

Governor Ronnie Musgrove - WEDA
Mississippi

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On more than one occasion, you have stated that your personal passion is education. To what do you attribute this?

Growing up in Tocowa, a small town in Mississippi with a population of 42, I saw how hard people had to work to survive financial struggles. This is so true for so many communities and families. It was my mother that taught me the desire to learn and that education was truly the key to improving my situation.

It was not easy, but I worked hard to obtain a good education. We have people in that same situation today. As governor, I have the opportunity to make a difference for them and it's an opportunity that I won't let pass by.

During your administration, what changes have been made to the educational system?

First, legislation passed in 2001 that cleared the way for a historic teacher pay raise, a raise that will eventually lift the average salary from 49th to 19th in the nation. *The New York Times* praised the package, saying Mississippi had "put together the kind of package that continues to elude New York."

In the first few weeks of the 2003 legislative session, I challenged the Legislature to invest in education first, and to invest at the level of 62 percent of the state budget. This investment covers pre-kindergarten through the university level. Giving our children the opportunity to succeed – giving them a good education – is the foundation for lifting Mississippi to reach greater heights. This commitment fully funds the teacher pay raise, and stabilizes funding for the Adequate Education Program.

A report published by the Princeton Review ranked states based on testing programs for the schools, and Mississippi was ranked twelfth in the nation. We have accountability and testing standards in place, far more stringent than those called for in the "No Child Left Behind" legislation passed by Congress. In fact, Mississippi was the sixth state in the nation to have its plan for "No Child Left Behind" approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

We are also focusing our attention on early childhood education, and have formed a public-private partnership to study the needs and funding sources to provide our youngest citizens with a strong foundation for their future.

What has been the result of your Task Force on Classroom Technology?

Mississippi is the first state in the nation to have an Internet accessible computer in every public classroom. More than 32,000 classrooms, from kindergarten through 12th grade, are wired and connected to the Internet.

Since June, nearly 6,000 computers were built from scratch by students and distributed to classrooms. I had the opportunity to watch these students, on several occasions, as they put the computers together. Watching them build, knowing they were developing their own technological skills while they were contributing to the future of thousands of students, was a great feeling.

Education is a community concern. People want to live in a good community. Good schools attract good jobs, which build good communities.

What is the business and industry climate like?

Building on the momentum from the \$1.4 billion Nissan assembly plant locating in Canton, the state continues to make great strides in business development and expansion. Mississippi's highly competitive blue-print for economic development, the Advantage Mississippi Initiative, combined with our efforts to make Mississippi a great place to do business, have placed the state high on the consideration lists of numerous corporations.

The Advantage Mississippi Initiative also provided the framework for our recent historical agreement with the State of Alabama, to jointly market our shared border to the rest of the world. We have crossed state and party lines to create quality, high-paying jobs, and improve the quality of life for the people of both states.

Despite the national recession, more than 53,000 jobs have been created at over 2,200 new and expanded facilities in the past three years. The total capital investment for those facilities is nearly \$15 billion. I'm proud of the work we've done to increase business opportunities in Mississippi. Business and industry used to ask the question, "why Mississippi?" Today, the question is "why not Mississippi?"

We will continue to promote Mississippi as a global competitor for the creation of quality, higher paying jobs.