

*Remarks for the  
Governor's Initiative for Volunteer Excellence Awards  
March 5, 2003*

- Recognize Steve Renfroe (chair, MS Commission for Volunteer Service) and Marsha Meeks Kelly (executive director, MS Commission for Volunteer Service)

There are at least four different things you can do with your hands. You can wring them in despair; you can fold them in idleness; you can clench them in anger; or you can use them to help someone.

Today, we're here to recognize people and organizations who have chosen to help – and by doing so, have made Mississippi a better place for us all.

Each of us in this room – those we honor here and those of us just here to honor – have the ability to make a difference in someone's life. These organizations, these individuals getting awards today have each demonstrated that ability in their own special way.

The questions for the rest of us are these – how can I demonstrate my own ability? What can I do to make a difference?

The answers to those questions are as individual as we are, but the answers have a common theme – sharing our time and our talents, to make our state, our nation and our world a better place.

That common theme can be found in our award winners here today. It can be found in teachers around the state, as they stand at the front of the classroom or kneel by a child's desk.

It can be found in the first responders who work quietly to ensure our safety, especially as happened recently during the heightened status of the homeland security threat level.

We didn't necessarily see it or realize it, but hundreds of men and women across the state – working in fire departments, law enforcement, ambulance services and other emergency agencies – took their own level of preparedness to the next level.

And, I believe that theme can be found in government as well. We have worked hard to set priorities in Mississippi, priorities that focus on the future and on making a difference for our people.

- More important than ever to set priorities and stick to them
  - That's what we've been doing in MS
  
- Impact of national recession
  - More than \$7 trillion lost in stock market
  - More than two million Americans out of work
  - States cutting school week / releasing prisoners / massive lay-offs

- Effects of national recession touches everyone
  - Recession has no respect for political parties
  - Every state affected
  
- Have to deal with the impact here in MS
  - Protect people in short term / prepare for long term
  
- Best way to do that is through creating jobs and investing in education
  - Everybody benefits from good schools

- Education must be first priority for MS
  - Making great progress
    - Teacher pay
    - Test scores
    - Computers in Classroom
  
- Keeping education a priority with a budget that puts Schools First / 62 percent
  - *HISTORIC ACTION THAT WAS TAKEN*
  - *UNPRECEDENTED COOPERATION*
  - *WAS A HISTORIC DAY WHEN SIGNED EDUCATION BILLS*

- Budget is key issue of legislative session
  - Must budget based on real numbers, not on hope
  - Funding education at 62%
  - Fully funding MAEP for the first time
  - Funds teacher pay raise
  
- Time to prove to people of MS we're serious about education
  - Make the investment now for dividends tomorrow
  
- When it comes to education, we mean business
  - Business means jobs



- MS Rural Economic Impact Authority
  - \$20M to help with economic development in rural areas
  - Funding to cover workforce training at community colleges
  
- MS's potential not exclusive to metropolitan areas
  - Promise of our people is just as strong in rural areas
  - Fighting to bring quality jobs to every Mississippian

- Economic development is economic development
  - Doesn't matter if it's two people in a truck or 5,000 people building a truck
  
- We have to look to the future of MS / where do we want to go?
  - Good schools / good jobs / good communities
  
- Have to continue investing in education
  - More computers in classrooms
  - Higher test scores
  - Better funding for higher education

- Will Rogers quote: Even if on right track,  
will get run over if you just sit there
  - MS is on the right track, and we're  
moving

And the momentum behind our movement is found in those individuals and organizations that have decided to help make a difference, that have stepped up to the plate and taken on a challenge.

Terry Bradshaw, the great quarterback for the Pittsburgh Steelers, once said that “when you’ve got something to prove, there’s nothing greater than a challenge.”

I want to issue a challenge to each of you here today – our award winners, past award winners, and each and every individual in this room.

Find a way to give to your community. Make a difference in your state. Do your best to shape our future for the better.

*(present awards)*