

*Remarks for the
Vocational Administrators Leadership Institute
June 12, 2002*

Good morning. It is great to be here with you. I know this Leadership Institute has been a strong learning experience for each of you, and I appreciate the hard work that has gone into it.

I'm told there are two goals you've been focusing on over the past two days – the goals of leadership, and partnerships for vocational and economic development. Strong goals for us all, and strong goals for Mississippi.

We're going to achieve those goals.

I appreciate the leadership that's been shown in the educational community. There have been challenges, to be sure, but you have taken those challenges and created some tremendous opportunities for the people of this state.

In my State of the State address in January, I outlined four main priorities for Mississippi – jobs, education, health care and public safety. Each of these is intertwined in some way, but none more so than jobs and education – and that's where the strength of your work comes in.

We're on the cutting edge in education. We now have over 1,100 teachers in Mississippi with this National Board certification – the sixth highest number in the nation. Let me repeat that – the sixth highest in the nation. Not 50th, not 40th, not 10th – sixth highest.

Mississippi was the first state in the nation to offer more pay to teachers with national board certification.

We are also on track to be the first state in the nation to place an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom, a goal we'll meet by the end of next year.

We've put together a unique partnership between the public and private sectors, a partnership that has raised money and solicited used computers for the classrooms.

We are going to ensure that our children are ready to compete in the economy of the 21st century, an economy that will be global, borderless and wireless.

Now, combine this with our commitment to pay you as the professionals you are. In July, we made this commitment law and the rest of the nation stood up and took notice.

The day after the special session on teacher pay, the New York Times ran an editorial piece commenting that “Mississippi had been able to put together the kind of package that continued to elude New York.”

High praise for our work, and I’m proud our commitment to you has received such widespread notice. I want the world to know that we’re serious about education in Mississippi, we’re serious about building a better world for our people, and we’re serious about shaping a brighter future for our children.

And on that foundation, we're going to build an economy like our state has never seen – one built on the strength of partnerships for vocational and economic development. We're investing in communities around the state to maximize the potential of our people.

We're putting Internet-accessible computers in every classroom in the state. We're building up the infrastructure of communities in rural areas to improve their competitiveness and ability to attract industry and jobs. We're working to achieve the promise found in every Mississippian.

Oliver Wendell Holmes once commented that
“man’s mind, once stretched by a new idea,
never regains its original dimensions.”

Your work stretches the dimensions of the mind
– and the potential of our state. Thank you for
the work you do each day, and thank you for the
opportunity to be here with you.