

*Remarks to the
Valley Services, Inc. Annual Meeting
July 28, 2001*

Thank you, John, and thank you for the opportunity to join you here today. I am pleased and proud to be part of this meeting of one of Mississippi's great success stories.

For those of you who are here from out-of-state, then let me welcome you on behalf of the 2.8 people in the great state of Mississippi. I know you will enjoy your time here, and I hope you'll have many opportunities to come back.

I was asked to speak today on the subject of leadership. Rather than talk in general terms about the subject, I want to share with you what's happening in Mississippi today, and how Mississippi is becoming a leader among states.

It's been said that leadership is action, not position. We've been very active lately, and I am proud of the leadership we've shown.

Just this past Monday, we made history when we passed a \$330 million teacher pay raise package that will lift our average teacher salaries from 49th to 19th in the nation.

We've been working for this day for years, and it has finally happened. And, we did it without a tax increase – we did it by setting priorities in our spending.

This plan was noted in last Tuesday's edition of the New York Times' op-ed section. They wrote that although New York's education problems may be more complicated, the state of Mississippi – with its smaller economy and scarcer resources – had crafted an attractive package that continues to elude New York.

That's action, and that's leadership.

Last year, we developed the Advantage Mississippi initiative, one of the most aggressive and creative economic development plans in the country.

With it, we were able to attract the Nissan plant that is, as we speak, rising out of the dirt in Canton, Mississippi, just about 20 miles north of here.

Nissan means an investment in Mississippi of almost \$1 billion and 4,000 new jobs.

Just a couple of weeks ago, we announced the first round of suppliers for the plant – another \$140 million investment and 1,000 jobs.

And the time line for the project is historic. From the day we first talked with Nissan to the day we announced the plant was a mere five months.

That's action, and that's leadership.

I understand that this meeting is all about bringing fresh ideas to the table. That is a great part of leadership, and I have brought a new idea to the table in just the past few days.

Thursday morning, I unveiled a plan of action for Mississippi, one designed to address other needs around our state such as raises for state employees and faculty at our colleges and universities, as well as improving the health insurance for those employees.

This plan would take a portion of the annual payment coming to Mississippi from the tobacco settlement, and use it for health care by maximizing the matching federal dollars.

For example, if we took \$150 million out of this year's expected payment of \$210 million, we could put it into Medicaid and, with the matching dollars, turn that \$150 million into \$600 million.

By doing this, we would free up state monies to do the work that needs to be done for our people.

That's action, and that's leadership.

And, the work of Valley Services reflects great leadership. Since 1961, this great company has quietly established itself as a giant in food service management, with over 2,000 employees in 23 states.

You should be, and I know you are, proud of the work you do. From the programs in hospitals and correctional facilities to the support of programs like “meals on wheels,” each of you is helping make Valley a leader in the industry.

I know you are completing a new facility in Pearl, Mississippi, that is expected to produce more than 200,000 frozen meals a week.

Those are great numbers and I congratulate you on this facility.

You are setting the standard in your industry, and I am proud of the standard you are helping set for the people and the state of Mississippi.

That's action, and that's leadership.

I want to leave you with one thought, and that is the difference between a boss and a leader. A boss says go; a leader says let's go!

That's what you are doing in your industry, that's what I'm doing with the people of Mississippi.

And when we are all moving in the same direction, toward the same positive goals, then we're doing the right thing.

That's action, and that's leadership.

Thank you.