

*Remarks for the
Executive Briefing on Digital Readiness
June 3, 2002*

Thank you, David. It is great to be here with you today, and it is my pleasure to welcome you all to this briefing on digital readiness.

The world in which we operate today is unlike anything man has ever experienced. The technology, the information, and the tools by which we manage them are beyond what our ancestors could have imagined.

By the same token, we are facing greater threats to our government and our economy because of new technology.

The events of September 11 were a wake-up call for us, a call to heighten our awareness of the potential for what can happen.

That is the economy of the 21st century, and that's the economy that we're going to have to be competitive in. To do that, Mississippi's workforce needs to be ready for the changes and respond to them quickly.

Being prepared for those threats is the challenge.

The first step in being prepared is making sure we have the people trained to handle the technology necessary to meet the challenge. We are well on our way with that work, as Mississippi prepares to become the first state in the nation to place an Internet accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state.

We have to begin teaching our children from the earliest age how to work with, and be comfortable with, the technology that drives our economy. They are going to be working, as we already are, in an economy that is borderless, wireless and global.

They must be ready to handle whatever comes their way, and government must be just as prepared.

Mississippi has approximately 1.8 million working age citizens, but only about 1.3 million of them are actually in the workforce. How do we get more of them into good, quality jobs? A major part of that answer lies in education.

People can earn more by knowing more. In many cases, there is a gap between the skill levels of the job seekers and the available jobs. Our role is to help improve those skills through job training and continuing education.

Mississippians have the work ethic to compete in the new economy, but we have to give them the proper tools. We are working hard to bring in new, quality, high-paying jobs, and we achieve those efforts by having a workforce ready to fill those jobs.

The state agencies and entities that provide workforce skills training and education are forming stronger partnerships within government and with private business and industry.

Each agency has a role in training the workforce, but there must be cooperation and coordination regarding those programs and activities.

Community colleges and universities will carry a greater load in workforce education and training. People entering the workforce today will hold eight or ten different jobs over their lifetime. This is part of a trend around the country, and one that will require individuals to adapt to new jobs and new situations.

E-government is here. We are going to be handling all kinds of permitting, from fishing permits to environmental permits, on-line. Individuals and the business community will have access to government like never before. Mississippi is ready for the challenge.

In looking over some information for this meeting, I read about the four C's of readiness: Commitment, Customers, Coordination, and Capability. I'm confident in the work being done to meet those four C's. I'm confident in the work of David Litchliter and his team at ITS.

We have our work cut out for us. But, like we have done before, I know we will rise to the occasion and set a new standard for others to follow.

Thank you for the work you are doing.