

*Remarks to the
Mississippi Economic Council
Annual Membership Meeting
Wednesday, May 30, 2001*

Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to be with you again this year.

Last year, I spoke to this same group about what I wanted to see happen in Mississippi.

I spoke about creating an environment for economic development, about developing an economic development strategy to spur growth.

What a difference a year makes!

In the past year, we've worked together – the business community, Lt. Governor Tuck, Speaker Tim Ford and the Governor's Office.

We've focused our efforts on making things happen, and that partnership has given us an advantage – specifically, the Advantage Mississippi Initiative.

Through it, we landed one of the top economic development projects in the country.

The Nissan plant currently under construction means an investment of \$930 million into our economy and 4,000 new jobs for the people of Mississippi.

Along with the Nissan plant, we have suppliers from around the country looking to locate in Mississippi. This means more jobs and more investment in our state.

And even more importantly, we've identified more than 40,000 potential suppliers already doing business in Mississippi.

We've done a lot in the past year. AND, we're not slowing down.

We're working to expand opportunities in rural areas of Mississippi. I believe that development follows infrastructure – that if we put the proper foundations into place, we can continue to attract strong investments in Mississippi and her people.

In fact, according to the “Economic State of the State” survey released yesterday by the MEC and Godwin Group, 88% of Mississippi business leaders feel that investing in infrastructure is a top priority in making our state competitive.

The infrastructure in our rural communities is being studied now. Water and wastewater systems are being reviewed, and recommendations for improvements will be made soon.

This past November, we created the Mississippi Land, Water and Timber Resources Board to focus on agricultural development.

Right now, the Board is considering two projects that will invest more than \$30 million in Mississippi and provide over 400 jobs.

Last year, I spoke about the foundation for economic development and how it starts with education.

You have stated that education is your number one priority, and it was confirmed in the survey results released yesterday. I share this priority with you, and we're making it happen.

Improving the fundamentals of our public school system begins in one area – with a commitment to increasing teacher pay to the southeastern average.

We need the resources to keep our teachers here in Mississippi. We need the resources to recruit new teachers.

These are the key ingredients in the success of educating our children.

There is an ad on television now, where a young boy talks about wanting to be a teacher.

“Why not be a doctor?” his father says.

“They make lots of money and people look up to them.”

The boy's reply is, "if it weren't for teachers, there wouldn't be any doctors."

We must respect those who teach with better pay. This is the message I tried to send to the Legislature this past session.

They passed one-time legislation that gives teachers more money, but takes away from their funds for school supplies.

They tied any future pay increases to a 5 percent provision for growth in our revenues – a projection that does not come anywhere close to the predictions of economists.

In fact, the U. S. economy is growing slower now than anticipated – the first quarter of this year saw growth of only 1.3 percent.

It is painfully obvious that the Legislature has fallen short on its responsibility to the teachers of Mississippi.

**One of the questions asked in the
“Economic State of the State” survey was,
“If you were Governor or a Legislator for
a Day, what would you do?”**

**For both business leaders and private
citizens, the number one answer was
“increase teacher pay.”**

**I will continue calling on our legislators to
do the right thing by our teachers, and I
encourage you to call on them as well.**

I am proud of the partnership between my office and the business community on another education initiative – “Computers in the Classroom.”

In my first state of the state address, I set the goal of placing an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom, kindergarten through 12th grade, in the state by the end of 2002.

We are now on track to make Mississippi the first state in the nation to reach this goal.

In the next few weeks, we will be more than halfway there, as we finish placing over 6,325 computers in classrooms.

I want to thank you, the members of the MEC, for your support of this effort.

With the help of the Public Education Forum and the M. B. Swayze Education Foundation, we are raising money in the business community to make this program a reality.

I am excited about what's happening in Mississippi. I feel good about the direction we're taking, and so should you.

Nobody ever said the work we're doing would be easy. We knew going in there would be challenges. But, we've met those challenges head-on.

We've been proactive instead of reactive, and we're seeing the results in new investments in Mississippi.

**I am proud of what we have done, and
what we will do, together. I look forward
to building on our partnership and
shaping a brighter future for the people
of Mississippi.**

Thank you.

