

*Remarks for the
Governor's School
June 27, 2003*

■ Recognize Dr. Bob Seney, Director of
Governor's Schools

It's a pleasure to be here with you today, and to represent Governor Musgrove at this great occasion. He has always enjoyed the opportunity to be at this great event, and sends his regrets for not being able to be here today.

It's been said that youth is a period of missed opportunities. Now more than ever, there are great opportunities here in Mississippi. It's important to keep our best minds, to keep you, in Mississippi.

It's an exciting time for our state – and you have the gifts, the talents and the potential to be a part of it and benefit from it. There's no doubt, Mississippi is changing, and the rest of the world is taking notice.

Everyone has an image of Mississippi in their mind; each of us here has an image of the state, just as people around the country. Today, I want to talk about a new and different image of Mississippi. It's an image of a state that's moving faster than anyone else into the 21st century, a state that's competing in the global marketplace, and a state that's setting new standards in education and job creation.

It's not an easy time to be doing all this – the national recession has dramatically affected every state in the nation. Many states have resorted to cutting the school week from five days to four, laying-off state employees, and in some cases, even releasing prisoners.

Governor Musgrove believes that we have to protect people in the short term while preparing for the long term, and the best way to do that is through investing in education and creating jobs.

This is what Governor Musgrove had in mind back in January, when he challenged the Legislature to invest in education first.

As a result of that challenge, a historical precedent was set – the money for education was set aside first, ahead of everything else. The level of funding was historic as well, coming in at 62 percent of the state’s general fund budget.

Even before this move, though, Mississippi has been building a reputation as a leader in education. The Governor led the fight to raise teacher pay, and now we have a package that will raise the average salary for our teachers from 49th to 19th when fully implemented.

The Princeton Review has ranked our testing system as the 12th best in the nation.

And, we are the first state in the nation with an Internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom.

A new message is being sent around the state and the nation, a message that says we're serious about education – and we're making the investment in it now so we can reap the dividends tomorrow.

And there are so many facets to education, facets that all come into play and seem to be totally unrelated, but are all key components in a good education. Science, language, business, the arts – each is a cornerstone in the foundation for the work you'll do throughout life.

The arts, in particular, have a role to play in education, and a renewed focus on that role is demonstrating just how important the arts are. I know that during your time here at the Governor's School, you have renewed your own focus as well on the role of the arts in education.

The arts are such a vital part of our every day lives, and as such, should be a part of our education as well. How long could we last without music, without pictures, without dance?

We have a responsibility to encourage and support those talented individuals who share their creativity, their vision, their method and their message through their art.

A recent article in The New York Times described how states across the nation, struggling with the economic impact of the national recession and growing budget shortfalls, are cutting their support of the arts to the bone – and, in some cases, entirely.

The state arts agency in Arizona is facing complete elimination. The same situation is facing arts agencies in New Jersey and Missouri. In California, funding for the arts was cut by 41 percent; in Massachusetts, by 62 percent.

In Mississippi, our funding of the arts is another investment in education. It's an investment in economic development; it's an investment in historical preservation; and, it's an investment in our future.

As we look to the future of Mississippi, we have to ask ourselves – where do we want to go?

What do we want for ourselves?

Will Rogers once commented that “even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.” Mississippi's on the right track – and you're right there with us

I want to ask you a few questions to help you think about what's important in life. It's not a test, I know you've had enough of those, but this is an exercise to make you think a little bit.

First, name the five wealthiest people in the world. Name the last five Heisman winners. Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest. Name the last five Academy Award winners for best actor and best actress.

How did you do? The point is, none of us remember headliners of yesterday. They may be the best in their fields, but applause dies, awards tarnish, and in today's economy, we'll most likely have a new list of the wealthiest people tomorrow.

Now, one more set of questions for you. Think of people in your life who have made you feel appreciated and special. Think of teachers who aided your journey through school. Name your first-grade teacher.

Easier? The simple lesson here is that people who make the greatest difference in life are not the ones with most money, the most awards or the flashiest lifestyle. It's the people who care, who nurture, who work to help make a difference.

You've demonstrated your abilities, here and back at home. I encourage you to continue challenging your limits. Push the envelope.

Think big, believe big, act big, and the results will be big.

Abraham Lincoln once said that, “in the end, it’s not the years in your life that count; it’s the life in your years.”

Make the most of your lives in the years to come. Live the odyssey – enjoy the excitement and perhaps even a little bit of danger – but always remember what you can contribute to your state, your country, and to the lives of those around you.

I’m proud of you and what you’ve done; I’m proud of you and what you will do.
Congratulations to you all.