

Good evening! Thank you for that warm welcome and for your invitation to be here. It is a pleasure to meet with you tonight to briefly discuss Governor Ronnie Musgrove's educational initiatives. Governor Musgrove regrets that he could not join us, however, he had prior commitments. He appreciates organizations such as Phi Beta Sigma, with its principles of brotherhood, scholarship and service and with education as one of its three national programs. For it is through education and through service to our fellow man that we all grow.

The Governor is passionate about and dedicated to setting unprecedented goals and achieving unparalleled progress in Mississippi's public education system. Our state and our children deserve progress. Mississippi's citizens demand results. Together we can achieve our goals. The fact that we are meeting tonight in this facility, its construction funded through the 1997 Adequate Education Act, is a testimony to the accomplishments and goals that our state can reach when we work together to provide for all Mississippians.

Tonight I'd like to give you an overview of three educational initiatives supported by Governor Musgrove during this year's legislative session, which will conclude next week. These three initiatives are placing computers in every classroom, requiring

appointed school superintendents and raising the average public school teacher's pay to that of the southeastern average.

During his gubernatorial campaign, Governor Musgrove dared Mississippians to imagine computers at the fingertips of every Mississippi school child. With the advancements in technology, the world is literally at our fingertips with the use of the Internet. We must take the steps necessary to ensure that every schoolchild in Mississippi's public schools has the opportunity to take advantage of and to learn from the resources offered by the Internet. In addition, it is almost required in today's workforce that you have some computer skills. To provide a public education to the children of our state which does not provide them with the experience and skills associated with working on computers would be an injustice to them. We are not here to provide injustices, we are here to provide effective educations to our children, educations which will stimulate them, require them to learn and which will prepare them for college, for the workforce and for the world outside the school walls.

Governor Musgrove created the Governor's Task Force for Classroom Technology via Executive Order 831 in order to accomplish

his goal of placing an Internet-accessible computer in every public elementary and secondary classroom in Mississippi by the end of 2002. The task force is comprised of representatives of teachers, school administrators, state agencies, private foundations and interests, and professional associations.

The task force is charged with supporting legislative initiatives to fund the project, raising private sector awareness and financial support of the project, and executing the initiative. Through its planning, the task force must determine the most cost-effective method for providing Internet accessible connections to every classroom, identify financial resources for the project, and complete an inventory of classroom computers. The task force will also be responsible for raising private sector funds to match public dollars appropriated by the Legislature.

How important is the leadership of every school to the students' success? How important is it to make sure that politics doesn't bleed into the classroom? The Legislature did not share the Governor's support during this session for requiring that all school superintendents be appointed. Senate Bills 2149, 2277 and 2851 all provided for the appointment of all superintendents effective January 1, 2004; however,

all three of these bills died in committee. Governor Musgrove supports appointed superintendents in order to ensure qualified and trained administrators in our schools. Some have argued that this denies the electorate's vote to be heard. This is why Governor Musgrove believes that we can elect our school boards and appoint our superintendents. As you know, many school districts have a system of an appointed superintendent and appointed board members which works fine. However, in order to ensure that every district's day-to-day operations are managed by an effective administrator, the Governor will continue to support this initiative.

I'm going to stop here and ask for your participation. We're all going to take a test. We're talking about education remember, so a test is not unusual. This test doesn't require a pencil or paper and you won't be graded. This is just a simple test to make us stop and think. I'll ask you a few questions and I'd like you to think of your answers - you can grade yourself if you would like. Here we go:

- 1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world.**
- 2. Name the last five Heisman winners.**
- 3. Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest.**

4. Name the last five Academy Award winners for best actor and best actress.

How did you do? The point is, none of us remember the headliners of yesterday. These are no second-rate achievers. They are the best in their fields. But applause dies, awards tarnish, and with today's stock market, we can have a new round of wealthiest people tomorrow.

Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one:

1. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special. Were any of them teachers?
2. List a few of the teachers who aided your journey through school.
3. Name your first-grade teacher.

Easier? The lesson? The people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most money, the most awards or the flashiest lifestyle. They are the ones that care. For many of us, such a caring relationship is nurtured and grows in our classrooms.

Too often, today's society expects our teachers to also be mothers and fathers or the one who instills discipline in our children. We

sometimes blame our teachers for the violence in our schools. But these areas are not teachers' responsibilities. Teachers are there to teach and that is what we must support them in doing and what we must pay them for doing.

Mississippi cannot be expected to attract and retain qualified teachers to educate our children if we are not willing to pay a competitive salary for such qualified teachers. Mississippi's 1998-1999 classroom teachers' average salary was \$29,500, while the southeastern average was \$35,817.

In conjunction with the Senate and the House of Representatives, we have taken great steps in just the last two weeks to accomplish our goal of raising Mississippi's average salary to that of the southeastern states. In fact, Governor Musgrove will sign HB 1134 into law this Monday, May 1. This legislation, which includes some accountability provisions for teachers, administrators and schools, provides for a \$337.9 million plan to raise Mississippi teacher pay to the Southeastern average by the 2005-2006 school year. Mississippi's teachers will start seeing larger paychecks during the 2001-2002 school year. Mississippi's teacher pay average will go from the present \$31,913 to the predicted

Southeastern average of approximately \$41,00 by the 2005-2006 school year. In case you're doing the math in your head, that is about a 30% raise.

I must point out that the bill signed by the Governor provides that teachers only receive these raises each year if the state economy grows by at least five percent a year. Governor Musgrove will work with the legislature next year to remove this growth provision before the first raise would take effect so that our teachers will know that we are committed to pay raises and that we are committed to putting education first in Mississippi.

This wasn't a choice for the future of our state, it was a necessity. We must pay our teachers competitive salaries so that we don't lose experienced educators to neighboring states and so that top students are encouraged to go into teaching. We must make the commitment to improving and building upon Mississippi's public education system so that we may develop the workforce that will attract new business and economic growth to our state.

Recognizing teachers' accomplishments and their qualifications is already paying off for Mississippi teachers and students. Rewarding

teachers for meeting National Board Certification standards has resulted in Mississippi ranking third this year among all 50 states for the number of teachers achieving this prestigious certification. Mississippi now ranks third in the nation overall for the number of National Board Certified teachers. Our teachers are committed to excellence and Governor Musgrove's administration is committed to supporting public education in Mississippi.

As the Governor stated in his inaugural address, the opportunity belongs to us to forget excuses and focus instead on solutions. I hope that I have shared with you tonight, a few of the Governor's solutions. It is not enough, however, to just say these words. We must take calculated risks when the rewards are great. Our state stands on a rock-solid foundation of faith. We build with the strength of the men and women who have come and gone, who dared to look ahead and to think about us. We must do that for our children and for their children. We must look to the future of promise and potential that together we can seize if we will not turn a blind eye to our challenges. For it is through challenges and the experiences that they provide, that we grow.

**Thank you again for your invitation. On behalf of the Governor,
please allow me to offer best wishes for Phi Beta Sigma's continued
success and for its continued dedication to service.**