

*Remarks to the
Hugh O'Brian Youth Foundation
Friday, June 1, 2001*

Thank you for the invitation to be part of this panel today. I have been placed in wonderful company with Charles, William and Bob.

We've been asked to talk about why you should stay in Mississippi. That's one of the easier topics I've had to discuss in some time.

Mississippi is moving faster than it's moved in years, and the opportunities are there for you.

We're making progress in economic development. Businesses are looking at Mississippi and seeing a strong and positive atmosphere for their work.

We can point with pride to homegrown businesses like Lextron, which Charles has taken from a dream in 1991 to a major manufacturer of electronics for the telecommunications and auto industries.

We can point with pride to Mississippi's newest corporate citizen, Nissan, which is coming here with an investment of more than \$900 million and the promise of 4,000 jobs.

We're investing in education because it is the foundation for our success. We want to strengthen that investment, and progress is being made.

We can point with pride to the fact that Mississippi is well on its way to being the first state in the nation with an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom.

Just this past January, we honored 389 Mississippi teachers who achieved National Board Certification – the highest standard in the teaching profession.

Mississippi is one of the top five states in the nation in the number of teachers reaching this level.

We support teachers through the Mississippi Employer-Assisted Housing Teacher Program, which provides special home loans for who work in areas facing a shortage of qualified teachers.

There is an ad on television now, where a young boy talks about wanting to be a teacher.

“Why not be a doctor?” his father asks.

“They make lots of money and everyone looks up to them.”

The boy replies, “Without teachers, there wouldn’t be any doctors.”

We have to respect our teachers and the work they do by investing in them and giving them the tools to do their job.

We can point with pride to our colleges and universities, and the role they are playing in areas such as research and development at the national and international levels.

Just this past week, it was announced that Mississippi State University had been awarded a eight-year contract with the Department of Defense worth \$108 million.

Under this contract, MSU will support the department's four supercomputing research centers.

In fact, 40 percent of the Defense Department's supercomputing power is located in Mississippi.

Mississippi Valley State University has been rated a "best buy" by *U. S. News & World Report* magazine for the third year in a row.

The University of Southern Mississippi's Polymer Science program is ranked as one of the top five in the country.

In fact, I have 16 pages of information here about Mississippi's universities (*hold up sheets*), and the work they are doing is absolutely amazing.

Mississippi has a tremendously rich history in the arts, in those areas that touch the soul as well as the mind.

We can point with pride to the International Ballet Competition, which circulates through Jackson every four years.

Here in Jackson, we've hosted three major exhibits – The Palaces of St. Petersburg, the Splendors of Versailles, and now The Majesty of Spain.

These exhibits only came here. No other city in the country hosted them.

And, as you probably heard, the King and Queen of Spain visited Jackson to see the exhibit.

We can point with pride to our own celebrated authors – Eudora Welty; Margaret Walker Alexander; William Faulkner; Willie Morris; Richard Wright.

Mississippi has produced some of the greatest artists in the music world – Elvis Presley, B. B. King, Leontyne Price, Jimmy Buffett, Faith Hill, and of course, Lance Bass of ‘N Sync.

This state has such great potential. We’re moving forward, but we’ve got to gain momentum. That’s where you come in.

We can point with pride to you, the leaders of the next generation. The success of our efforts will be seen, in some part, in your success.

We can point with pride to you because we have every belief and hope that you will stay in Mississippi, that you will choose to do your life's work here and make a difference for the next generation.

There are countless reasons to stay in Mississippi, and I'm looking at many of them here in this room.

A native Mississippian, Hodding Carter, once wrote that there are two things we can give our children – roots and wings.

You've got your roots here, in your family, friends, and teachers. They help determine the strength of your wings.

At some point, you'll take flight – and I encourage you to see and do as much as you can.

But, in the end, I hope your wings will bring you back home. This is where your roots are – and this is where you can help develop the roots for the next generation.

Stay in Mississippi. Take an active role in creating new opportunities. Dare to do the things that haven't been done before, and dare to do them here.