

Questions – The Learning Exchange, MSETV, January 13, 2003

**1. Of the six major priorities from the Higher Education Summit, what would you say is the priority that will make the most difference?**

All of the priorities are vital. The steering committee worked extremely hard and provided a road map for our future. We are taking bold steps in Mississippi. In the last several years, we have made some changes that needed to be made in our education system. I believe that all parents want a bright future for their children. We must raise the educational hopes of our people. Good education means good jobs. We do have some things to be proud of here in Mississippi:

- Test scores are up – Princeton Review – MS testing program 6<sup>th</sup> best in nation – accountability.
- More high school students are going to college – SREB – 62% or 6<sup>th</sup> highest in nation.
- Computers in the classroom – NGA certified – MS first state in the nation to provide an internet-accessible computer in every classroom

**2. Can you expand on the priority that all of Mississippi's children will start school ready to learn?**

We have worked on some exciting initiatives regarding early childhood education in Mississippi. By teaming with the Barksdale Reading Institute, we have entered into an agreement with Dr. Lynne Kagan of Harvard University. Dr. Kagan is one of the foremost early childhood experts in the country. She is working with us on a model for Mississippi's children.

In addition, during my State of the State, I outlined a program called Summer Start. Summer Start will bring children to the classroom two months before and continue two months after their kindergarten year. This extended-year, full-day kindergarten is for children who have not had the opportunity to participate in a pre-kindergarten program. By adding these four months for those children who need to catch up on basic skills, by the time they enter the first grade, they will be ready to learn. This program will reduce drop-out rates, increase the skills of our future workforce, and ultimately save the state millions.

**3. Regarding the quality of teaching, what has been done to assure parents that teachers are providing a quality of education for all of our children?**

Earlier, I discussed accountability. In order for our students to learn, we must treat our teachers as the professional that they are.

- Quality teachers – MS in the top 10 in number of board certified teachers
- Mississippi first state to offer stipend with board certification
- Teacher pay – moving from 49<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>

**4. We read articles about college professors leaving the state. What can we do to retain our best and brightest?**

We must stop this flow of teachers out of the state. That's why I have recommended the creation of the \$200 million Mississippi Brain Trust. Under this plan, bonds would be issued - \$20 million a year for 10 years – to recruit and retain the very best minds for research, development, and workforce training. This Brain Trust will endow chairs and professors at our universities and colleges and funding graduate assitantships.

**5. How do the recommendations of the Higher Education Summit affect your efforts in bringing jobs to Mississippi?**

Since January 2000, more than 49,000 new jobs have been created in Mississippi. More than 23,000 of those jobs were created through the expansion of existing industries. Over \$13.5 billion has been invested in new and expanded businesses. Two years ago, we landed the Nissan plant. Six months ago, Nissan announced an expansion for a total investment of \$1.5 billion and more than 5,000 new direct jobs. But we need to do more. Good education means good jobs.

As you know, Mississippi has been hurt hard by NAFTA and the national recession. I have proposed the Mississippi Rural Economic Impact Authority to use \$20 million in bonds to provide assistance to new and existing businesses and training for people who have lost their jobs in rural Mississippi.

**6. You presented your State of the State last week. How will your plans help meet these recommendations?**

We must put our schools first here in Mississippi. The budget I proposed in November invests 62% of the general fund in education. This is what's needed to meet the priorities outlined by the Higher Education Summit. By investing in education, we will create more high-paying jobs and build better communities. I have asked that the legislature pass a bill which includes pre-kindergarten through higher education at 62% in January. That's the signal that we need to send, not only to our people, but also to the nation.