

Class of 2000 Awards Banquet
Saturday, May 27, 2000
Crowne Plaza
7:00 p.m.

Good evening.

It a real pleasure for me to be with you tonight as you honor some outstanding graduating seniors from across our state.

It is always nice when I have the opportunity to speak with people and organizations who put a real value on the importance of education.

Many of you may know that I taught reading to 4th through 6th grade students for ___ years. In my

opinion, those years in a student's life can be the "lost years", if we allow them to be.

(insert a story about a student you had an experience with)

It is amazing what a little time, attention and hard work will do for a child who has the desire to learn.

Reading can open so many doors to opportunities that can be available to our children.

Mr. and Mrs. Jim Barksdale recently endowed \$1 million dollars to be used to help at-risk youth throughout the state who need help to read. The

Barksdales are committed to helping Mississippi's children acquire the tools they need to be successful when they enter the job market. It is people like the Barksdale's who are making a difference, and people like the BellSouth Pioneers who are making a difference in the lives of our young people.

Those of you who have given so freely of your time and energy to reach out and have a positive effect on even one life should be commended. Your interest in the future of our state is critical, and I thank you for your efforts.

I have recently taken on the role of chairing the State of Mississippi's President's Student Service Challenge Scholarship Program, which places an emphasis on volunteerism and service learning for young people. I could use every one of you as a great example of how rewarding service learning can be both for the volunteer and for the person or organization receiving their services.

Giving back to your community is so important. If people do not take the time and exert the energy necessary to give back to one another, then we slowly become a state and nation of uncaring and unfeeling people with no great vision for the future.

Our children are our future, and we must, as a state comprised of people who care about one another, pull together and address reading issues in our state.

To the students who are here tonight, I want to congratulate you on your efforts. These students represent parochial, private and public schools from across Mississippi, and I know they have worked hard and prospered through the Class of 2000 project. I wish you the best of luck as you graduate from high school and take the next step in your life. I hope that you never lose your interest in, and passion for, reading.

The Governor and I both know that it takes more than money to teach a child to read. It takes imagination and commitment.

One of my goals as First Lady of the State of Mississippi is to promote education through reading. During the next few months, we will be developing a reading program that will be introduced with the start of the new school year. My focus will be on exciting children about the wonderful doors that reading can open for them. I will also focus on an awareness campaign for the general public that will help them

become aware of the need for volunteers in the area of reading.

There is much to be done, and we are determined to make a difference. I hope that I can count on each of you to help me in these endeavors.

I thank you for asking me to be here tonight, thank you.