

*Remarks for the
MS Mental Health Association Summit
November 4, 2002*

Good morning. I'm glad to be here to welcome you to Mississippi, and to take a moment to talk with you about the work we're doing here in health care.

(priorities – story of Jordan / 15-point buck)

I believe the measure of our society is found in the way we treat our people – our children, our elderly, those who need any kind of help – and the work we do together in health care, and in mental health care, is another standard by which we will be measured.

Health care is a priority for Mississippi. We are working to address the health care needs of our people, needs that affect so much of what we do in other areas such as education and economic development.

It's simple, really; healthy children go to school ready to learn. Healthy adults go to their jobs ready to work. A healthy population contributes to a healthy economy.

We can bring about tremendous change in our health care system if we just don't sit still, if we stay on track and commit to making a difference.

We're working to change the statistics, the "worst firsts," where Mississippi leads the nation and we shouldn't.

We're first in prevalence for diabetes, heart disease death rate, lack of breast cancer screenings in women over age 50 and population underserved by primary care physicians.

We're going to change those statistics.

Those you serve as mental health professionals face unique challenges, and we are taking on those challenges as well. I support the work you're doing and the struggles you are facing in that work, but know that you're not working alone.

We are aware of the challenges and the importance of your concerns about some of our efforts, including a preferred drug list in Medicaid. Rica Lewis Payton, executive director of our Medicaid program, is working closely with me to make sure these concerns are recognized.

That's why, as we have worked on a preferred drug list for Medicaid recipients, we have exempted psychotropic drugs.

Changes to Mississippi's health care environment are being made. I want to make sure we do absolutely everything we can to make sure we have a healthy Mississippi. It's possible, and we will make it happen.

I'm excited about what's going on in Mississippi, about our potential and our promise, about our ability to accomplish some fantastic things.

I have never looked at a situation and thought, “something must be done.” I look at situations and think, “I must do something.”

I want us all to think that way. I want us to work together to accomplish those things I know we can do. We have been blessed with the talent, and we must invest it well.

Thank you.