

EMBDC Business Before Hours
Tuesday, March 14, 2000
7:30 a.m.

*The audience will consist of a large segment of Meridian's business community. Topics of interest to them are: education, workforce training and economic development. You are flying in to Meridian and immediately back to Jackson in order to get back for the legislative session. Remember: stand up straight and deliver the message.

Good Morning.

It is good to be with you on this early Tuesday morning.

(Tell something humorous about your early trip.)

I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you this morning. I know that we are somewhat limited on time, but there are some important issues that I campaigned on, which remain on the top of my list of priorities for the people of this state, and I know they are important to you. Those issues are:

- 1) Education
- 2) Economic Development

Just this past week you probably read in the newspaper or heard on the nightly news that the teacher pay bills that were before the House of Representatives were dead. Teacher pay must remain a priority. I believed when I was campaigning, and I believe now, that the single most important issue to move education forward is increasing teacher pay. From the beginning of my administration I outlined a plan that would allow the Legislature to bring Mississippi teachers' salaries up to the Southeastern Average. It is a multi-year plan which, if followed, will meet our goal in four years. I believe we still

can, and will reach that goal. We cannot afford to wait on this critical issue. The time to invest in our children is now.

One investment that we have already started working on is the improved classroom technology for our students. Wednesday of last week I announced the formation of a Classroom Technology Task Force.

This task force has been charged with the challenge of placing an Internet-accessible computer in every public elementary and secondary classroom in

Mississippi by the end of the year 2002. The men and women on the task force are representative of the people of our state. They are educators, parents, business owners and professionals with one common

goal of working together to increase the educational resources available to Mississippi students. They are working diligently to reach their goal, which when completed, will positively influence all of our students in Mississippi.

Our young people's education determines the future of economic development in Mississippi.

What are we talking about when we say the words, Economic Development? Aren't we talking about improving the quality of life for our people when we say the words economic development? Don't we mean finding ways to make life better for our people? Finding ways for men and women to build families,

build home, build lives, right here in Mississippi.

In my State of the State Address I posed the following question: “Are we ambitious enough when it comes to attracting good jobs and building a more secure future for Mississippi’s working families? I said then, and I repeat myself today by saying, “If there have been any doubts in the past, let me lay them to rest here and now.”

We are determined to improve the quality of life for our people.

One way we can do that is to move our workforce into the twenty-first century with the skills and the training needed to provide a better life for all

Mississippians. We know that technology is changing virtually daily. And, are challenged again and again to simply keep up. But if we offer our people an opportunity for training and re-training, Mississippi's workforce will continue to be competitive in this ever-changing marketplace.

Workforce development is not optional and neither is the education of our young people throughout this state. In order to be able to provide employers with the best qualified workforce, we must have men and women who are exceptionally educated and prepared to enter this world of technological advancements.

To develop a workforce that stands out to employers,

we must provide our students with the best education possible, and the best tools possible that will enhance their learning process and prepare them for the technology of tomorrow.

Two months ago, I named J. C. Burns as Executive Director of the Department of Economic and Community Development. Since that time, he and his staff have been on a tour of our state soliciting input from local leaders and community representatives as they develop Mississippi's goals and plans for attracting and growing business and industry in our state. I had the opportunity to travel to some of the cities on the tour and I was excited to see the tremendous turnout of people from private

business, education, government and the community at large. More than 1,300 people attended to the meetings and gave their ideas and input about ways to help Mississippi move up the ladder of economic growth. It will take that same commitment from all of the people of this state working together sharing their ideas and developing the working formula for a successful effort.

We know we need a coherent agenda for advancing our state economically. It is time to move forward, to think bigger and to put into place a plan that works for the people of Mississippi.

I am pleased to say that we have established, a

coalition of Mississippi's public and private sector leadership to develop the first ever Mississippi Partnership for Economic Development. This group is being co-chaired by myself and Dwight Evans, President and CEO of Mississippi Power. This dedicated group of Mississippi leaders will give their time and energy to create a new plan for economic growth in our state.

Mississippi has an economy that is stronger and growing faster than it has in decades. We are now seizing the opportunity to develop a strong plan that will map the direction that we want our state to take in the next decade. We are taking the right steps to

show the world that Mississippi is poised and ready
for the growth of tomorrow.