

Delta State University
Commencement Address
Saturday, May 6, 2000
10:00 a.m.

Remember to stand up straight. Use low tones. Remove your mortar board.

Good Morning.

What a pleasure it is for me to share this special occasion with you.

It was less than a month ago that I was here for Dr. Potter's inauguration ceremony when I brought greeting from the State of Mississippi and I congratulated Dr. Potter and the faculty of Delta State University for their commitment to one-on-one teacher and student interaction.

You have achieved an education that will serve you well. You will find that the education you have achieved is one of the only things that no one can ever take away from you.

It is our job to provide you with the tools you need to succeed in the workplace.

It is what you do with your education that will define the person you become, and the impact that you will make on our state and on our nation.

As you enter the market place, you will put your education to the test. We recognize that a strong educational system and a qualified workforce benefits not only you, but all of the people of Mississippi.

Just as your success depends on maintaining a level of commitment and your ability to continue to grow and learn, our success in Mississippi depends on maintaining a commitment to provide opportunity to everyone across this state through education and training.

In the past few months the MDECD has been working on efforts to reconstruct Mississippi's goals and plans for attracting and growing business and industry in our state.

We know that we must have a coherent agenda for advancing our state economically. We have relied on out-dated economic plans. We have used stale incentives and we have wondered why better-paying jobs pass our people by.

We have a strong economy. We have a workforce that is getting better and better. We have the resources. We have the potential.

Realizing it was time for us to create a new plan that provides solutions, we have just unveiled a plan that was established by the first ever Mississippi Partnership for Economic Development, a coalition of Mississippi's public and private sector leadership. The partnership is being co-chaired by myself and Mr. Dwight Evans, President and CEO of Mississippi Power Company.

The plan is extensive and includes a variety of factors.

One of the goals of the plan is to bring competitive paying jobs to our state that will keep Mississippi's best and brightest students in our state to build their homes, build their families and build a quality of life that is second to none.

We know that a large part of attracting industry to Mississippi is having a strong educational system.

We must enhance and improve our schools so that we can create economic growth.

The two most important factors companies consider when relocating to a new area are:

1. A trained and qualified workforce
2. A good educational system to raise their children and provide an educated workforce for the future.

Any plan that we have to boost economic development in Mississippi that does not address improving our schools is hallow, which is why education is a key factor in our economic plan.

Some of my major educational goals when I was campaigning for Governor were:

1. To raise teacher pay to the Southeastern average through a multi-year plan
2. Put a computer in the classroom
3. Improve early childhood development
4. Enhance colleges and universities

We have just accomplished the first goal. During this legislative session we passed a teacher pay raise bill that would raise teacher pay to the Southeastern average within a six-year plan.

On January 11th of this year in my Inaugural Address and on February 9th in my State of the State Address, I said that "the most critical issue facing the people of the State of Mississippi is raising teacher pay."

Last week I signed the bill into law.

We have now made a commitment to our teachers and to our children. Mississippi is putting education first, and we will see the benefits of our commitment for years to come.

We are also working toward completing the second goal. In March of this year, I established the Governor's Classroom Technology Taskforce that has been charged with the goal of placing an Internet-accessible computer in every elementary and secondary school classroom by the end of 2002.

Our market place is dramatically different than it was just twenty years ago. Just think of how computers have changed our lives. (statistic about the number of web sites in 1993 vs. now)

Most of you will have more than one employer in your career, and many of you will work in more than one industry before you retire.

We must provide our students with a strong academic background, a broad-based education and the practical training our workforce requires if Mississippi is to compete with other states in the future.

If you thought that you were through learning just because your "formal" education is over, you are wrong.

Your learning has really just begun.