

*Remarks for the
Port Symposium
November 2, 2001*

Thank you, Michael, for the invitation to be here with you today. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the great things happening in Mississippi, and there's a lot for us to proud of.

The definition of a leader is a “visionary with a poorly developed sense of fear and no concept of the odds against him or her.”

That's what we need in Mississippi today – visionaries who pay no attention to the odds and have work hard to realize their goals.

Not listening to the naysayers, and focusing on getting things done – that's what we've been doing here in Mississippi lately.

Let me begin with a few words about where we are as a state and a nation, in light of the events of recent weeks. Our world has changed forever, and we have to adapt to a new way of thinking.

We aren't taking things for granted like we've done in the past, and we're a little more cautious about certain things.

Trade has been affected and we are dealing with the uncertainties of the threats of biological war and a ground war with no foreseeable end.

But, we're also a little more proud of our great nation, as seen by the flags that fly everywhere you go. And, we're a little more concerned about our fellow man, and what can be done to help those in need.

I am proud of the work that this state has done since September 11 in responding to the changes. We answered the call of President Bush when he asked for National Guard support at the airports, and we are answering the call of the President right now as National Guard personnel are brought up for active duty.

When America calls on Mississippi, we answer quickly.

We have also taken the lead in responding to the fear of anthrax exposure, following the incidents in Florida, New York and Washington. Every state agency with a role to play in this area, from the health department to the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, got together Monday afternoon.

After eight hours of meeting, they had put together a protocol for state employees to follow for handling anthrax threats.

Information from the health department has been distributed to the media for the people. The attorney general has made it known that all threats will be investigated and, if necessary, prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Every state agency pulled together and put a plan in place. In fact, the FBI agent who attended that meeting complimented us, saying the Mississippi was taking the lead in getting its agencies lined up and working together.

I'm proud of that work, and you should be too.

Outside of the threats that have come into our lives as a people and nation in recent weeks, we are still doing great things here at home.

We've made great strides in educating our children. We've made a commitment to paying our teachers like the professionals they are, a commitment that will raise our state from 49th to 19th in the nation over the next few years in terms of average teacher salary.

I'm proud that Mississippi is being seen as a leader in education by other states. In fact, the day after the July special session, The New York Times published an editorial praising the work we had done together.

Mississippi, according to The Times, had – with its scarce resources and small economy – put together the type of package that continues to elude New York.

I don't know about you, but I think it's about time Mississippi set the standard in educational progress in our country. And, we're doing it in other areas of education as well.

Through a unique partnership between the state and private industry, we are working toward our goal of placing an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state. By the end of next year, Mississippi will be the first state in the nation to reach this milestone.

The “Computers in the Classroom” initiative, working with the new commitment to teachers, will prepare the children of this great region and the entire state for the marketplace of the 21st century – a marketplace that will be borderless, wireless and global.

That is how we’re meeting the promise of the Gulf Coast and the entire state of Mississippi.

We are looking at new ways to address the health care issues affecting so many Mississippians, and especially those in the more rural areas. For too long, we have led the country in those areas where we want to be in last place – first in diabetes, first in heart disease, first in population underserved by primary care physicians.

Now, we have an opportunity to change those rankings; we don't have to continue leading in the "worst firsts."

Here's how we do it: we use a portion of the historic tobacco settlement to make a dramatic difference in the lives of the people of this state. We can remove the obstacles that have held us back, and commit ourselves to a better future.

Let's take a portion of those dollars and use them for what they were earmarked for – the health care needs of the people of Mississippi.

Let's use those dollars to maximize available federal matching funds. In other words, give us a quarter and we'll turn it into a dollar.

Let's then use those dollars for things like expanding screenings for cancer and heart disease; putting more nurses in schools to help our children; and easing the health insurance burden on state and school employees by eliminating deductibles for doctor visits and reducing dependent costs.

Let's expand and improve screenings and treatment for breast and cervical cancer.

Let's make it easier for working parents to provide for the health care needs of themselves and their children.

You've heard the phrase, "pay me now or pay me later." That's what we're talking about here. We can spend money on the front end on preventive measures, or we can spend more money later on dealing with the effects of untreated illnesses.

I want us to be proactive instead of reactive.

I want us to continue setting standards for other states to emulate. I want us to build a healthier economy, a healthier population, and a healthier educational system – and you are the ones to help make it happen.

I was at the Tennessee-LSU game in Knoxville a few weeks ago, and my son and I were looking out over the crowd. He commented to me that there must be 10,000 different ways to wear orange.

I thought more about that statement in the following days, and it struck me that there must be 10,000 different ways for us to do business in Mississippi.

What does that mean?

It means Mississippi needs to be prepared for whatever may come in its economy. We need to be ready to create our own opportunities. We have to think outside the box.

Here's how we're doing it.

In partnership with the Appalachian Regional Commission, we are expanding internet access in rural areas around the state. By giving the people in these areas this access, we are opening up the world to them.

In addition to this access come efforts to provide education and job training for a workforce eager to participate in the new economy. We are providing the tools for them to succeed.

And by providing access to the internet and improving the technological infrastructure in these rural areas, we are building a foundation for economic development.

The face of the Mississippi economy is definitely changing. We are attracting jobs that demand skills, a strong infrastructure, and a change in the ways we do business.

We aren't trying to attract jobs. We are attracting them. And it's because we are recognizing the role of technology in the new economy and putting it to work.

Will Rogers once said, “even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.”

Mississippi’s on the right track, and we’re moving fast. We will compete with anyone, anytime, anywhere. That’s a promise.

We have opened trade offices around the world. We are working hard to attract new business to Mississippi, and we’re doing it every day in Santiago, Chile; London; Yokohama, Japan; and Singapore.

With the Advantage Mississippi Initiative passed last year, we established the Mississippi World Trade Center to further position the state in the global economic arena.

With this in place, we will have an effective connection with the rest of the world

One of the major selling points for our state is the Mississippi Gulf Coast. With its ports and access to some of the fastest-growing areas in the country, Mississippi is well-situated to build its trade with countries around the world.

Mississippi is America's state of promise.
We keep our promises.

Thank you for the invitation to be here today.

