

*Remarks to the
Hattiesburg Area Women's Forum
June 12, 2001*

- Thanks for invitation to be part of Forum

- Hard to believe less than two years ago was in classroom teaching
 - Had all teacher resource books at my disposal

- Overnight, plopped into fish bowl with no manual of what to do

- Some days of identity being called into question
 - First lady was “Eve”
 - New security when Governor called
 - No one here by name of Melanie
 - First grader in north MS
 - Look like Barbie doll

- Have gone from Eve to “Nobody” to Barbie
 - Really am First Lady of MS
 - Proud to be here to help welcome Dr. Sylvia Rimm

- Also pleased to have an opportunity to talk about some issues close to my heart

- Commend Dr. Rimm for her work with children
 - As a teacher and mother, concerned about issues facing children

- First and foremost is education
 - Obviously, education is foundation for success
 - Must give our children the best we have in this area

- It's been said "the potential possibilities of any child are the most intriguing and stimulating in all creation"
 - Statement shows why children are at the forefront of all we do

- So much we are doing now
 - MS one of top five states in nation for teachers to reach level of National Board Certification
 - Working to increase teacher pay

- Also on the way to being first state in nation with internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom
 - Will meet this goal by end of 2002
 - First phase will place
 - 9 computers at Hattiesburg Middle School
 - Total of 67 computers in Forrest County

- As former teacher, loved being there for the “lightbulb” moments
 - When student understood point being made and realized joy of learning

- Pushing for more of these moments through reading initiative
 - “See the World, Read a Book”
 - Reading can take a child anywhere he or she wants to go

- Traveling Mississippi to encourage reading at all levels

- In addition to technology, cannot forget foundations of learning and thinking
 - Education in the arts important
 - Need to expose children to art/music/dance

- Much happening in Mississippi to support this effort
 - Majesty of Spain exhibit
 - Only place in North America where exhibit being shown

- International Ballet Competition
 - Rotates between Jackson and Bulgaria / Finland / Russia

- Important to keep the arts vital and visible as part of life

- Buckminster Fuller once wrote, “every child is born a genius”
 - So true
 - Every child in Mississippi born with capacity to succeed

- Our job is to ensure their success through commitment to teachers and schools

- One other area to briefly mention
 - Efforts toward breast cancer awareness

- American Cancer Society estimates for Mississippi in 2001
 - 3,800 new cases
 - 800 deaths

- Urge you to be aware of the symptoms of cancer
 - Early diagnosis is key to survival
 - Get regular check-ups / ammogram

- Want to close by saying we've all been given gifts in life
 - Using them in business / home / church / schools

- Let's use them to our fullest in our communities
 - Volunteer where you can
 - Takes time, but worth it

- Mother Teresa once said that “service is not a chore; it is a privilege”
 - Let's exercise our privilege
 - Give back / help out
 - Make a difference

- Thank you for asking me to be here today

