

*Remarks to the
Mississippi AFL-CIO Legislative Conference
January 14, 2002*

Good afternoon.

(tell story of Tennessee-LSU game)

We're always exploring new and better ways to do business in Mississippi. We've got some major challenges ahead of us.

We're dealing with a national recession and budget shortfalls at the state level. This is going to be the focus of this legislative session.

But, I have said before and I'll say it again – in a budget of \$3.5 billion, we should be able to find a way to fund the priorities for the working men and men of this state.

Today, I want to touch on some important issues for the State of Mississippi – specifically, education and economic development – and the role they play for our workforce.

Each of these has an impact on our everyday lives and businesses, affecting everything from where we go to school, where we shop, which doctor we go to, and yes, where we choose to live.

First, we have done something fantastic here in Mississippi. We have made a commitment to our teachers, one that says that we are going to pay them as the professionals they are.

The work that's been done in the legislature will carry Mississippi, over the next several years, from 49th to 19th in the nation in terms of teacher pay.

And our work has been noticed – the day after the special session in July, the New York Times ran an editorial about what we had done. In short, the editorial said that Mississippi had put together the type of package that New York still couldn't match.

That's a great thing for Mississippi.

Another great technology story for the state is the “Computers in the Classroom” initiative currently underway. This fall, we will be halfway to our goal of placing an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state – and on track to be the first state in the nation to do this.

As our students prepares for a future in an economy that’s borderless, wireless and global, this technology will make a huge difference for them.

That’s another great thing for Mississippi.

The economic development outlook for the state is good, despite the sluggish national economy.

Let me start by going back one year, to August of 2000. In a special session, the legislature overwhelmingly passed the Advantage Mississippi Initiative – and the way business is done in Mississippi changed.

This initiative created a number of new programs and incentives, all designed to help the state retain existing industry and attract new industry.

The end result is new industry, new jobs,
and new revenue for the state.

Advantage Mississippi created eight
regional offices to assist in better service to
rural communities. With these offices in
place, we are better positioned to attract
industry to areas that before may never have
had a chance to compete.

That's what we're doing in Mississippi.

In fiscal year 2001, the year just ended, we announced 195 new business locations throughout the state. Nearly 12,000 new jobs were created, with an investment of over \$2.5 billion.

Now, those numbers did include Nissan. But take that plant out and let's see what remains – 194 new business locations, almost 8,000 new jobs, and over \$1.5 billion invested in Mississippi.

That's good news.

As part of our effort to compete in the global marketplace, we have built a network of foreign offices to support the growth of Mississippi exports.

Today, we have offices in Santiago, Chile; London; Singapore; and Yokohama, Japan. Through their support of our products and services, Mississippi companies are reaping the benefit.

Last year, these offices generated nearly 2,000 trade leads, as well as providing 185 foreign clients with on-site assistance here in the state.

But, not every economic development success story has to have investments in the billions and thousands of new jobs.

One great success story comes from Prentiss, Mississippi, where “Partners in Progress” has set up shop. This Michigan-based business re-engineers cellular phones. The jobs, about 140 of them, don’t call for unskilled labor, and start at about \$8.50 per hour. The technicians can make as much as \$21 per hour.

Last fall, we formally kicked off our newest innovation in worker training and employer recruitment. The Workforce Investment Network, or WIN, as we call it, has established six Job Centers around the state.

These centers provide “one-stop” shopping for both employers and hopeful employees. People looking for work can get information from the internet and from staff, and they also have access to an array of job training opportunities.

Employers have a central location where they can post job openings, interview potential employees, and recruit for expanding businesses.

We are also taking an aggressive role in setting up job fairs in areas where businesses may have moved away. Just this past June, we held one in Jackson County, which has had some of its businesses move out recently.

Over 5,000 people went to that job fair.

More than 1,000 job interviews were held on-site, and nearly 600 people went home with jobs that day.

It's estimated that another 950 people will get jobs based on their applications and interviews from the job fair.

There are great things happening in Mississippi, and it's making a difference.

That's good for economic development.

For us to make the most of our workforce, we have to respond quickly to the changing forces of our economy and the marketplaces in which we compete.

I believe it is vitally important for our state to provide training and retraining for our workforce. We should streamline the process to provide one point of contact for the working men and women of this state.

Businesses look for a strong, able-bodied workforce. They also look to locate in areas that are able to react and respond to issues such as workforce training.

Businesses are looking at Mississippi because they are confident in our ability to meet their needs.

Mississippi's capturing some good national attention, and it's about time. We are showing we have what it takes to compete with anyone, anytime, anywhere – and we're able to do it because of the good people of our state – people like you.

