spending priorities that is destructive.”

When you do a budget for your household, you don’t add in income in the hopes it will just appear. You set priorities.

It’s not a difficult concept, but you have to be disciplined to make it work. You have to be able to hit your target.

The same applies to economic development.

We are constantly looking for new businesses to recruit, as well as existing businesses to expand.

We've been hitting some pretty big targets in this areas. In the past two years, more than 21,000 new jobs have been created and over \$6 billion invested in the state.

Just last week, *Site Selection* magazine ranked us as one of the top ten states in the nation, based on ten different criteria.

In the end, economic development is economic development. It doesn't matter if you're talking about two guys and a truck or 4,000 people making the truck. At every level, we're working hard to bring high-quality, good-paying jobs to our people.

This is the Mississippi of the 21st century we're talking about here.

One of the most important issues for our state today is health care. Every Mississippian – regardless of income or any other status – is concerned with the basic provision of, and access to, quality health care.

The problems we been facing with our Medicaid system affect us all, whether we depend on Medicaid or not.

Over 650,000 Mississippians – children, seniors, disable – rely on Medicaid, and we need to fight for them. We need to make sure our children, our parents, our grandparents, have the health care they need and deserve.

We know what our target is in fixing the Medicaid system, and I'm confident we're going to hit it. The most important part of that target is providing some flexibility for our executive director to manage the system the way it needs to be managed.

You may notice I keep saying “we” – this applies not just to me or the people working with me – it applies to you as well. It applies to all Mississippians, because “we” have to work together to make sure we hit our targets.

The role you play – from the local level on up – affects the future of our state. It doesn’t matter where you focus your efforts – with a church, with a Boy Scout Troop, with a neighborhood association, or with Ducks Unlimited – they have an impact on us all.

I've always believed that saying "I must do something" always solved a lot more problems than saying "something must be done."

When you get involved, when you demonstrate your care and concern, you create a ripple effect – one that spreads across all barriers.

Once that ripple effect gets going, gains some momentum, it's tough to stop.

We're creating a ripple effect in Mississippi. We're setting priorities for our people, we're setting goals for our future, we're aiming at targets that, when hit, will move us ahead.

Mississippi has so much to offer, and we have much to offer Mississippi. We're doing more and doing it better than ever before. The momentum is there, and it is growing.

Our success depends on the work we do together and the energy with which we do it. Malcolm Forbes once commented that “diamonds are just chunks of coal that stuck to their jobs.”

Let’s stick to our jobs; let’s commit ourselves to doing great things for the people of Mississippi. The end results are going to be the message we send to generations to come; I want it to be a positive message.

I look forward to working with you as we write that message. Thank you.