

*Remarks for the  
Neshoba County Fair  
July 26, 2001*

We hear a lot today about what's happening in Mississippi, and there are great things being done for the people of Mississippi. There's no doubt about that.

I cannot stand here without taking a moment to talk about this past Monday, when we made history. On that day, we made good on our commitment to those who do so much to build our future.

On that day, we sent a loud and clear message that Mississippi is doing what it

takes to succeed by ensuring we will have the best and brightest teachers for our children.

We have done what has been talked about for years – we have put into place a teacher pay raise that will lift us to the southeastern average.

I've said it before, and you'll hear me say it again, that we have to set priorities, and there is no greater priority than education.

By removing the five percent provision in the special session, we have laid the

foundation on which we will build our success and fulfill the promise of our potential.

That is great news for all of us. But, we can't sit back and expect all good things to come to us. We have to keep going, and that's what I am here to do.

I know, and you know, that the future for our state is limited only by our imaginations. There are obstacles to overcome, to be sure, and I won't build our future by giving you false information and false hope.

What I will do is build our future on the promise and the hope that is Mississippi.

What I will do is continue to create opportunities and make the most of them.

A great example of this is the Nissan plant that, as I speak, is rising out of the ground outside of Canton. The total investment in this project is pushing \$1 billion and will result in more than 4,000 new jobs for the people of Mississippi.

And that's before you count the investments and jobs that will come from suppliers for the plant.

Just last week, we announced the first round of suppliers. Their move to Mississippi, along with two already located here, means an investment of more than \$140 million and over 1,000 jobs.

We brought the Nissan plant – one of the top ten economic development projects in the country – to Mississippi because we created our own opportunity.

The Advantage Mississippi initiative, passed last year, is one of the most aggressive economic development packages in the nation – and here’s just one illustration of how well it worked.

The normal time it takes to bring a project of this size to reality is twelve to eighteen months. Do you know how long it took us to land the Nissan project, from the first conversation to the announcement of the deal?

Five months.

What a great example of creating opportunity.

Now, I have another plan for the people of Mississippi – one that will serve to again create our own opportunity. And we have the talent, the resources, and the ability to implement that plan.

A few years ago, Mississippi began receiving payments from the tobacco settlement. These annual payments, based on a percentage of revenue received by the tobacco companies, are placed into a trust fund and invested by an appointed board.

Once the money is in the trust fund, it can't be touched.

Right now, the total amount of money in that trust fund stands at \$609 million – and it's growing every year.

As I said, once the money is in the trust fund, we can't touch it. But I ask you, how much is enough in that fund? There is no end to the annual payments – they will continue for as long as the tobacco companies are in business.

Here's the question...



Do we continue to take these payments and put them into a fund that will grow bigger and bigger, and just sit there?

I have a way to use the money funneled to the state, and use it to help build our future of promise and hope.

When we receive those annual payments, I want to use them for health related expenses, just as the settlement says – but I can grow that money and make the most of it.

By diverting the money into Medicaid before it goes into the trust fund, we can

maximize federal dollars. For every dollar we put into Medicaid, we get four dollars back from the federal government.

I want to take a portion of those annual payments – this year's payment is estimated at \$205 million – and direct it toward Medicaid, and by doing so free up general funds that we can use to bring about dramatic change.

Out of a budget of \$3.5 billion, I believe we can find the funds we need to make some exciting things happen. It's just a matter, as I have said, of setting priorities.

By thinking outside the box, by creating our own opportunities, we can make a difference in your lives.

The bottom line is this...

We have passed the historic teacher pay raise. This is how we pay for it.

I want to address the needs of our state employees, giving them a much-needed pay raise and helping them take home more money by covering their deductible on health insurance. This is how we pay for it.

I want to increase funding for our community colleges and universities, so we can keep our talented faculties in the state and attract more. This is how we pay for it.

I have spoken with the legislative leadership and the attorney general about this plan, and I have their support.

The promise and the potential of our great state cannot and should not be limited. Only by taking bold steps to create positive change can we hope to make a difference.

I refuse to believe that we are not capable of doing great things.

I refuse to listen to those who say, “it can’t be done.”

If I did, we wouldn’t have a law in place right now designed to lift our average teacher pay from 49<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> in the nation.

I am committed to doing the very best job I can for the people of our great state. I believe – I know – that by making the most of our resources, Mississippi will realize the promise, the hope, that is ours for the taking.

