

*Remarks for the
Jobs for Mississippi Graduates Luncheon
April 10, 2002*

Thank you, Alice. It's great to be here to help celebrate this tremendous program and the great work done by these young people.

In the twelve years since its start, Jobs for Mississippi Graduates has helped hundreds, if not thousands, of Mississippi's students complete their schooling and move from the classroom to the workplace.

It's a program I have supported from the start, and the results speak for themselves.

(if you have a story about your own experience as a high school senior – challenges in school, etc. – this may work well here)

Every student who finishes the Job for Mississippi Graduates program has been given an opportunity – an opportunity to make the most of their God-given talents and potential. It's an opportunity that cannot be missed.

We're working hard to create more opportunities for our students. Because of that work, and the potential you hold for the future, others are looking at us and saying "why not Mississippi?" That speaks well of what we're doing.

In my State of the State address last January, I outlined four priorities for Mississippi – health care, public safety, education and jobs. It's the last two that, at this time in your lives, affect you as young people the most.

I'm proud of the direction we're taking in education. We're raising teacher salaries from 49th to 19th in the nation. We're putting an Internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state, and we'll be the first state in the nation to do it.

This year, the Legislature followed the guidelines we offered in the executive budget recommendation – guidelines that fully fund the teacher pay raise, fund the Adequate Education Program at the current level, and make sure teachers aren't paying for school supplies out of their own pockets.

By making education a priority, we make jobs a priority – and that’s an obligation we have to the young people in this room today and all our children around the state.

I know each of you here today is committed to making the most of your potential, and that’s just what our state needs. Each of you has a special talent and a special gift to share with Mississippi.

I want us to put those talents and gifts to work here at home, and we’re making that happen too.

In the past two years, we've attracted more than 21,000 new jobs and over \$6 billion in new investments.

States like New York are looking at what we're doing and saying, "why can't we be more like Mississippi?" A newspaper column in Louisiana referred to us as the "new North Carolina" of the South.

Those are strong statements that let us – and the rest of the world – know that exciting things are happening here. But, there is so much more we can and will accomplish, and you can be a part of making it happen.

We need you to help Mississippi reach her true potential. Use your skill, talent, energy and drive to make a difference in your community.

The great American poet e.e. cummings once wrote, “it takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.” That’s what we hope for from each of you – have courage, and become who you really are.

Stay strong in your convictions, hold fast to your dreams, and work hard. That’s how great things happen.

