

*Remarks for the
Governor's Commission on Health Care
May 9, 2002*

Good morning. I want to thank each of you for taking the time to be here today, and for agreeing to serve on this commission.

The work we will be doing together will be exacting, it will be detailed, and it will be focused on the goal of the creating the most efficient and effective Medicaid program in the country.

I have said all along that the answers to the issues facing Medicaid can be found with the real people affected by those issues – that’s why you’re here.

Rica Lewis Payton has been given the flexibility she needs to restructure the program. We must use that flexibility wisely, keeping in mind the more than 650,000 Mississippians who depend on Medicaid for their health care.

There are 31 of you on this commission.
You are doctors, pharmacists, and
advocates. You are on the front lines of the
health care community in Mississippi.

You are the experts, and you know what
needs to be done.

In the work we are doing, it is important to
gather information from all sources, and
each of you has information to share.

Our work began earlier this week, when representatives of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services met with Rica and staff members from her office and my office.

The meetings were very productive, and offered some new ideas and directions for our work. Rica will be discussing some of the details of the meetings with you in a few minutes.

In my State of the State address in January, I called for a new commitment to the basic health care needs of the citizens of Mississippi. That new commitment begins here, today, with this commission and the work it will do for Medicaid.

I urge you to be honest and open in your meetings, and keep in mind what the results of your work will mean. There are more than 650,000 Mississippians depending on the work done by this commission and others in the coming weeks and months.

We cannot – and we will not – let them down.

Again, I appreciate what each of you brings to this commission and the discussions to be held. Today's the first step in a long process, but it will be worth it.

I'd like to ask Rica Lewis-Payton to make a few comments. Rica?