

*Remarks for the  
Beaumont Foundation Press Conference  
January 6, 2003*

Good afternoon. For too long, Mississippi has ranked near the bottom in education – that has all changed. We are raising our teacher pay from 49<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> in the nation. Our test scores are up, and the Princeton Review has ranked our testing system as one of the best in the nation.

More of our high school graduates than ever before, 62 percent to be exact, are going on to college – the tenth highest ranking in the nation. We are in the top ten in the number of nationally board certified teachers.

And last week, Mississippi became the first state in the nation to place an Internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state. More than 32,000 classrooms are now connected to the greatest information resource in the world – and Mississippi’s students are connected as well.

Students in every public school will have the opportunity to use these computers for research, to build technical skills, and most importantly, for learning. That’s good for our students – and it’s good for Mississippi.

Our investment in education is an investment in our future – that’s why I presented a budget that invests 62 percent in education. Anything less shortchanges our future, and that’s not an alternative I’m willing to accept.

The skills to succeed are developed through education, and the people of Mississippi need the best tools to enhance those skills and cross the technology bridge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Today, we are here to announce a new program that will help strengthen that bridge.

The Beaumont Foundation of works in communities across the nation to help provide the technology and the opportunity for people to make the most of this amazing information age. Now, they are bringing that work to Mississippi – and we are proud to have them here.

This year, the Beaumont Foundation will be awarding grants in Mississippi totaling \$1.1 million worth of Toshiba hardware. Individuals and schools alike can apply for everything from a wireless laptop computer to overhead projectors.

I appreciate the work of the Beaumont Foundation, and I'm proud to welcome them to Mississippi. We are excited about the potential for this program for our people and our schools.

I'd like to ask Mark Sanders of the Beaumont Foundation to say a few words, and then we'll be glad to answer any questions. Mark?