

Stennis Capitol Press Lunch
Monday, April 3, 2000
George Street Grocery – upstairs
Noon – lunch
12:15 p.m. – speaking

They would like for you to speak approximately 10 minutes and then they have requested a 25 minute question and answer time. I would suggest going long on the speech and short on the Q & A. I know that you will remember to remain cool calm and collected at all times. Stand up straight and do not um and uh.

Greeting

Good afternoon. I appreciate the invitation to be here today to talk with you.

(You may want to say something about your plans to talk so long that you may not have time to answer any questions. That will scare them to death.)

Main Points

- As people who are up on the latest breaking news, you are probably aware of our efforts to get the teacher pay raise plan passed during this legislative session.
- Some of you have heard me say time and time again how critical I believe this issue is to the people of the State of Mississippi.
- Some people have said that teacher pay raises just can't be done, and won't be done during this legislative session, and I disagree.
- The legislatures own figures show that it can be done, and I have shown in black and white how the multi-year plan that has been proposed will work.
- The multi-year plan takes into account any built-ins that are currently committed to by the legislature.

- If we commission studies and continue to belabor the issue, then we have waited too late and we will be even further behind the southeastern average for teachers salaries.
- The facts are, we have already studied the issue and we know the facts. The facts show that we are losing good teachers to other states and other professions because in Mississippi we haven't made education a priority.
- I am adamant that legislators make a commitment to Mississippi teachers and students to improve education by putting the teacher pay raise bill into statute this year.
- If a commitment is not made this year, then I am concerned that people will find other issues that will receive funding priorities in the years to come.
- We will continue to work with the leadership of the House and Senate to better the future for our

children. We cannot compromise the future of our state. We cannot compromise the education of our children or the professionalism of our teachers.

- When someone questions the fiscal responsibility, I have to respond by asking, is it fiscally responsible to lose our teachers to other states? Is it fiscally responsible to do less than we can for our students? Being fiscally responsible begins and ends with setting priorities and education must be our top priority.

Economic Development

- Our young people's education determines the future of economic development in Mississippi.
- When we say the words economic development, we are ultimately talking about improving the quality of life for our people.
- Creating economic development growth means making opportunities for men and women to build families, build homes and build their lives right here in Mississippi.

- We are working diligently to improve the quality of life for our people by planning for, and promoting economic development growth.
- One way to do this is to move our workforce into the twenty-first century with the skills and the training needed to provide for a better life.
- We know that technology is changing daily, and we are challenged again and again to simply keep up. (insert stats on the # of web pages now vs. 1993)
- 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 tools possible that will enhance their learning process and prepare them for the technology of tomorrow.

- J. C. Burns - tour of the state.
- Development of Mississippi Partnership for Economic Development – Dwight Evans, Mississippi Power CEO
- Economic Development Plan

Healthcare

Mississippi has strengthened the safety net of health care for our people over the past few years.

Mississippi is once again, and with pride, leading the nation. We were the first to establish a Health Care Trust Fund dedicated to health care, and we are making health insurance available, for the first time,

to thousands of children of working families across Mississippi through the Mississippi Children's Health Benefits Program.

Mississippi Children's Health Benefits Program
(note name change from CHIP)

- Estimates indicate that 85,000 Mississippi children are eligible and only approximately 4,000+ are enrolled to date.
- (Tommy Thompson)
- We must set our sights on identifying and enrolling every eligible child in Mississippi with the same dispatch and thoroughness we would devote to a very serious public threat.
- My administration is currently working with the Mississippi Department of Human Services and the Division of Medicaid to develop an action plan and revamp the

collateral material that will be used to market the program.

- We know that there is a large segment of our population that is eligible for this healthcare, which is not getting information about the availability of the program.
- We can help families provide insurance for our children and we won't be told it cannot be done.

Balanced Budget Act of '97

- Unfortunately, county by county, community by community, primary care providers are becoming more and more scarce.
- The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 had an enormously negative impact on rural healthcare in Mississippi.

- This affects the mother whose child is sick and the nearest doctor is an hour drive away.
- We must act if we are to stop this exodus.
- Technology and innovation are making the practice of medicine more and more about living longer, more productive lives.
- Mississippians in every county deserve to have access to those life-saving, life-enhancing skills.
- Washington may be pulling up stakes and heading for the big cities when it comes to funding for hospitals, but we are sticking by our small towns, our rural communities and our hospitals.
- We won't let Washington forget about Mississippi's hospitals and the people they serve.

Prescription Drug Costs

- Most of us in this room have parents or in-laws who are senior citizens, and some of us are pretty close to that age ourselves.

- Aren't we all keenly aware of the growing cost of prescription drug bills for this age group?
- We can't just stand by and pretend we don't see this happening.
- Our parents and grandparents are looking for us to do something about this problem.
- We don't have time to wait on Washington to figure out how to help Mississippi's seniors.
- We have to get a handle on the escalating costs of prescription medications.
- This is going to take the collective efforts of the pharmaceutical industries, government, medical professionals and concerned individuals to bring these costs down so that our seniors are not having to make a decision to either pay for their prescriptions or pay for their electricity bill.

Census

- Economic Development, Education, and healthcare are also all affected by Mississippi's Census results.
- It is vital that we have an accurate count.

Closing Comments

I would like to be able to stand up here and tell you that we have all of the answers to Mississippi's challenges.

There is one answer that I know we do have available to us today, and that is the solution to our teachers' low salaries. I know the importance of this issue because I know that every other issue I have brought up today revolves around raising teacher pay.

- If we don't pay our teachers competitive salaries then we can't keep good teachers in the classroom.
- If we don't have good teachers in the classroom, then our children won't be given the best opportunity for advancing their education.
- If our children aren't educationally competitive then they won't be hired by employers.
- If employers can't find good employees in our state then economic development declines.
- If our students leave the classroom unable to find employment or further their education, then we won't have people eligible to enter the medical field and stay in Mississippi to practice medicine.
- It is a never ending cycle that all starts with our commitment to raise our teachers' pay.

It will take more than just me, and more than just you, to make changes that are sensible and accountable for the people of Mississippi.

We need your help. We need you to work together with us to find solutions that make sense.

There are no quick fixes, but together we will find responsible approaches to making life better for all Mississippians.

Thank you.

I will be glad to take some questions, if there are any.

