

*Remarks to the
Mississippi Institute of School Health, Wellness and Safety
June 6, 2001*

Thank you for the invitation to be here this morning. I am always pleased to have a chance to talk with professionals such as you about two of my favorite subjects – children and education.

It's been said that “the potential possibilities of any child are the most intriguing and stimulating in all creation.”

That statement illustrates well why the welfare of the children of our state is at the core of everything we do. From education to economic development, we are always working with the future in mind.

And you are on the front lines of that effort. You are there everyday, influencing our children and helping to direct their lives in a positive direction.

That is a job description we share, and share proudly.

We shoulder a big responsibility with our children – not just our own, but all children. As adults, as teachers, as role models, we must set the example for them.

Whenever I have the opportunity, I talk about the importance of the work we are doing and the need to invest in the future of those we serve.

Everything we do, from the classroom to the Capitol, affects their lives. Nutrition programs, literacy programs, safe transportation, health services in the schools – there are so many areas in which the work we do has an impact on daily life.

At the beginning of my term, we began to focus on improved health access for our children. All too often, working parents simply have not been able to afford adequate health insurance for their children.

That has all changed.

Over the past year, we have been getting the word out about the Children's Health Insurance Program.

When I took office, only about 500 children were enrolled in this program. Today, I am proud to say that more than 41,000 children have access to quality health care, and we will continue to work to increase that number.

A moment ago, I mentioned the education and economic development. These two areas are key points in the success of our children, and we are making progress.

When we invest in education, we invest in our children. Every dollar spent in education – whether it is for textbooks, teachers, or school-based health programs – is a symbol of our belief in, and support for, our children.

That is why I am continuing to call on our legislators to do the right thing for our teachers. It is time to support them with a pay raise, and the first step in that effort is the removal of the five percent provision for revenue growth.

We cannot continue to play politics with the future of our children.

We are putting the building blocks in place to give our children the technological skills they will need in the workplace of the 21st century.

For them to have a chance to compete and succeed in this new workplace, they must be comfortable with the technology that so many of us still struggle with.

That is why we are going to make Mississippi the first state in the nation to have an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom.

By late next year, we will reach this goal. Every class in every school, grades K through 12, will have access to the world through the touch of a key and the click of a mouse.

Behind all of our efforts to provide our children with the tools to succeed, we must also stay focused on their basic health.

Children cannot learn if they are hungry or sick. They cannot focus on gaining the skills they will need in life if they cannot focus on the blackboard.

Providing our children with proper health care – from the home to the school – is a key point in our success.

As I mentioned before, the Children's Health Insurance Program has taken on tens of thousands of new children – but so many more remain uninsured.

In the end, we cannot forget the basics that formulate our everyday lives.

We cannot forget the basic skills of reading writing, and arithmetic.

We cannot forget the basic practices of good health and hygiene measures.

We cannot forget the basic lessons of learning respect for authority, of saying “yes, ma’am” and “no, ma’am;” “yes, sir” and “no, sir.”

We cannot forget the foundation of our society and our nation, a foundation based in four simple words – “In God We Trust.”

A gentleman named Buckminster Fuller once wrote that “every child is born a genius.”

That is so true. Every child in Mississippi is born with the capacity to succeed. Every child in Mississippi is born with a God-given talent.

Every child in Mississippi is born with a dedication from you and me to see that he or she has the tools to build a future.

Thank you for the work you do. Thank you for your commitment to the children of our state.

God bless the children.

