

*Remarks for the  
Mississippi Legislative PTA Conference  
January 10, 2002*

Thank you, Rick. I am proud and excited about being here today with you, because I know we share the same priority for our state – the very finest in education for the children of Mississippi.

There's an old Chinese proverb that says "learning is a treasure that follows its owner everywhere." I want our children to have that treasure. We're going to make sure that happens – and here's how we're doing it.

First, we are going to pay our teachers as the professionals they are. We have made that commitment to them, a commitment set in stone in July of last year when we called a special session to remove the so-called “five percent provision” on the teacher pay package.

This provision said the state’s revenue collections had to grow by at least five percent before the teacher pay raise went into effect.

It wasn’t a commitment to our teachers.

It was a statement that said to them, we want to pay you more and we will if we make more money.

I have always believed and will always argue that, in a budget of \$3.5 billion, we can find a way to fund our priorities. That's what we're going to do this year.

As we go into this legislative session, we are going to fund the teacher pay package. We are on our way to carrying the average teacher salary in Mississippi from 49<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> in the nation.

We are capturing the attention of other states for our efforts. The New York Times, when we removed the five percent provision in July, wrote in an editorial that “Mississippi had put together the kind of attractive package that continues to elude New York.”

High praise for our work here, and I’m proud our commitment to our teachers has received such widespread notice.

Here's another reason to recognize the role our teachers play – we are a leader in nationally board certified teachers.

This past year, 405 teachers across the state earned National Board Certification. This year-long process recognizes the very best in teachers, as determined by their peers.

We now have over 1,100 teachers in Mississippi with this certification – the sixth highest number in the nation. Let me repeat that – the sixth highest in the nation. Not 50<sup>th</sup>, not 40<sup>th</sup>, not 10<sup>th</sup> – sixth highest.

Mississippi was also the first state in the nation to offer more pay to teachers with national board certification.

I want the world to know that we're serious about education in Mississippi, we're serious about building a better world for our people, we're serious about shaping a brighter future for our children.

There's more praise, too, for our "Computers in the Classroom" initiative.

Under this program, we are working to be the first state in the nation to have an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom.

The fundraising is happening, computers are being installed, and children are being exposed to a new and broad learning tool.

It is exciting to know that a child in the most rural area of the state will have access to the same information as a child in our more urban areas.

We are going to make sure our children have access to the technology that will be so prevalent in this new century.

We are going to make sure they have every opportunity to learn this technology, so they can successfully navigate the new economy before us.

We have also just unveiled a new report earlier this week at the Mississippi Education Summit.



Our report outlines six specific priorities designed to help improve our competitiveness and quality of life.

The priorities include raising the educational hopes of our people; sending our children to school ready to learn; improving the quality of teaching and learning in elementary and secondary schools; increasing college and university graduation rates; expanding adult learning, workforce training and professional development; and increasing university research and development efforts.

These priorities are an outline for our future. They are part of the road map we are following for changing the way Mississippi operates.

By investing in human capital, we are positioning ourselves to be competitive in an increasingly competitive world. We no longer compete with Alabama, Louisiana and Tennessee.

We're competing with Canada, Mexico and countries in Asia. We're competing with labor markets around the world.

And we make ourselves competitive by making our people competitive. The best economic development packages in the world don't mean a thing if we don't have a workforce ready to back them up.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, the philosopher Diogenes said "the foundation of every state is the education of its youth." In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that statement still rings true.

Our success, our competitiveness, our quality of life is based on our commitment to the education of our people.

Mississippi is gaining national attention for the work being done here, and rightfully so. We are sending a very clear message beyond our borders – a message that says we're serious about rising to the top, about setting new standards for others to follow.

What we want to do with education in Mississippi is to light some fires for learning, from preschool to adult education. We want the people of Mississippi to have a burning desire to learn and improve their quality of life.

We can make a commitment to education, or we can choose not to. The decision makes a difference for all of us. I, for one, am committed to education and the great things it can do for our people and our state.

I look forward to working with you over the next three months. Together, we're going to keep making the difference for education, for our children and for our future.

Thank you.