

*Remarks for the
Democratic Governors Association
March 21, 2002*

Thank you, Congressman Shows, for that kind introduction. I want to say from the start that I'm excited to be one of the few and the proud – a Democrat named Ronnie – and I look forward to Ronnie Shows continuing as a representative from Mississippi after this next election.

He has done a great job for our state, and he deserves to return to Washington – despite the best efforts of John Ashcroft and the Justice Department.

I want to take a moment to thank Citigroup and Karen Anderson for their sponsorship of today's meeting. Thank you, Karen, for your support today.

(story of lawyer on plane when traveling to DC / didn't believe you were governor)

Well, I *am* the Governor, I'm a *Democratic* Governor, and I'm proud of what we're doing in Mississippi.

In my State of the State address in January, I outlined four priorities for our state – jobs, education, health care and public safety.

We're making strong progress on each one.

Mississippi is growing like never before. In the past two years, during a national recession, we've created more than 21,000 jobs and attracted over \$6 billion in new investments.

Site Selection magazine, one of the top trade publications in the economic development industry, ranked Mississippi as one of the top ten states for its “Governor’s Cup” award.

The perception of Mississippi is changing. The old question of “Why Mississippi?” doesn’t get asked anymore. The question now is, “Why *not* Mississippi?”

And the answer is, because we can compete with anyone, anytime, anywhere.

We have put together the most aggressive economic development package in the nation, with the Advantage Mississippi Initiative.

We're committed to building Mississippi and making sure it achieves its promise and potential. Our people deserve nothing less.

This same message applies to people in every state across our nation. If we are to build our states, our country, we must do it by creating jobs and building industry. We must do it by investing in our people through workforce training.

We have made progress in areas like welfare reform, but unfortunately we are seeing that progress slowed by proposals from the current administration.

The Bush proposals on reform are creating rifts and divisions where before there has been unity.

Our people deserve better.

Education has always been a foundation priority for the Democratic party, and that foundation is strong in Mississippi.

We've passed historic legislation to raise our teacher pay; when fully implemented, the average salary will have risen from 49th to 19th in the nation.

We're in the process of putting an Internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state. Every child in our schools – from the most rural town to the most urban city – will learn and develop the technological skills necessary to succeed in the 21st century.

Every parent in Mississippi will also know their children are learning, because of accountability measures we've put in place that go far beyond proposals from the administration.

For Mississippi and for every state to give its children the very best in education, we must provide them with the proper tools.

We cannot succeed with unfunded mandates. *We can* succeed when, at all levels, education is made a priority and our children are given what they need to learn.

It's that simple.

Our best efforts in economic development and education, however, will be less than our best if our citizens don't have access to quality health care.

In Mississippi, like so many other states around the nation, we are experiencing serious problems in our Medicaid programs. The structure we operate under now is not the best structure for the people we serve.

It's possible to fix the problems, but there's going to have to be some leadership and we know that leadership is going to have to come from the Democratic party.

If we're going to implement the change that's needed in Medicaid, we have to be sick and tired of being sick and tired. We have to take the leadership role and make things happen.

We can't rely on a stimulus package that doesn't include something as vital as the Federal Medicaid Assistance Program to offer solutions.

Again, if things are going to improve in Mississippi and in all our states, it's going to take the leadership of the Democratic party.

And we know the greatest leadership comes at the state level. There are 36 governors races in the country, and we need to work hard to win every one of those races.

We have some of those candidates with us here today. Jim Abbott of South Dakota, Jim Doyle of Wisconsin, and I believe Janet Napolitano from Arizona is with us as well.

Let's commit ourselves today to helping them win these races and win them big.

We have six Democratic incumbents who need our support – Don Siegelman, Gray Davis, Roy Barnes, Tom Vilsack, Jim Hodges and Charles Turnbull.

We've got 12 Republican incumbents who need to be looking for work come next January.

I'll be working hard for our Democratic incumbents and the Democratic candidates in the other races – and I'll be expecting some help next year when they all win.

P. J. O'Rourke wrote that "Republicans are the party that says government doesn't work and then they get elected and prove it."

Let's not give them any more chances to show that this is true.

I'm proud of what we have done as Democratic governors, and I know the work will continue. Let's provide the leadership needed to make our states and our country the very best they can be.

Anything less just won't do.

Thank you.