

*Remarks for the
Insurance Women of Jackson Luncheon
May 8, 2002*

(open with story of lawyer on plane)

Whether it's one lawyer on a plane or one thousand people who read an article in The New York Times about what we're doing here, people are learning that Mississippi is changing.

They're learning that we're doing business in a different way.

What is important from this story is that this individual came away from Mississippi with a strong, positive impression of our state and our people. She picked up on the fact that we're doing things differently.

I believe Mississippi is going through a revival – in its commitment to making the most of the promise of *all* its people, in all areas of the state.

We're working hard now to reform the Medicaid program, to make it more effective and efficient for the people who depend on it for their health care.

There are 2.8 million people in Mississippi who look to me and other elected officials to help provide leadership, direction and guidance for them.

Those people are always first and foremost in my mind -- especially in my efforts to protect Medicaid in recent weeks. The 650,000 Mississippians – most of them seniors – who depend on this vital health care program need to know it will be there for them.

They are the reason I fought to make sure we could get the flexibility we needed to manage the program efficiently and effectively, and still provide quality health care services.

The flexibility to manage demands the flexibility to commit to medical services when they are needed, and I will not be satisfied until I know the people of this state can receive health care when they need it.

I asked for flexibility, and today it is here.
This is the first step toward ensuring quality health care – as well as some peace of mind – for those 650,000 Mississippians who expect me to help them.

As a member of the National Governors Association Executive Committee, I will be focusing on how we can help shape a national strategy for restructuring Medicaid – a strategy that will have its roots in Mississippi.

Just yesterday, I met with three U.S. senators, as well as Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, to talk about what needs to be done with Medicaid. Our meetings focused on how we can work with Congress to craft a more efficient program for Mississippi and the entire country.

The pressing need for changes to the Medicaid program is being met, and I am hopeful changes will be forthcoming in other areas as well.

The issue of tort reform has been front page news for some time now, and I want to make my position on this very clear. I have said on several occasions that I support tort reform that is fair to both sides, and I will consider a special session when the Legislature can show me they have legislation that will make it out of committee.

The business of Mississippi, to paraphrase Calvin Coolidge, is business. This is a good state for business, and the numbers show it.

Over the past two years, more than \$6 billion has been invested in Mississippi. More than 21,000 jobs have been created.

That's evidence that we're doing something right.

A few days ago, I was on the interstate, moving slowly behind a large tractor-trailer carrying a huge piece of machinery bound for the Nissan plant. That's evidence that business is being done in Mississippi.

Mississippi, within the past couple of months, was one of four states being considered for Hyundai's first North American plant.

That's evidence that Mississippi is a good place to do business.

The evidence points to one simple fact – Mississippi is open for business.

I'll be relating that fact in the next few days, when I travel to Japan on a trade mission.

The investment of time and resources that goes into such a mission is well worth it.

I believe Mississippi is getting its reputation for being able to compete – with anyone, anytime, anywhere – because we *want* the business.

We all want what is best for the people of this state. That's why I am working to improve the delivery of health care; to create high-paying, quality jobs; to craft the best educational system possible; and to ensure Mississippians are safe and secure.

I know you share those goals with me, and I appreciate the work you do each day to take us a step closer to them.

I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today.