

*Remarks for the
State Free File Agreement Press Conference
March 14, 2003*

Good morning. Today, I'm proud to make two important announcements that will benefit thousands of Mississippi taxpayers.

First, I'd like to make all Mississippi taxpayers aware of a new public-private partnership called the Free File Alliance, which provides free on-line tax preparation and e-filing services for federal tax returns to over 78 million qualified Americans. This includes lower and moderate income taxpayers, those who qualify for the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, seniors, students, and active duty military personnel.

Second, I am announcing today that we have spearheaded the creation of a state free file agreement. It is based on the federal Free File Alliance model, only it provides qualifying Mississippi taxpayers a choice among free tax preparation and e-filing products for their state returns.

These new public-private partnerships are a tremendous public service. They harness the power of the Internet to help millions of American file their taxes for free, with virtually no cost to the federal, state or city governments.

They give hard-working Mississippians a choice among tax preparation products, and by filing their tax returns electronically, they help them receive their tax refund in as little as 10 days.

They are secure. Eligible taxpayers complete their tax returns using the websites of private companies employing the latest security technology to protect privacy. Only final tax returns are transmitted to the government, and companies that participate in our agreement must comply with all applicable federal and state laws protecting taxpayer information.

They will help to dramatically increase the amount of people who file their state taxes electronically, saving us all money.

In these challenging times, when we are dealing with the impact of a national recession, public-private partnerships like the state and federal free-file agreements I'm announcing here today have the power and potential to save significant taxpayer dollars while improving the delivery and quality of government services.

In short, these agreements make one of the true certainties in life – paying taxes – much less challenging and a lot more productive for thousands of Mississippi residents.

I'd like to ask Chris Long, a representative of the Computer and Communications Industry Association, and Jim Ruda with Intuit to make a few remarks. Chris?

(Long and Ruda make remarks)

We also have two people with us here today who have used this electronic filing system, and they have brief comments they would like to share with us this morning.

Venita Prewitt is a student at Hinds Community College, and Charlie Brenner works with the Jackson Hinds Library System. I'd like them to speak, then we'll be glad to take a few questions.
Venita?

(Prewitt and Brenner speak, then floor is open to questions)