

*Remarks for the
Kids First Press Conference
September 17, 2003*

- I'm happy to join you today in announcing a public/private partnership that will benefit the children of Mississippi.

- First, let me recognize:

The Leadership Mississippi Group

- Melanie Morgan – Trustmark – Jackson
- Mitch Kalom – Kalom Consulting -
Biloxi
- Henry Hewes – A.G. Edwards –
Gulfport
- Angie Verdell – Entergy – Jackson

More

- *Not present but still mention* –
- Greg Phillips – Pine Grove Recovery Center – Hattiesburg
- Dorothy P. Wilson – The Sun Herald - Gulfport

- Peggy Howard of Mississippi Economic Council, representing Mississippi businesses and the sponsor of Leadership Mississippi
- and Medicaid officials, and other health advocacy groups and representatives from Blue Cross Blue Shield, Entergy, the Godwin Group, Sanderson Farms, and other businesses.

- Rica Lewis Payton is not with us today but it's no secret that we have the best Medicaid Director and the best Medicaid team in the Nation.

- They work hard every day to take care of the health care needs of over 720,000 Mississippians,

- Because of their efforts
 - more than 58,000 children
 - now having access to
 - federally funded quality health care.

- It is indeed a pleasure to be surrounded by so many people who care so deeply about the health and well being of Mississippians.

- Healthcare is not a privilege to be enjoyed by just a few
 - Nor is it a partisan issue over which we should become divisive
 - Instead, to ensure quality health care for our people
 - We must work together
 - To find affordable, accessible solutions

- Today, we are here to announce an exciting initiative
 - that was developed out of a subgroup
 - of the Leadership Mississippi Class of 2003.

- The vision of this Leadership Mississippi class is a testament that Government does not always have all the answers.

- Through the work of these individuals with Leadership Mississippi,
 - the Godwin Group,
 - the Division of Medicaid,
 - and Blue Cross Blue Shield,
 - we are here today
 - to announce that a new initiative
 - will target working parents
 - to provide health care coverage for their children.

- This venture – Kids First Mississippi - shows that private enterprise believes
 - Healthy citizens make a better workforce for today and tomorrow
 - Healthy adults wake up ready to go to work
 - Healthy children go to school ready to learn the skills necessary to be productive members of tomorrow's workforce
 - We will also see a long term benefit of lower medical costs
- Providing health care to our children has had as significant an impact on the health of our children as the impact of kindergarten has had on their education.

- When I took office in January of 2000, there were 542 children enrolled, we are now providing health care to over 58,000.

- By working together with this public and private partnership to address health care
 - we can make tomorrow,
 - the coming months
 - and the coming years
 - brighter for all of our children

- I would now like to introduce Melanie Morgan, Vice President for Corporate Communications at Trustmark and a member of the Leadership Mississippi team to share their story of Kids First Mississippi.

- *Melanie speaks.*

- I would now like to introduce Peggy Howard, Senior Vice President of the Mississippi Economic Council.

- *Peggy speaks.*

- Again, thank you for being here today. We will be happy to take a few questions.