

*Remarks to the
Mississippi Association of Supervisors
2001 Annual Convention
June 6, 2001*

Thank you for the opportunity to be with you this morning. I appreciate the chance to speak to you about the good work being done in Mississippi.

This past year has seen its share of highs and lows.

In my work with the Legislature, we've focused our efforts on making things happen, and last summer that partnership gave 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 – estimates are up to 26,000 – 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 last week by the Mississippi Economic Council, 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. I look forward to working with you on implementing these recommendations.

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.

I've spoke about the foundation for economic development and how it starts with education.

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

One of the questions asked in the MEC's
"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."

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.

I let the Legislature know their revenue estimates were too high. Unfortunately, my warnings are now coming to pass.

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.

State revenue collections for the month of May were \$41 million below estimates.

State agencies will begin the next fiscal year on July 1 with plans to spend only 45% of their budget for the first half of the year.

I am confident that change is coming in our economy. It won't happen overnight, but when it does, Mississippi will be ready because of the actions we are taking today.

I am proud of 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 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.

