

Our state employees are doing their jobs and doing them well – and our commitment to our state employees remains strong.

Our responsibility is to deal with the impact of the national recession here in Mississippi through sensible policies that protect our citizens in the short term and prepare them for the long term.

The first order of business is to put our schools first, because we know that communities with good public schools attract good jobs.

My first priority is protecting education and Mississippi's future.

Giving our children the opportunity to succeed – giving them a good education – still remains the best hope for lifting us to greater heights.

Education is not only the concern of the parents and grandparents. It's a community concern. People want to live in a good community. Good schools attract good jobs, which build good communities.

Higher education has a critical role to play in bringing jobs to Mississippi.

My budget invests 62 percent in education. This enhances our future; anything less shortchanges it. I'm fighting to increase funding for education. The beaten path is not always the best. The status quo is not good enough.

I propose that you appropriate pre-K through higher education in one comprehensive bill, and at 62 percent. Pass it, put it on my desk and I'll sign it – and I don't mean the last week of March, I mean the third week of January.

Let's prove to the people of Mississippi we care about our schools. Let's prove to them that when it comes to education, we mean business – and business means jobs.

If we shortchange our investment in education, we shortchange her future—our future—and that's not an alternative I'm willing to accept.

Since January 2000, more than 49,000 new jobs have been created in Mississippi. More than 23,000 of those jobs were created through the expansion of existing industries. Over \$13.5 billion has been invested in new and expanded businesses.

Rural areas of this state have been hit hard by companies moving out of the country because of NAFTA, and we must maximize our resources and be innovative and aggressive in creating jobs.

The simple reality – communities with good schools attract good jobs.

Three years ago, I made a pledge to the people of Mississippi – we will plan; we will achieve. We've reached solutions because we dared to say "we can." Let's be willing to dare again.