

*Remarks for the
Groundbreaking for Green Houses
August 22, 2002*

(recognize Dr. Thomas, Steve McAlilly)

They say the measure of a society is how we treat our children and our elderly. Today, we're here to renew and strengthen our commitment to the senior citizens of our state – those who have given so much to our society.

It's a commitment we take seriously in Mississippi. Last spring, we fought hard to ensure Medicaid was adequately funded, so we could continue to provide critical services like nursing homes.

We fought hard for the right to restructure the program. We fought hard to make sure the 709,000 Mississippians who depend on Medicaid could count on the program to be there for them.

80 percent of the nursing home residents in Mississippi rely on Medicaid. We fought hard for them, and we fought for their families – their sons and daughters, their grandchildren – who want the very best when it comes to health care.

As part of the fight, I visited nursing homes around the state, to meet face-to-face about this issue. I wanted to talk with our senior citizens and hear directly from them about Medicaid and its impact on their health care.

The time we spent together was valuable – and helped us achieve our common goals.

I asked for a reasonable appropriation for Medicaid and the flexibility to manage the program in the best interests of those who depended on it. I knew we needed to find some common ground – and in the end, we did just that.

And so today, we take another step forward in building our commitment to Mississippi's senior citizens.

We're doing it by breaking ground – both literally and figuratively – for a new effort in long-term care for our senior citizens. The Green Houses will change the face of nursing care in the years to come, and I'm proud that effort is starting here in Mississippi.

I want to thank Dr. Thomas for sharing his expertise on this project, and Steve McAlilly and Traceway for their dedication to making today possible.

This exciting new concept will change the way we look at health care for seniors, and offer them the care, the respect and the quality of life they've earned and so richly deserve.

I'm proud of what's being done here, and the way Mississippi is leading the way in the health care arena. Let's keep the momentum going.

Thank you.