

*Remarks to the
KidsFest 2001
September 29, 2001*

Good morning! Thank you, Mayor Barfield, and thank you for the opportunity to be part of KidsFest 2001. I am always proud to have a chance to be around young people like you, the future of Mississippi.

I want to begin by saying that the past weeks have been difficult ones for our country, but they have also been a time of pride and unity. The attacks on America have left us down, but we are not out.

Since September 11, we have come together and all lines that used to separate us have been erased. There is no black and white, there is only red, white and blue. We are all Americans, and we have all shared in the tragedy of the attacks in New York and Washington.

But, we will come through this time, and we will do it with the knowledge that our future is secure because our faith is strong. We are “one nation, under God,” and that is one of the great strengths of America.

And this morning, I am looking at another great strength of our country. Each of you here today, as young Mississippians and young Americans, have something tremendous to offer.

It is important for you to have every opportunity to share your gifts. That is why I place so much emphasis on education here in Mississippi, because for you to make the most of your potential, you must have a strong foundation on which to build.

I want to make sure your foundations are strong.

I want you to have the very best teachers possible standing at the front of your classrooms; that's why we are going to start paying teachers like the professionals they are.

I want you to be able to compete in the borderless, wireless and global economy of the 21st century; that's why we're working to put internet-accessible computers in every public school classroom in the state by the end of 2002 – and Mississippi will be the first state to do so.

I want you to have the strength to reach for the stars; that's why I have put forth a proposal to strengthen health care in the state by using future payments in the tobacco settlement to bring in more federal money for health care needs.

Give me a quarter, and I'll turn it into a dollar for better health care in Mississippi.

The pay-off from this investment will come down the road. When you are healthy now, you go to school ready to learn. When you are healthy ten years from now, you are ready to work. When you have a good education and go to work, the economy is healthy.

I know each of you here today has a dream. When I was eight years old, I dreamed of being a lawyer – and I worked hard for that dream.

I was the first person in my family to go to college. On my first day of law school, I went to class thirty minutes early because I didn't want to miss anything.

When I got to that class, there were two other students in the room. As we talked and got to know each other, I realized that if they could be lawyers, then I could be a great lawyer.

One of the students in the room that day didn't last too long as a lawyer, choosing instead to become a writer. I'm sure you've heard of John Grisham?

Whatever it is you want to do, wherever it is you want to go – work hard for that goal and know there are others who want to see you succeed.

Ayn (*rhymes with “mine”*) Rand, a famous author in the 20th century, wrote in her novel *The Fountainhead*: “The question isn’t who’s going to let me; it’s who’s going to stop me.”

Don’t let anyone stop you from going after your dreams, and know that we’re here to help you reach as high as you can.

Usually it's only in science fiction or fortune tellers that we think about seeing the future.

I know I don't have a crystal ball, but I can see the future for Mississippi – it's right here in front of me today.

From what I see, the future is strong. I'm proud of you and what you will do, and I'm excited for our state and our country.

God bless you all as you go for the stars.