

*Remarks for the
“Operation About Face” Press Conference
May 22, 2002*

Good afternoon. Learning the skills to be successful in life and in a career can be a challenging thing – but we are here today to talk about taking on those challenges and overcoming them.

We have a new method for doing just that in “Operation About Face.” By bringing together the National Guard Mentoring Program and workforce training programs already underway in the state, we can make a tremendous difference for our young people.

We have funding for the first phase of the program in place through the Workforce Investment Act. This first phase will take place here in Hattiesburg, where children ages 13-17 will learn to see how the things they learn in school play a role in a real-life setting.

The challenge will be in funding the program statewide. I will be working closely with Jim Lott and the Mississippi Development Authority's Workforce Investment Network to bring in more funding for this effort, and I'm confident we'll be where we need to be in short order.

This is a unique program in the way the National Guard, the Mississippi Development Authority and my office are combining to work together.

We have great hopes for this program, just as we have great hopes for the children of Mississippi.

The great French author Victor Hugo once wrote that whoever “opens a school door, closes a prison.” I don’t believe Hugo was talking about the physical, tangible prisons that hold those who commit crimes. Rather, he was referring to the walls that close in our minds, our thoughts, our ideas.

I'm excited about the work that's going to be done with "Operation About Face." I'm excited about how the leaders we have in the National Guard are going to work closely with the leaders of tomorrow to create the future we know Mississippi can have.

Ayn (*rhymes with "mine"*) Rand, a famous author in the 20th century, wrote in her novel *The Fountainhead*: "The question isn't who's going to let me; it's who's going to stop me."

No one's going to be able to stop our kids; not when they've done an "about face" and head in the right direction.

There is great promise and potential in our state and in our children. We're going to see it fulfilled.