

*Remarks for the  
Opening of the Mississippi Women's Conference  
March 17, 2003*

Good morning. It is good to be here with you this morning, and almost a year to the day since we met together at last year's conference. As always, I am proud to have the opportunity to welcome you to this conference and all it has to offer.

You've got a lot ahead of you today. Three workshop sessions covering 25 different topics – and I thought my days were busy.

Each one of those topics has something to offer to you, but I want to take a minute to thank you for something you offer to Mississippi – your commitment and dedication to improving not only yourself but the world around you.

At lunch, you'll have the opportunity to hear from one of the truly great women of our time, Myrlie Evers-Williams. She is a courageous and wonderful woman, and has set a standard for leadership for all people to follow.

It's an exciting time here in Mississippi. We're moving faster than ever before, and instead of us chasing other states, now we see them doing more of the chasing. You can help us widen the gap.

We're making progress in education, progress that is getting national attention. We're raising teacher pay from 49<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> in the nation. Our test scores are up, and the Princeton Review has said we have the 6<sup>th</sup> best testing system in the nation.

We have accountability standards in place stronger than those called for in the "No Child Left Behind" legislation. We're 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation in number of nationally board certified teachers. Every one of our 32,354 public school classrooms has an Internet-accessible computer – and we're the first state in the nation to accomplish this.

We're also the first state in the nation to fully fund education, and fund it before anything else.

We are investing in education because it's the foundation for our growth in economic development. I want you to keep that in mind today when you're discussing topics like "Wealth Building," "Women's Business Ownership," "Show Me the Money," and "Closing the Digital Divide."

I'll be with you this afternoon, and I'm going to talk about what we can do with a good foundation in education – about how we mean business about education, and how education builds business.

I look forward to seeing you again this afternoon.