

*Remarks for the
Mental Health Summit
June 27, 2002*

Thank you, Dr. Hendrix. It is my pleasure to be here with you this morning to welcome you to this Mental Health Summit. I understand the focus of this summit is to work toward an integration of mental health care and primary health care – in short, to ensure quality health care for those who need it.

That is the focus of the work we have been doing – trying to find a way to make sure every Mississippian has access to health care. We've been working to do this in a variety of ways.

In my State of the State address in January, I said that we must commit ourselves to the basic health care needs of the citizens of Mississippi. On a daily basis, we are working to meet that commitment.

We have to look at what can be done to make health care work for the people. How can we help offer them the basic care that every human being deserves? How can we make the health care system more efficient?

There are so many issues before us – Medicaid, the availability of medical malpractice insurance for doctors, not to mention the simple provision of care for everything from trauma to long-term care.

The issue of health care has not been dormant since the end of the legislative session. I appointed a Health Care Commission at the end of April to study the problems facing Medicaid and present solutions for solving those problems.

I expect a report from the Commission soon, and look forward to implementing their recommendations to make our Medicaid program the most effective and efficient program in the nation.

We have been working with doctors from around the state to address the issue of medical malpractice insurance. The threats of doctors leaving have not fallen on deaf ears. We will work with them on this issue, and I will be calling a special session for the latter part of August to deal with it from a legislative standpoint.

We will not stand by and allow the affordability of insurance to limit the accessibility of health care. This just is not an alternative.

Improving Mississippi's health care is a common goal for each of us. We may differ in our solutions, but health care is a priority to everyone in Mississippi. Too many Mississippians of all ages and walks of life struggle with rising costs for health care.

We are working on solutions to this crisis, but we still have many areas to improve. Healthy Mississippians are essential to Mississippi's success. For Mississippi to remain competitive in education and economic development, our people must be healthy and able to work.

We are providing health insurance to more of Mississippi's children since the start of 2000. As of June 1, we now have more than 52,000 Mississippi children enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program, almost 100 times more than were covered when in January 2000.

This health insurance program is working for working families. We continue to look for new, innovative ways to reach every child in Mississippi in need of health insurance coverage.

We must not use the budget as an excuse to avoid tackling the difficult issues in health care. We may not solve all the problems with health insurance and prescription drug costs quickly, but we can begin with a sound investment in the health insurance we offer our state employees.

Over the past year, we have discovered a new state of mind. We have renewed a spirit of hope. Mississippians must have hope for a better quality of life. Improving our health care system and options is one way of building that hope.

Together we have told the nation and the world we will not settle for second best. We will not be labeled or told we cannot, just because we are Mississippi. That confidence is contagious. I believe it breeds success.

I know your time together will be productive. I am thankful for the insight and care you bring to your work, and for the impact it has on the people of our great state. Thank you.