

*Remarks for the
Governor's Achievement Awards Ceremony
April 19, 2002*

Thank you, George. I'm proud to be here today to celebrate the excellence, the achievements, and the quality that are building Mississippi. The work of the people and the organizations in this room today are a major reason Mississippi can compete with anyone, anytime, anywhere.

I'm especially proud of the first recipients of the Governor's Achievement Awards in Business and Education – the Hayes Cooper Center for Math, Science and Technology in Merigold; the School of Polymers and High Performance Materials at the University of Southern Mississippi; and the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta.

(tell story of LSU-Tennessee game last fall; 10,000 ways to do business)

We're always working to develop new ways of doing business. Because of the constantly changing face of the world's economy, we must be prepared for every possibility.

The economy of the 21st century is wireless, borderless and global. To compete and win in that economy, we are creating our own opportunities and setting the stage for success.

Case in point – the “Computers in the Classroom” initiative. Through this public-private partnership, Mississippi is going to be the first state in the nation with an Internet-accessible computer in every classroom.

Students across the state, from Batesville to Biloxi, will have access to the same technology. More importantly, they'll have the same opportunities to learn how to use that technology and apply it to the work place.

Last month, 50 students from around the state met in the Capitol to build, from scratch, 100 computers in one day. For some of us, programming a VCR is difficult. For these kids, building a computer was no big deal.

That speaks volumes about what we're doing and where we can go in this state, and I'm proud of that. The investment we make in education demonstrates our commitment to the future.

The same can be said of our investment in economic development. In my State of the State address, I spent 17 minutes of a 40-minute speech talking about jobs in Mississippi.

When we began the 2002 legislative session, we were concerned about the funding level for the Mississippi Development Authority. What was anticipated to be a 28 percent reduction in funding became, through a lot of hard work, an 8 percent reduction.

I fought to make sure the MDA received the funding it needs to make a difference in Mississippi. A national recession is not the time to cut our investment in economic development, and now our work to bring quality, high-paying jobs to the people will continue.

Whether it's 25 jobs in Prentiss or 4,000 jobs at the Nissan plant, we give every project the same attention.

After we landed the Nissan plant, the business community around the world viewed us in a different light. They saw we could compete with anyone else, and win.

More recently, we made the final four in the competition for the Hyundai plant – further evidence that Mississippi is a player in the new global economy.

But as I said, the jobs that come with large projects like Nissan are good – but the jobs that come with smaller projects are just as important.

For example, the Alcoa facility in DeSoto County was scheduled for closure. We worked closely with the company and local officials and, in the end, Alcoa made the decision not only to stay open but also to expand their facility.

The Whirlpool plant in Oxford is getting ready to grow as well. When Whirlpool needed to consolidate its operations, it didn't close down in Mississippi – it chose to close down in Canada and expand in Oxford.

That's good news for Mississippi.

In the middle of a national recession, we're not going to slow down on our efforts to grow Mississippi. Education, jobs, health care, and public safety are the priorities we have to focus on to achieve our goals, and we're doing just that.

My commitment to the growth of this state is absolute, as is yours. Together, we can make the mark of excellence and build the reputation of achievement that will make Mississippi stand above others.

We have the promise, and we have the potential, to do this. We must also have the desire to make it happen.

Peter Drucker wrote that “the best way to predict your future is to create it.” This same philosophy is shared by today's winners.

I'm confident in our ability to create opportunities and make the most of them. The power to predict our future is within our reach; let's use it wisely.

Thank you.