

*Remarks for the
Appalachian Regional Commission
December 5, 2001*

Good morning – I am glad to have this opportunity to be with you this morning and talk about the good work that’s being done together by the ARC and Mississippi.

(suggest telling story of Tennessee game – 10,000 ways of wearing orange, 10,000 ways of doing business)

Great things are happening in our state. We are capturing the attention of the world outside our borders because of the exciting things we've got going on, and I'm sure you will agree that it's good for Mississippi to be recognized for being on the cutting edge.

I want to make sure the 22 counties of Appalachia Mississippi are on the cutting edge as well, and we've got a game plan for doing it.

To begin with, the Advantage Mississippi Initiative passed last year in a special session has set a new standard for economic development in America.

This program has become a model for other states, a model for how to create your own opportunity. When we changed our thinking about how we could do business – when we started looking for the 10,000 different ways of doing business – that’s when we began to make a difference.

That model needs to be in place in northeast Mississippi, and that will happen. Here's what Advantage Mississippi offers the ARC...

Advantage Mississippi seeks to create educational, training and retraining opportunities to meet the needs of business.

It works to build the basic infrastructure and transportation avenues for communities, to support the needs of existing businesses as well as those looking to locate.

Advantage Mississippi has also demonstrated its commitment to a new relationship between state government and the business community.

By making government more accessible, accountable and responsive, we can forge partnerships that will benefit us all.

We have new leadership at the Mississippi Development Authority that will help in this area. Bob Rohrlack started with us this past Monday, and I hope each of you will have an opportunity to meet and work with Bob.

I'm excited about the qualities and experience Bob brings to his position, and he shares my commitment to building in Mississippi and more importantly, making the investments we need to make.

If we invest in our people and the tools they need to succeed, then we are going to make a difference.

Here's how we're doing it...

We are investing in education. Our teachers are going to be paid as the professionals they are. I'm proud to say that we are going to raise teacher salaries from 49th to 19th in the nation with the new pay plan.

We're working to make sure our children have the skills to compete in an economy that is moving toward a global, wireless and borderless arena.

Through the "Computers in the Classroom" initiative, we are placing an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state.

Every student, even in the most rural areas of the state, will have equal access to the world through the internet. The skills they will develop will help carry them on to higher levels and greater skills to use in the marketplace.

As part of this effort, it is important to work together on what I know is a lead goal for the ARC – the development of infrastructure.

We recognize the importance of the traditional infrastructure, in areas such as water and sewer facilities and transportation outlets. Beyond that, however, we need to build our technological infrastructure.

Businesses today rely on high-speed telecommunications, and increasing broadband access in the ARC region will be a great step forward in improving our ability to grow the region.

Finally, as we work to retain existing business and recruit new business, we have to be able to show access to quality health care.

This is important now for the people of Mississippi and the ARC region, and it will be important later in our economic development efforts.

I have proposed a health care plan to address the most pressing health care needs of our people, and it is particularly applicable to the ARC region.

I want to improve the access to health care by making sure that school nurses are on hand to serve our children.

I want to explore avenues by which we can maximize federal dollars through Medicaid to ensure rural hospitals are able to stay open and serve their population. Too many rural hospitals in Mississippi are at risk today, and we cannot afford to lose them.

We all share the same vision for the Appalachian Regional Commission and for Appalachia Mississippi – a vision of education, jobs, health care.

The work we have before us is challenging, but not impossible. We can work together and make something great happen for this region. It's within our grasp.

How we continue to grow and develop depends on us and our mindset. We cannot look at a situation and think, "something must be done." We have look at them and think, "we must do something."

I want every Mississippian to think that way. I want us to work together to accomplish those things I know we can do.

We have been blessed with the talent; we must invest it well, and not be content with keeping it buried.

Thank you.