

*Remarks for the
Raising the “Following the Leaders” Flag Event
October 28, 2002*

(recognize Dr. Orr, Mayor Hart, Dr. Love, Dr. Higdon, Principal Craven)

We’re here today because of these young people – because of their promise and potential, and because of our commitment to helping them make the most of their talents.

Last month, Mississippi was selected as one of six states to participate in the first phase of the “Following the Leaders” project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Water Valley High School is one of only 15 schools in the state to participate.

This project focuses on helping states implement the mandates of the recent “No Child Left Behind” legislation recently passed by Congress.

I want to thank Dr. Orr and the Education Leaders Council, Dr. Hancock from the Department of Education, and the other partners in this effort – Project Achieve, Accountability Works, the Milken Family Foundation and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation – for their support.

When the announcement was made about our selection, it was said that we had “an infectious enthusiasm and commitment to students,” as well as the “immediate capacity to use ‘Following the Leaders’ tools effectively.”

Those are strong endorsements of the work we've been doing, and a challenge to us for the work that's yet to be done.

But these students here – along with students all over Mississippi – are depending on us to take on the challenge and turn it into opportunity. That's what we're going to do.

In a few minutes, we're going to raise a flag – a “Following the Leaders” flag – as a symbol to this community that Water Valley is making a difference.

As we raise the flag, I want you all to think about something else – this will be the first “Following the Leaders” flag raised in the state – and the first flag in the nation.

Mississippi is making a difference. We’re leading, not following. We’re carving a new path, not following an old trail. In our children, we’re sending a strong message to a time that we may not see – a message of hope, of promise, of skill, of ability.

It’s a message the rest of the nation is looking to Mississippi to send – and we will not fail in that effort.

It's obvious that education is a priority for us here in Mississippi. For me, it's also a personal passion with its roots in my own experience. There's so much for us to do in Mississippi and across America.

I'd like to ask Dr. Ann Hancock, regional representative for the U.S. Department of Education, to say a few words about the national efforts in education. Dr. Hancock, thank you for being here with us today and for the support you bring to our work in Mississippi.