

*Remarks to the
Mississippi Partners in Education Awards Luncheon
October 21, 2002*

This is a great day for education. I'm always ready to talk about what we're doing and where we're going with education in Mississippi, and today I have plenty of opportunities.

I spoke this morning to the Mississippi Association of Colleges meeting up at Ole Miss – 200 of the leaders in higher education in our state, all ready to take these young people here today under their wing. And later this afternoon, I will help celebrate the 50th anniversary of Joiner Elementary School in Tupelo.

(story of Jordan / 15-point buck / priorities)

I will tell you without hesitation that education is my number one priority for Mississippi, and I know each of you here today – teachers, students, business leaders – share that priority with me.

I want to quickly speak to issues that affect each of you where you are today.

To the teachers, I applaud the work you do at the front of the classroom each day. You are on the front lines of the growth of this state – and your work is carried with your students for a lifetime.

That is why we have worked hard to make sure you are paid as the professionals you are.

Teacher pay is on the rise because we made it a priority.

To the students, we are going to make sure you have the tools you need to succeed. We are nearing the end of our effort to place an Internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom, so you will be able to learn, research, and build the skills you will need to compete in the economy of the 21st century.

We're doing this because it's a priority for us.

And to the business leaders here today, we're investing in these teachers and students because in the long run, quality education means quality jobs. We want these students to stay in Mississippi and work with you to grow our state.

Again, it's a priority.

I don't believe in "unattainable goals." I believe in "unprecedented goals." I want to see our state, and our region, set the bar high and not be satisfied with where we are.

One of the great ways we are doing this is through the partnerships we celebrate and honor here today. The blending of schools and businesses is a great match.

It's been said that "without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community." The sense of community in this room, in this state, is strong because there are people and businesses that care deeply about our collective future.

There is an old Chinese proverb that says, "learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere."

What our children learn today – in the technology of a computer in the classroom, in the arts, in language, in the most rudimentary lessons – will stay with them forever.

And those of you who lead them in this process – teachers and business leaders alike – will stay with them as well.

You are the ones who help light the path ahead for our children, who help point out the stumbling blocks and the stepping stones.

In Mississippi, we've chosen a path covered with challenges and surrounded by opportunity. How we walk that path and use our resources will determine our success for generations to come.

I feel good about what the children of those generations will say about our work.

Thank you.