

*Remarks for the  
MDOC 2002 Employee Recognition Awards Luncheon  
April 9, 2003*

- Recognize Chris Epps
  
- Chris Epps has been serving as Commissioner of the Department of Corrections since last August
  - It has not been an easy time for him, but he has served the Department well
  - He has served the state well
  - Thank him for his dedication / commitment

- Here today to say thank you as well to the employees of the Mississippi Department of Corrections
  - Because of the work you do each and every day, the people of Mississippi know that their streets, their families, and their homes are safer
  
- The work you do helps in our work to build good schools, good jobs and good communities across our state
  
- We're making great progress in that work
  - Helping to protect people in short term / prepare for long term

- One of the best ways to do that is through investing in education and creating jobs
  - Everybody benefits from good schools
  
- Education is, and must be, first priority for MS
  - Making great progress
    - Teacher pay / 49<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> when fully implemented
    - Test scores up / accountability standards stronger than “No Child Left Behind”
    - Princeton Review: MS has 6<sup>th</sup> best testing system in nation
    - MS 6<sup>th</sup> in nation in National Board Certified Teachers
    - Computers in Classroom

- We're proving to the people of MS that we're serious about education
  - Making the investment now for dividends tomorrow
  
- The safety of the people of this state is of paramount importance to all of us
  - That's why we do the work we do
  
- I believe it is important to make our first investment in public safety in the classroom
  - Give our children the skills to succeed
  - Help them focus their attention on a good job

- If we make the investment in our kids early on, hopefully we'll make your jobs a little easier later on
  - Our kids shouldn't have to compete for resources with prisoners
  
- At the same time, I am committed to making sure you have the tools you need to get your jobs done / to ensure the public safety
  - In finding that safety, we can't forget the work you do in leading us to it
  - We aren't the ones working in dangerous situations on a regular basis
  - We aren't the ones working to ensure our facilities are accredited
  - We aren't the ones sharing our faith with prisoners, to turn their lives around

- That's your job – and you do it well
  - Because of the work each of you do, the people of Mississippi are able to rest a little easier
  
- I'm confident we will meet the challenges to the work we're doing
  - We're going to meet them head-on and turn them into opportunities
  - Accomplishing that will take an effort that begins in the communities and runs to the highest levels

- Today, five employees from the Mississippi Department of Corrections are being honored for their contributions
  - I want to congratulate / thank them for their dedication and outstanding work
  - Also want to thank all employees of MDOC for doing tremendous work
  
- I would be remiss if I didn't take time today to thank some very special MDOC employees, people who couldn't be here with us today
  - They're busy serving in our nation's military / fighting war on terrorism
  - More than 60 MDOC employees have been activated for military duty
  - Many of you serve in Guard / Reserves
  - Chris Epps / Major in MS National Guard

- We share a sense of pride in the work they are doing right now
  - Also share a sense of hope for their safe return
  - Keep them in our hearts and prayers
  
- There's so much potential and promise for our state
  - The challenge now is to work together to fulfill it
  
- We have to look to the future of MS / where do we want to go?
  - Good schools / good jobs / good communities
  
- Thank you all for your role in making it happen