

*Remarks for the  
Monroe County Chamber of Commerce Annual Banquet  
January 18, 2002*

Good evening, and thank you, David. I appreciate the invitation to be a part of tonight's annual banquet.

*(tell story of traveling to DC; lawyer on plane who didn't believe you were governor)*

Whether it's one lawyer on a plane or one thousand people who read an article in The New York Times about what we're doing here, people are learning that Mississippi is changing.

They're learning that we're doing business in a different way.

They're learning that we're being recognized for our forward-thinking approaches to education.

We're doing great work for the state of Mississippi. Great things are happening in our state. We are capturing the attention of the world outside our borders because of the exciting things we've got going on, and I'm sure you will agree that it's good for Mississippi to be recognized for being on the cutting edge.

We're on the cutting edge in education.

We've got 405 teachers across this state who have 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.

We are also on track to be the first state in the nation to place an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom, a goal we'll meet by the end of next year.

We've put together a unique partnership between the public and private sectors, a partnership that has raised money and solicited used computers for the classrooms.

We are going to ensure that our children are ready to compete in the economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an economy that will be global, borderless and wireless.

Now, combine this with our commitment to pay teachers like the professionals they are. In July, we made this commitment law and the rest of the nation stood up and took notice.

The day after the special session on teacher pay, the New York Times ran an editorial piece commenting that “Mississippi had been able to put together the kind of package that continued to elude New York.”

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

You know and I know that education is the foundation for all of this work. We're building a strong foundation.

And on that foundation, we're going to build an economy like our state has never seen.

Last year, we landed the top economic development project in the nation, and we did it like no one else.

It's a process that normally takes 18 months. From our first contact with Nissan to the day we announced – 5 months.

We did it because we were ambitious, we were aggressive, and we wanted the project more than anyone else.

That's the way we're handling economic development now. With the Advantage Mississippi Initiative, we are making great progress in recruiting new businesses and retaining existing ones.

A great deal of work has been done to put more Mississippians in good jobs.



And while we have had successes during a recession, the current condition of the national economy has also caused some setbacks.

We've seen plants close and jobs eliminated. It's a difficult situation for our economy and our people. In some cases, plants are closing to relocate to areas where they can better control costs through a less expensive labor pool.

In other cases, such as the recent closing of the Burlington plant, the jobs are simply gone because of the economic situation.

The Burlington closure means the loss of 850 jobs for the people of Stonewall and Clarke County, as well as the elimination of over 1,000 jobs in Mexico. Job loss isn't happening just because companies want to move somewhere less expensive.

Plant closings present difficult situations for our communities. When they happen, I send out our Rapid Response Team.

This team, made up of representatives of local and state agencies, was created to react to a plant closing in the same way other emergency agencies react to a natural disaster or industrial accident. The team exists to make a difference and to make it as soon as possible.

The focus of their work is on working with employees to ease the transition by providing resources and services to meet specific needs, such as unemployment insurance, financial counseling, job search and job placement, and training.

Employers receive assistance in easing the pain of the lay-off process, transition planning, meeting federal requirements, and maintaining their corporate image.

The bottom line is this – now is not the time to back off our investments and efforts to bring jobs to Mississippi.

Our potential stretches to every corner of Mississippi – from the Gulf Coast to Monroe County – and it stretches to every Mississippian. It cannot and will not be wasted.

Finally, to make the most of that potential, we must have a healthy Mississippi. It's tough to do your best at work or in school if your health isn't good. We recognize that a healthy child goes to school ready to learn, and a healthy adult goes to a job ready to work.

Right now, we lead the nation in heart disease and diabetes. We're second in overweight population, hospitalizations and emergency room visits. We're fifth in uninsured population.

These are numbers we can change, and we're going to do it.

I've unveiled a proposal to accomplish this goal. Through it, we're going to attack heart disease before it leads to strokes or death.

We're going to attack diabetes before it leads to amputation or blindness.

Health care professionals around the state have seen this proposal and are backing it.

They are the ones on the front lines; they see the cases of diabetes and heart disease.

I'm glad to have their support in helping our people.

Think about the difference we could make in peoples' lives by acting now – a difference between life and death, a difference between continuing to work and earning disability.

Believing “I must do something” solves more problems than saying “something must be done.”

One thing you won't hear me say is, "something must be done." We live in America's state of promise. It is a promise too long unkept. That has changed.

Mississippi is doing more and doing it better than ever before. The momentum is there, and it is growing.

I am excited about the goals we've set for ourselves. I know you share those goals with me, and I look forward to reaching them.

Thank you.



