Good afternoon. 650,000 Mississippians receive health care services through the Medicaid program, and today I am continuing the fight, with all the power of my office, to make sure those services are not interrupted.

Health care services such as nursing homes, prescription drugs and free-standing dialysis are threatened by the lack of funding in the next fiscal year.

We have the ability – and an obligation – to remove that threat.

Last week, the House of Representatives made progress in doing that by removing budgetary restrictions and offering flexibility in managing the program.

Unfortunately, the day ended without action from the Senate.

As a result, I am calling a special session on Wednesday, April 24, to focus on a solution for Medicaid in Mississippi.

I am presenting another plan to ensure the health care needs offered through Medicaid are made available in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

My plan has four points.

First and foremost, it calls for flexibility for Rica Lewis-Payton to restructure the Medicaid program.

Second, it calls for the creation of a joint legislative committee to work with Ms. Lewis-Payton in addressing the rising costs of the program.

Third, every health-care related agency in the state would work cooperatively with Medicaid to strengthen the delivery of health care in a cost-efficient manner.

Fourth, the Medicaid appropriation for the next two fiscal years would be set at the level of $425 million. This "no-growth" guarantee ensures the Legislature knows exactly how much is needed to fund the program through June 30, 2004.

The Medicaid problem isn't limited to Mississippi. A vast majority of the states are experiencing shortfalls in Medicaid. There's a way out of this, but it's going to take planning, cooperation, and a shared commitment to reaching a solution.

Next Wednesday, we will have the opportunity to do just that. With the plan I am offering, the people of Mississippi who depend on Medicaid can know the program is there for them.