

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

Thank you for that introduction and for the opportunity to join you for the closing convocation of the twenty-first Mississippi Governor's School.

The theme of this year's Governor's School is "2001: An Earth Odyssey." The Cambridge Dictionary defines an odyssey as "a long journey containing a lot of exciting or dangerous events."

I don't know about the "dangerous" part of that definition, but I know that "exciting" is one word that can be used to describe the past three weeks for you.

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 odyssey.

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.

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 come to Mississippi to 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're working to raise teacher pay.

That's why we're putting internet-accessible computers in every public school classroom in the state by the end of next year – and we'll be 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.

Let me illustrate this point. A few weeks ago, I was in New York City for the Mississippi Picnic in Central Park.

While I was there, I was interviewed by The New York Times, Business Week, Forbes, Barron's, and Fox News Network.

I met with site selection consultants for some of the largest companies in the world.

These are the movers and shakers in media and business, and as I told them the good news of what we're doing in Mississippi, they all repeated the same thing... "I didn't know that... I didn't know that."

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.

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.

Thank you.

