

Governor Musgrove's IHL column –

Strong schools, quality health care options and safe communities and homes are top priorities for the people of Mississippi. Your priorities are our priorities. Good education, quality health care and public safety top the list of funding priorities in the executive budget recommendations presented by the Governor to the Legislative Budget Committee.

A progressive approach to budgeting that is more accountable with fewer excuses – those are the budget recommendations we have presented. It is time for us to make some basic changes to the way we develop the budget for the State. Former Governors have presented their budgets to the Legislature after the budget had been set. For the first time, we presented our budget to the Committee at the beginning of the budget process.

They have our recommendations to consider as they develop the budget for our state. By sharing with them our priorities for funding, we have given them a plan of action to implement the budget, and to meet the needs of our people ensuring quality education for our children, addressing health care needs and promoting public safety.

Now faced with a slowdown in revenue, we must begin to develop a strategy to fully restore funding for IHL. Before January 2001, we may have to make some hard choices and reorder our priorities. The shortfall in HB 400 causes us to consider funding changes. The reduced funding is being felt statewide. We must work together to adjust spending to mirror the revenue we are receiving. It is our duty to be fiscally responsible as we make decisions to spend the hard-earned tax dollars of Mississippians. If we make the right decisions now, it will allow us to invest more in higher education next year.

Our universities are not standing still. Construction and growth can be seen, and will continue to be seen on many of our university campuses. In FY 2001 the IHL received \$38.5 million in a bond bill to support repair and renovation and priority projects at many universities. We have also worked with the IHL to develop a construction project priority list for all universities in FY 2002, which totals more than \$15 million.

Our budget recommendations for FY 2002, beginning July 1, 2001 are proactive in fully restoring funding for IHL. We have recommended that in FY 2002 IHL and Community and Junior Colleges receive \$45 million in general fund dollars out of \$140 million in general fund growth. Our recommendations include creating opportunities to maximize federal funds with a State match of general or other funds. In addition it includes built-in costs and mandates that were defined in the Higher Education budget requests.

We have also recommended that Student Financial Aid be fully funded. It is important that every Mississippi student have the opportunity to attend college. For some students,

acquiring financial aid to assist with college costs is vital. We are committed to helping Mississippi students further their education.

We must bring higher education opportunities to all Mississippians regardless of their geographic location. We will work together to set common goals and set common strategies to reach those goals. Our universities can work with one another to make all of our colleges and universities stronger. We pledge to work with you to make all of higher education stronger for the people of Mississippi.