

*Remarks for the  
Mississippi Association of Educators  
March 12, 2002*

I am glad to be here with you today, because we share a common goal and a common vision for Mississippi – the very best education available for each and every one of our citizens.

It has been a difficult year for education in this state, but it didn't have to be. Things can and will be better, when our budget is crafted with education as a priority.

I know you're tired of the same thing, the year-in and year-out cycle of cuts that leave you scrambling for supplies and students questioning our commitment to their future.

I'm not going to talk about who's right or who's wrong in this situation; that won't solve anything. But, I will say that we simply can't afford to continue building a budget on false hopes instead of realistic numbers.

Our schools, our teachers and our children shouldn't have to endure another year like this one, and I'm going to work to make sure they don't – and I can use your help.

A couple of weeks ago, an editorial about education in the Clarion-Ledger stated that “it's the lack of spending priorities that is destructive.”

When you do a budget for your household, you don't add in income in the hopes it will just appear. You set priorities.

It's not a difficult concept, but you have to be disciplined to make it work.

As legislators begin crafting the budget for next year, call them up and let them know you want, you demand, a disciplined budget that has education as a priority.

Let them know you want, you demand, a budget that is built on real numbers.

Let them know you want, you demand, our schools and our children to live up to their promise.

Let them know you will accept nothing less.

We're earning a reputation for our forward-thinking approaches to education, with programs like Computers in the Classroom and the teacher pay raise package gaining national attention.

I don't want that reputation tarnished because we didn't get what we hoped for with regards to the economy.

It's not right, and it's not fair to our children.

We can make education work in Mississippi.

We will make education work in

Mississippi. But, we have to do it together.

I've offered a budget recommendation that fully funds the teacher pay raise, funds the Adequate Education Program at its current level, and provides supplies for teachers.

Unfunded mandates won't help our kids. A shared commitment to establishing education as a priority will.

I appreciate the tremendous work you do each and every day in our schools. I appreciate the sacrifice, the commitment you demonstrate to the parents and the students. Keep the commitment strong, because generations are depending on the work we do together.

Thank you.