

*Remarks to the  
Mississippi Association of Gifted Children State Conference  
October 10, 2002*

Thank you, Jane, and good morning to you all. It is always a pleasure to speak to a group of people who are deeply involved in the education of Mississippi's children. Since I first began campaigning for the state Senate on the dusty roads of Panola County back in 1987, education has been a priority for me.

As a senator, I chaired the Education Committee, and my commitment to Mississippi's teachers and children has continued since that time. I'm proud of the work we've done to improve our schools.

Last year, I signed into law one of the most aggressive teacher pay packages in the nation. The day after it was signed, the New York Times ran an editorial about the legislation, and asking why New York couldn't put together the type of package we had crafted here in Mississippi.

We're working to make sure our children are prepared to compete and succeed in the economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To that end, we are putting Internet-accessible computers in every public school classroom in the state.

Many of these computers are being built from scratch by students around the state, and it is amazing to see the interest and commitment these students have those coming up behind them.

Students from Hickory Flat to Hot Coffee, from the most rural districts to the larger city districts, will have access to the same information and technology. The skills they learn from using these computers will definitely impact their success in life.

We recognize the need to serve all students. As co-chair of the working group formed by the National Governors Association and the Chief State School Officers, I helped draft recommended policy for the re-authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

But again, we must work together to ensure an effective education for all our children – those in the mainstream, those with special needs, and gifted students.

I appreciate your commitment to education and the support of Mississippi's gifted children and youth. It has an impact – and the effect of that impact will echo for generations to come.

If we are to succeed in our efforts to recruit and retain business in Mississippi and provide good, quality jobs for our people, then we must ensure the strength of our educational system.

Creating jobs for the people of this state has become a trademark of my administration, but building a future for the children of this state through quality education is my personal passion.

There is an old Chinese proverb that says, “learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere.”

What our children learn today – in the technology of a computer in the classroom, in the arts, in language, in the most rudimentary lessons and the most advance programs – will stay with them forever.

And those of you who lead them in this process will stay with them as well.

You are the ones who help light the path ahead for our children, who help point out the stumbling blocks and the stepping stones.

Today, I'm proud to say something more about your work. I have issued an official proclamation, which I'd like to quickly read to you.

*(read proclamation)*

This has been done in recognition of the great talents of gifted children around our state, as well as those who teach them and work as advocates on their behalf.

Thank you.