

*Remarks to the
Mississippi Justice Court Judges Fall Seminar
October 11, 2001*

Thank you, John, for that introduction and for the opportunity to be here with you today. And, I want to thank each of you for the service you provide to communities around the state.

I want to talk with you what's happening in Mississippi today, and how Mississippi is becoming a leader among states.

It's been said that leadership is action, not position. We've been very active lately, and I am proud of the leadership we've shown.

We made history in July when we passed a \$330 million teacher pay raise package that will lift our average teacher salaries from 49th to 19th in the nation.

We've been working for this day for years, and it has finally happened. And, we did it without a tax increase – we did it by setting priorities in our spending.

This plan has been written about in the op-ed sections of The New York Times and The Washington Post. In the Times, they wrote that although New York's education problems may be more complicated, the state of Mississippi – with its smaller economy and scarcer resources – had crafted an attractive package that continues to elude New York.

That's action, and that's leadership.

Last year, we developed the Advantage Mississippi initiative, one of the most aggressive and creative economic development plans in the country.

With it, we were able to attract the Nissan plant that is, as we speak, rising out of the dirt in Canton, Mississippi, just about 20 miles north of here.

Nissan means an investment in Mississippi of almost \$1 billion and 4,000 new jobs.

And, the first round of suppliers for the plant are bringing another \$140 million investment and 1,000 jobs.

And the time line for the project is historic. From the day we first talked with Nissan to the day we announced the plant was a mere five months.

That's action, and that's leadership.

What we're talking about is bringing fresh ideas to the table. That is a great part of leadership, and we must be aggressive about creating our own opportunities for the people of Mississippi.

In late July, I unveiled a plan of action for Mississippi, one designed to the pressing issues of health care for the people of Mississippi.

This plan would take a portion of the annual payment coming to Mississippi from the tobacco settlement, and use it for health care by maximizing the matching federal dollars.

For example, if we took \$10 million out of this year's expected payment of \$210 million, we could put it into Medicaid and, with the matching dollars, turn that \$100 million into \$500 million. Simply put, give me a quarter and I'll turn it into a dollar.

What do we do with that money? We screen for diseases and treat them before they reach critical stages. We increase the number of nurses working in our schools. We improve services to those with mental illnesses and in group homes without increasing our costs.

We improve health insurance for state and school employees by eliminating the deductible for doctor visits and reducing dependent costs.

And, over the next twenty years, we spend over \$7 billion for health care in Mississippi, as opposed to less than \$2 billion if we do nothing.

We have the opportunity to have a dramatic and positive effect on the health of the people of our state, and we need to take advantage of it. We can't wait any longer.

With a healthier population, we are looking at healthier students, a healthier workforce, a healthier economy, and a healthier way of life.

That's action, and that's leadership.

And each of you here today is showing your dedication to providing justice in your communities by taking time to further your training.

As justice court judges, you have a tremendous responsibility to those you serve. You are on the front lines of justice for our communities, and your decisions have an impact on the people.

Your cases cover a wide spectrum of offenses, and each one is different. Your ability to discern between these cases and the circumstances that set each one apart is key to being a good justice court judge. By being here today, you are building your skills to better serve the people.

You are effectively demonstrating that believing “I must do something” always solves more problems than saying “something must be done.”

I believe that each time you take the bench, each of you are thinking “I must do something.” And when we are all moving in the same direction, toward the same positive goals, then we’re doing the right thing.

That’s action, and that’s leadership.

Thank you.