

*Remarks for the
Medicaid Press Conference
March 4, 2002*

Perhaps no other service means as much to our people as Medicaid. It helps meet the health care needs of those citizens who need it most – our elderly, our children and our disabled.

The current Medicaid shortfall threatens these citizens – and the threat should have been removed months ago.

On January 25, I presented a proposal to fix the shortfall when it stood at \$148 million.

The Legislature has more than enough time to work on this problem. There has been so much debate that the Medicaid program is now broke, and people are scared.

The fear extends beyond our borders. My office has received calls from as near by as Tishomingo County, and as far away as North Carolina.

Many of these calls are from the elderly, or individuals with family members in nursing homes or receiving Medicaid services. They are rightfully worried about what's going to happen next with Medicaid.

People are wanting to know if they can take a family member for chemotherapy. They are asking, "can I go to the pharmacist to get my medication?"

It's time to calm their fears, and ease their worries.

Today I am offering another proposal to solve the Medicaid shortfall, which now stands at \$158 million. I make this proposal to the Mississippi Legislature and the Mississippi people.

The Legislature needs to pass House Bill 1379 with an amendment allowing for a Revenue Anticipatory Note in the amount of \$119 million. These funds would be repaid when the state brings in the accelerated sales tax collections called for in House Bill 1379.

The balance of the shortfall can be covered by borrowing \$39 million from special funds. To make this work, the Legislature must adopt the budget proposal I offered in January, with revenue estimates of 2.65 percent.

Any growth over 2.65 percent would be used to repay these funds. If the Legislature is correct in its revenue estimates, this would amount to nearly \$60 million.

In addition, we need the authority to make this program work the way it's designed. This authority would allow my office, in cooperation with Rica Lewis-Payton, to put in place measures to better manage the health care services for the people of Mississippi.

Mississippi's Medicaid program is the most legislatively mandated program in the country. Now is the time to allow for the flexibility to make this program work more efficiently and more effectively.

The bottom line in all this is the health of our people. We are far past the point where we can afford to allow politics to affect policy. Our people deserve better.