

For immediate release

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A letter from Mississippi Governor, Ronnie Musgrove:

Throughout my campaign for Governor, I told all Mississippians how important the issue of raising teacher pay is for both our teachers and for the children of our state. I reaffirmed my commitment to raising teacher pay in the State of the State Address. I want every person in this state to know just how important I believe raising teacher pay is for the children of our state. Raising teacher pay to meet the southeastern average is the most critical issue facing the people of Mississippi today.

In order for Mississippi to be competitive with other states when it comes to attracting business and industry to our state, we must have a workforce that is superiorly educated. The workforce of tomorrow is filled by the children of today. Those children demand the best education that we can provide.

If we are not paying competitive salaries for our teachers, they will leave Mississippi to find jobs in other states. Our children deserve the best teachers and the best teaching resources available, and it is our responsibility to make both available to them. They deserve our commitment to education.

I have presented a plan that shows how we can make this commitment to education possible now. The money is available and we do not have to cut any programs to make the plan happen.

The plan is simple. We make a commitment to our teachers and to our children now by enacting this plan into law this year. We will begin the financial commitment in the year 2002, when \$22 million will be designated for teacher pay raises; in the year 2003, \$88 million will be designated; in the year 2004, \$88 million will be designated; and in the year 2005, \$88 million will be designated. This four-year payment plan allows Mississippi's teachers to meet the Southeastern Average between the years 2004 and 2005.

If we don't put a plan in place today that shows our commitment to education then the excuses will come next year as to why we don't have the money to raise teacher pay.

They will come the next year and they will come every year after. We have the money, and to say otherwise is simply not true.

I have developed my plan using the budget figures provided by the legislature, and the numbers show that we can make this happen. There is no reason that our lawmakers cannot pass a guarantee for raises over the planned four years.

Not passing the teacher pay raise bill during this legislative session is saying that Mississippi does not value education. We must show our teachers and our students that we do believe in the importance of education. We believe in education because we know that it is the foundation that shapes the future for our children.

Mississippi must be competitive in our schools so we can be competitive in the job market. Better schools mean better jobs, and that is where our priorities must be.

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