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**Priorities for Advancing Mississippi Through Higher Education  
Unveiled at Leadership Summit Facilitated by AGB Center**  
*First-time Summit Capitalizes on Public/Private Partnerships*

Jackson, Miss., January 7, 2002 -- Governor Ronnie Musgrove and the steering committee for the Mississippi Leadership Summit on Higher Education today unveiled *Building Opportunity in Mississippi Through Higher Education*, a report of priorities for advancing Mississippi through its colleges and universities.

As the first state selected by the Washington, D.C.-based Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges' Center for Public Higher Education Trusteeship and Governance (AGB) to host a summit on higher education, Mississippi is bringing together government, business, and education leaders to provide a cooperative framework for education, economic and social progress.

The steering committee's report introduces a shared vision for Mississippi's future and outlines six major priorities that will help advance the state's competitiveness and its citizens' quality of life. The priorities include initiatives that Mississippi education – its public and private two-year and four-year colleges and universities, and in several places, its public school system – can undertake collaboratively with the state and the private sector to achieve this shared vision.

The 40-member steering committee, co-chaired by Governor Musgrove and Aubrey Patterson of Tupelo, chairman and chief executive officer of BancorpSouth, Inc., includes a broad cross section of Mississippi education, business and community leaders. They have served on the project since May 2001.

“Mississippians can take great pride in the steering committee's work and their vision for a future where our citizens and their fellow Americans share a view of Mississippi as the state of promise and opportunity,” said Musgrove. “It will be a great day for education in Mississippi when partners and advocates collaborate in support of our vision for a Mississippi that markets and capitalizes on its marvelous assets of strategic location, social civility, educational and cultural institutions, quality of life, climate, and a willing workforce.”

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## ADD ONE – MISSISSIPPI SUMMIT/HIGHER EDUCATION

Granting every citizen access to opportunity – educational, economic, and social – is the hallmark of the steering committee’s vision for Mississippi’s future. The proposed public agenda for higher education includes priorities and initiatives that are built around that goal.

The report’s six major priorities recommend that Mississippi colleges and universities work together with all Mississippians to:

- Raise the educational aspirations of our citizens
- Prepare all of our children to learn by the time they begin school
- Boost the quality of teaching and learning in our elementary and secondary schools
- Increase college and university graduation rates
- Dramatically expand adult lifelong learning, worker training and professional development
- Increase the level of activity in university research and development

“With the implementation of *Building Opportunity in Mississippi Through Higher Education* we have the opportunity to improve the educational attainment of all Mississippians and the economic situation of individuals and communities across the state,” Musgrove said. “It is within our control to build a workforce in Mississippi that will help us retain current industries and attract new ones. We have to be more efficient than ever in how we focus our resources if we want this agenda to move forward.”

The steering committee recognizes that statewide educational improvements will require a united front of state policy makers and public schools, in partnership with the higher education community. The report calls for the establishment of an education coordinating body that will improve the alignment of policies and practices across educational sectors, and an education progress board that will serve to strengthen accountability for this agenda. Toward that end, the Institutions of Higher Learning, the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges, and the State Board of Education have already been working to formalize coordinating efforts.

“Implementing our agenda will demand strong leadership, new partnerships and new ways of doing business,” said Aubrey Patterson, steering committee co-chairman. “Based on the committee’s involvement, we are confident that public/private partnerships will be forged across the state in support of *Building Opportunity in Mississippi Through Higher Education*.”

The steering committee’s planning process, facilitated by AGB, was developed by Mississippians for Mississippians. The committee intends for this vision and agenda for higher education to extend over the long term – a period possibly beyond 10 years.

“The steering committee’s work speaks well for the level of commitment that Mississippi leaders are willing to devote to raising educational aspirations and performance across the state,” said AGB Center Executive Director Richard Novak. “The AGB Center expects to work with four to five more states in the years to come, and Mississippi’s package of priorities and initiatives is an agenda to be admired. The report is very specific in recommending how Mississippi can achieve its goals for educational, economic and social progress.”

## ADD TWO – MISSISSIPPI SUMMIT/HIGHER EDUCATION

For example, it proposes that leaders of education, media, business, government, communities and civic organizations work together to implement a long-term public awareness campaign to promote the importance of high school completion, advanced education and lifelong learning among all segments of Mississippi’s population – children, families, educators, business people, the media and communities. Funded through private and in-kind sources, this cooperative campaign would build on the existing educational outreach and communications efforts of Mississippi’s public and private institutions in partnership with public relations firms and news organizations. Another initiative recommends that the state consider matching private research investments to support institutional mission-driven research addressing state needs. This effort would complement the federal research dollars that Mississippi institutions are effectively obtaining already, while enhancing economic development.

“This is such an exciting time in the state of Mississippi, and AGB is proud of a process that truly reflects our mission to promote improved communication among leaders in higher education, state government, the business community, and others,” Novak concluded. The Center serves as a facilitator, convenor and provider of consulting services and technical assistance on matters affecting higher education governance, trusteeship and institution-related foundations.

For more information visit [www.centerforgovernance.net](http://www.centerforgovernance.net) or [www.mississippi.gov](http://www.mississippi.gov).

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