

*Remarks for the  
Bill Signing Press Conference / House Bill 19  
December 3, 2002*

Mississippi is taking on a new image. The rest of the country is watching what we have done – and continue to do – in education. Test scores are up. More of our children are going to college. Learning is starting before our kids walk into the school for the first time, and continuing throughout their lives.

The rest of the country is also watching what we're doing to grow Mississippi through the creation of quality jobs, more than 47,000 of them in the past three years. Mississippi is competing with the rest of the world – and we're winning a good part of the time.

There were a lot of people in this state, and around the nation, who said we couldn't raise teacher pay. But, we did it.

There were a lot of people who said we couldn't land one of the top ten economic development projects in the nation with the Nissan plant, much less expand the project before it's even completed. But, we did it.

And, there were a lot of people who didn't think civil justice reform could – or would – ever be signed into law by a Mississippi governor.

For the better part of this year, the discussions in Mississippi have focused on the calls for civil justice reform. From the local business person to the Wall Street Journal and Forbes magazine, we were criticized about the civil justice system and the need for an overhaul.

In the spring, I said I would call a special session to address the need for medical malpractice reform. On September 5, I became the first governor in the history of this state to call a special session to consider civil justice reform.

The call to the Legislature was clear. My position on the need for fair and balanced reform was also clear.

I started this special session with a call for serious debate on civil justice reform, and a promise to sign a bill that would accomplish meaningful reforms. Today, I'm proud to stay true to that promise by signing House Bill 19.

(sign bill)

The issue of civil justice reform has been addressed. House Bill 19 is now the law of the state of Mississippi. A message has been sent to the rest of the nation about doing business in Mississippi. This is a good place to be – just ask the companies that have located or expanded nearly 1,800 facilities over the past three years.

But now, we must turn our attention to other pressing issues – issues such as fully funding education, creating quality jobs, and ensuring our people access to quality health care. These issues demand our full focus and energy. To give anything less is a disservice to the people of Mississippi.

I'll be glad to take your questions.