

What a year.

In January, Mississippi hosted a Leadership Summit on Higher Education. Bringing together leaders from government, business and education, we focused on priorities ranging from sending kids to school ready to learn to programs for adult learners.

February brought the settlement of the Ayers case. The ruling by Judge Neal Biggers helped bring closure to a case that tied the hands of our university system for more than a quarter of a century.

Safety and security were focal points in March. The mission of the Mississippi National Guard in providing additional security at our airports was extended at the President's request, and on March 20 I signed legislation providing additional protections for victims of domestic violence.

Our authority to restructure Mississippi's Medicaid program was affirmed in April. While adequate funding remains an issue, we are making progress in meeting the health care needs of our citizens.

The return of the Task Force Rifles from a peacekeeping mission in Bosnia was reason for celebration in May. These men and women had trained long and hard for their work of preserving a fragile peace, and we welcomed them home with pride.

Mississippi's standing as a competitor in the world marketplace grew stronger in June with Nissan's announcement of the expansion of their facility in Canton and an additional investment of \$500 million. Their confidence in Mississippi sent a message to the rest of the world that this is a good place to do business.

In July, the first annual “Governor’s Communities of Excellence” awards were presented. Six communities around the state were recognized for their innovative use of economic development grant funds.

The heat of August focused our attention on the growing threat from the West Nile Virus. A state of emergency was declared on August 9 to ensure necessary resources were available to combat the virus that put all Mississippians at risk.

September saw Tropical Storm Isidore make a beeline for the Gulf Coast. A state of emergency was declared early and National Guard personnel were deployed. Fortunately, the storm lost strength and its impact was less than expected, but flooding still affected thousands of Mississippians.

Mississippi’s health care providers were given some relief with the signing of medical malpractice reform legislation on October 8. The legislation was passed during a special session that began September 5.

In November, we had extra reason to be thankful. The massive tornado that struck Lowndes County claimed one life but spared thousands others as it cut a wide swath through homes, businesses, dormitories and academic buildings.

Then, there was December. The signing of civil justice reform legislation on December 3 sent another signal to the business community that we were serious about fair and balanced reforms in its courtrooms. The coming of Christmas reminded us anew of the promise and hope for us as fallible people.

It’s been quite a year, and there’s much to come in the year ahead.