

Mississippi Funeral Directors Spring Conference
Monday, March 13, 2000
7:00 p.m.
7:30 p.m. speaking
Holiday Inn Southwest

*Approximately 200 in the audience. Stand up straight and be energetic.

Good evening. Thank you for asking me to be with you tonight.

(You can throw in a joke here about your staff suggesting that you be more energetic than normal when addressing this group because if you are still for too long, or if you are not enthusiastic while you are talking with them, then you might be mistaken for a corpse, but only if you think they will find that humorous and non-offensive)

I would like to share with you information about my goals for the State of Mississippi in regards to economic development.

What are we talking about when we say the words,

Economic Development? Aren't we talking about improving the quality of life Mississippians when we say the words economic development? Don't we mean finding ways to make life better for our people? Finding ways for men and women to build families, build homes, build lives, right here in Mississippi.

In my State of the State Address I posed the following question: "Are we ambitious enough when it comes to attracting good jobs and building a more secure future for Mississippi's working families? I said then, and I repeat myself tonight by saying, "If there have been any doubts in the past, let me put them aside here and now."

We are determined to improve the quality of life for our people.

One way we can do that is to move our workforce into the twenty-first century with the skills and the training needed to provide a better life for all Mississippians. We know that technology is changing virtually daily. And, we are challenged again and again to simply keep up. But if we offer our people an opportunity for training and re-training, Mississippi's workforce will continue to be competitive in this ever-changing marketplace.

Workforce development is not optional and neither is the education of our young people throughout this

state. In order to be able to provide employers with the best qualified workforce, we must have men and women who are exceptionally educated and prepared to enter this world of technological advancements.

To develop a workforce that stands out to employers, we must provide our students with the best education possible, and the best two ways to do that are to:

- 1) Raise teacher pay to meet the Southeastern Average.

That is not too much to ask for our teachers who are charged with teaching the future leaders of our state and our nation. Just this past week you probably read in the newspaper or heard on the nightly news that the teacher pay raise bills that were before the House of Representatives are dead. I said from the

beginning of my administration, that the plan I have suggested to the Legislature to bring Mississippi teachers salaries up to the Southeastern Average is a multi-year plan. If followed, we will meet that goal in four years. We can, and we will reach that goal. We cannot afford to wait on this critical issue. The time to invest in our children is now.

2)Place a computer in every classroom.

Wednesday of last week I announced the formation of a Classroom Technology Task Force. This task force has been charged with the challenge of placing an Internet-accessible computer in every public elementary and secondary classroom in Mississippi by the end of the year 2002. The men and women on

the task force are representative of the people of our state. They are educators, parents, business owners and professionals with one common goal of working together to increase the educational resources available to Mississippi students. Task force members also know what it takes to prepare our young people for the jobs of the future. They are working diligently to reach their goal, which when completed, will positively influence the lives of all of our students in Mississippi.

Two months ago, I named J. C. Burns as Executive Director of the Department of Economic and Community Development. Since that time, he and

his staff have been on a tour of our state, soliciting input from local leaders and community representatives as they develop Mississippi's goals and plans for attracting and growing business and industry in our state. I had the opportunity to travel to some of the cities on the tour and I was excited to see the tremendous turnout of people from private business, education, government and the community at large. More than 1,300 people attended the meetings and gave their ideas and input about ways to help Mississippi move up the ladder of economic growth. It will take that same commitment from all of the people of this state working together sharing their ideas and developing the working formula for a

successful effort.

We know we need a coherent agenda for advancing
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our state economically. It is time to move forward, to
think bigger and to put into place a plan that works
for the people of Mississippi.

I am pleased to say that we have established a
coalition of Mississippi's public and private sector
leadership to develop the first ever Mississippi
Partnership for Economic Development. This group
is being co-chaired by myself and Dwight Evans,
President and CEO of Mississippi Power. This
dedicated group of Mississippi leaders will give their
time and energy to create a new plan for economic

growth in our state.

Mississippi has an economy that is stronger and growing faster than it has in decades. We are now seizing the opportunity to develop a strong plan that will map the direction we want our state to take in the next decade. We are taking the right steps to show the world that Mississippi is poised and ready for the growth of tomorrow.