

*Remarks for the  
Mississippi Healthcare Association Rallies  
August 15, 2002*

Good afternoon – it is great to be here with you, and I appreciate Rica Lewis Payton being here with me today. She is doing great work for the health care system in our state, and we appreciate her dedication.

They say the measure of a society is how we treat our children and our elderly. You've heard of my commitment to improving education for the children of Mississippi. I'm here today to remind you of my commitment to the senior citizens of our state – those of you who have given so much to our society.

I want to thank you for those contributions – through your hard work and commitment to building Mississippi, you have made this a better place to live and work.

Now, it is time for us to be committed to you – and that’s a commitment we take seriously.

It’s been more than a year now since I unveiled a plan to make the Medicaid program in Mississippi the most effective and efficient program in the country. We’ve worked hard to make sure that you had access to quality health care – no matter where you live, no matter how you were covered, no matter what.

Last spring, we fought hard to ensure Medicaid was adequately funded, so we could continue to provide critical services like nursing homes. We fought hard for the right to restructure the program. We fought hard to make sure the 650,000 Mississippians who depend on Medicaid could count on the program to be there for them.

80 percent of the nursing home residents in Mississippi rely on Medicaid. We fought hard for them, and we fought for their families – their sons and daughters, their grandchildren – who want the very best when it comes to health care.

As part of the fight, I visited nursing homes around the state, to meet with you face-to-face about this issue. I wanted to talk with you and hear from you about Medicaid and its impact on your health care.

The time we spent together was valuable – and helped us achieve our common goals.

I asked for a reasonable appropriation for Medicaid and the flexibility to manage the program in the best interests of those who depended on it. I knew we needed to find some common ground – and in the end, we did just that.

Assurance was given by the legislative leadership that funding would be there for the program.

And, we got the flexibility we needed. Rica Lewis Payton and her staff have been working to identify areas where they can make Medicaid work better. I want to brag again on Rica – she is a tireless worker for you, she has an answer for every question about Medicaid, and she truly cares about making this program work.

In May, I appointed a Health Care Commission made up of more than 30 doctors, pharmacists, and health care professionals – including some from the nursing home industry – from around the state. Their charge was simple – find the best way to make Medicaid work for the people of Mississippi.

After weeks of hard work, the commission presented a detailed report, and we're using our flexibility to implement changes and help meet your health care needs.

And, in the most recent special session held July 30, we were able to remove another restriction on the Medicaid program – a provision that limited spending in the program and would have affected the delivery of health care to you.

Our work to strengthen the health care system in Mississippi is making progress, but our work isn't done yet. We're going to keep up the energy, we're going to keep up the commitment, and we're going to keep up the pressure to make Mississippi's Medicaid program the best in the country.

Thank you for what you've done for Mississippi.  
You've worked hard for us – and I'm proud to  
work for you.