

*Remarks for the  
Pathfinders Labor Study Press Conference  
April 25, 2002*

Good morning. When I made my State of the State address in January, I outlined four priorities for Mississippi – jobs, education, health care and public safety.

These are all inter-related and relevant issues. Each one affects the other in different ways.

During my 40-minute speech, I spent about 17 minutes talking about jobs. Why?

Because bringing quality, high-paying jobs to the people of Mississippi is part of the foundation on which we build our education, health care and public safety.

Mississippi is growing like never before. In the past two years, during a national recession, we've created more than 21,000 jobs and attracted over \$6 billion in new investments.

*Site Selection* magazine, one of the top trade publications in the economic development industry, ranked Mississippi as one of the top ten states for its “Governor’s Cup” award.

The perception of Mississippi is changing. The old question of “Why Mississippi?” doesn’t get asked anymore. The question now is, “Why *not* Mississippi?”

And the answer is, because we can compete with anyone, anytime, anywhere.

That's why today's report is so important. This report on the central Mississippi workforce is proof positive that we have the ability to support large economic development projects.

It outlines in tremendous detail the labor pool in central Mississippi, and offers evidence that our efforts to attract large employers have not been wasted.

It is also further evidence that a national recession is not the time to cut our investment in economic development. I'm pleased the Legislature moved to follow the budget recommendations we made for the Mississippi Development Authority.

By adequately funding the MDA and all the programs that fall under it, especially workforce training, we are going to retain the competitive edge that we've already demonstrated to the rest of the world.

I am absolutely committed to bringing quality jobs to the people of Mississippi. This study shows we have the people here to fill those jobs.

For the 15 county area surveyed for this report, the statistics show that, in addition to the unemployed, a new employer would be able to hire from a pool of more than 68,000 *underemployed* workers.

And, the report points out something that I've always known and believed in: "In respect to workforce quality, Central Mississippi has an exceptionally strong asset."

Mississippi has the promise, the potential and the people – and we're not going to let them sit idle. We are going to work day and night to create jobs for our people. We're going to build on the \$6 billion in investment and 21,000 new jobs.

Mississippi and her people deserve no less.