

*Remarks for the
“Operation About Face” Press Conferences
August 21, 2002
(McComb)*

Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be here with you this morning. We’re here today to talk about the young people of this state – young people who mean so much to us and to our communities.

There are many challenges to be faced in life, and for young people, those challenges sometimes seem insurmountable. We are focused on helping them tackle and beat the challenges – and one of our best tools for doing this is “Operation About Face.”

This program represents a unique partnership between the National Guard, the Mississippi Development Authority and my office, as we work together to improve the potential of Mississippi's children.

To illustrate that partnership, I'm joined today by the Adjutant General of the Mississippi National Guard, Major General James H. Lipscomb III, and Jim Lott, Director of the Employment Training Division of the Mississippi Development Authority.

By bringing together the National Guard Mentoring Program and workforce training programs already underway in the state, we are already making a tremendous difference.

This program does so much for Mississippi's greatest resource – and when I say our greatest resource, I'm referring to the young men and women of this state – the individuals who, together, represent the future and the promise of Mississippi.

The About Face program, though still relatively new to the state, offers so much. It provides our children with an opportunity, a new start, a chance to direct their lives toward positive and exciting goals.

It gives them hands-on experience with situations they'll encounter in life, everything from balancing a checkbook to creating a budget for their home. More importantly, it gives them the confidence they'll need to make their dreams come true.

The first class of students graduated in late June in Hattiesburg, and it was a great moment to watch those young people and to experience the shared feeling of accomplishment among them.

This first class exceeded all the goals set for them. One goal called for 72 percent of the students to successfully complete the program; 96 percent of the students made it to graduation.

Another goal called for 72 percent of the students to show an increase in their reading and math skills. Again, 96 percent demonstrated an increase in these skills.

When we first announced the “About Face” program this past May 22, I mentioned that one of the obstacles we faced was in funding the program statewide.

Today, I’m proud to announce that, like the graduates of the first “About Face” program, we have also taken on – and overcome – the challenges ahead of us.

We are establishing this program around the state. We established it last week in Greenwood, Aberdeen and Pascagoula. Today, we’re bringing it to McComb.

We're going to take the "About Face" program wherever we can, because the effect it has on our young people can shape the direction of our future.

I'm excited about the work that's being done with "Operation About Face." I'm excited about how the leaders we have in the National Guard are going to work closely with the leaders of tomorrow to create the future we know Mississippi can have.

Ayn (*rhymes with “mine”*) Rand, a famous author in the 20th century, wrote in her novel *The Fountainhead*: “The question isn’t who’s going to let me; it’s who’s going to stop me.”

No one’s going to be able to stop our kids; not when they’ve done an “about face” and head in the right direction.

I want to thank General Lipscomb for the leadership he has shown with the Mississippi National Guard, and the manner in which that leadership has been passed on through his soldiers to Mississippi’s young people.

And, thanks also go to Jim Lott and the MDA for their hard work and support of this great program.

There is great promise and potential in our state and in our children. We're going to see it fulfilled.

In the end, I want our children to remember the words of Henry David Thoreau – “go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined.”

Through the “About Face” program, we are going to help steer them in the direction of their dreams, toward the life they imagine – and toward the fulfillment of the promise and the potential that is Mississippi.

Thank you.