

*Remarks to the
Mississippi Governor's School Closing Convocation
June 29, 2001*

Thank you for that introduction and for the opportunity to join you again this year for the closing convocation of the Mississippi Governor's School.

The theme of this year's Governor's School – "Conflict: A Catalyst for Renewal" – is interesting. I don't know all the aspects you've covered in your time here, but so often, great change and renewal is brought about by some type of conflict.

Think, for example, about last year – September 11 – and the tragic events of that day. We were suddenly and horribly attacked – and our nation was thrust into the worst military fighting of a generation.

What have been the results of the conflict of that day? An impassioned sense of patriotism and love of country, a common embracing of the values that hold us together, and a renewal of our strength as a nation.

Now, on a smaller and more local basis, what can you do to turn conflict into a catalyst for renewal in your own communities?

The Mississippi Governor's School is designed to challenge you, to make you think in new ways, to help you broaden your horizons in terms of thinking.

It is designed to, as the motto says, "bring a new light to learning."

That light is burning brightly here today, and I believe you will all keep it burning throughout your lives.

That light is important not only to you, but to those with whom you share it – and that’s the beginning of a whole new journey.

Benjamin Franklin, in an edition of his *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, once wrote – “the noblest question in the world is, ‘what good may I do in it?’”

Today I want you to think about the great things you’ve accomplished – in your schools, in your communities, in your lives to this point – and then ask yourself that noble question.

You have so much to offer – to your families and friends, to your communities, and to your state.

In fact, the driving force behind the establishment of the Mississippi Governor's School was to try and keep talented young people like you here in Mississippi.

I hope you will choose to stay in Mississippi, to be a part of positive change, to make a difference for those who will follow in your footsteps.

Each time I participate in a graduation ceremony, I am reminded of what tremendous promise we have for our state.

It doesn't matter where the graduation is taking place – I still look across the faces of the students and see hope, hard work and perseverance.

I see the future of our great state in the faces of those who will help shape it. I see that future clearly today.

I am dedicated to the premise that education must be our first priority in Mississippi. With so many challenges before us, we have to set priorities. We have to decide where to focus our energy.

I will digress for a moment to say that the process of setting priorities for this state has caused some conflict. I'm sure you've read the stories in the papers about differences of opinion in the Legislature and state government over how to accomplish certain goals and objectives.

Yet, in the end, we are often able to use that conflict to bring about some positive change.

That said, I believe that no other issue affects our state like education. It is the bedrock of our success and the cornerstone for our growth.

When businesses like Nissan look at doing business here, they aren't just looking at what type of economic incentives we can provide, or the geographic advantages, or the transportation systems.

They are looking for an educated, skilled workforce. They want people who are ready, willing and able to work, and work hard.

They want people like you.

That's one reason why education is our priority.

That's why we've raised teacher pay and committed to paying teachers like the professionals they are.

That's why we're putting Internet-accessible computers in every public school classroom in the state by the end of the year – the first state in the nation to do so.

And that's why we fund the Mississippi Governor's School, so the best and brightest among our youth can attend without worrying about the cost.

We owe you every opportunity to succeed and to make the most of your lives. In the end – and this may sound selfish – your success becomes our success.

The difference you make as a hard-working citizen of this state grows exponentially through your efforts. The work you do has a cumulative effect. It all builds to a point where, in addition to benefiting you, it benefits others as well.

Good things are happening in Mississippi.

We're making a difference here, but I need your help to continue this work.

Mississippi is doing great things. You will be a part of taking this state to the next level through your work, and I am excited about what you will do.

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.

Ayn (*rhymes with "mine"*) Rand, a famous 20th century author, wrote in her novel *The Fountainhead*: "The question isn't who's going to let me; it's who's going to stop me."

Are you going to let anyone stop you from achieving the promise and potential you have within you? I hope not; but remember, you can use conflict as a catalyst for renewal. You can turn stumbling blocks into opportunities – for yourself and those around you.

My simple hope for you is that you will set your sights on what can be and never lower them.

Make the most of your lives in the years to come. Live the odyssey that's ahead – 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.

Thank you.