

*Remarks for the
Public Education Forum Annual Meeting
November 15, 2001*

Good afternoon. A few weeks ago, I went with my kids to the Tennessee-LSU football game in Knoxville. Looking out over the crowd, my son commented to me that there must be 10,000 different ways to wear orange.

I laughed at the time, but as I thought more about it, the more I appreciated his insight. It made me realize that there are 10,000 different ways for us to do business in today's economy.

That's what we're doing in Mississippi. We're thinking outside the box. We're creating our own opportunities. We're planning for a future built on the successes we achieve today.

There are exciting things happening in Mississippi today, and I'm proud of the role the Public Education Forum has played in making these things happen.

At the forefront of your work has been what I believe is one of the most exciting education projects in the nation right now – the Computers in the Classroom initiative.

This is one of the most exciting public-private partnerships around today. Through a marriage of government and business, we are making a difference in the lives of our children and building a strong foundation for their future.

Imagine, an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state.

Imagine, every child – from the most rural town to the most urban city – having access to the information and technology of the internet.

Growing up in a rural area, I could never have imagined anything like this in my school. For many children today, computers are a part of everyday life; for others, they are still a dream.

We're going to make them a reality for our children.

We're able to do this because of the work of many people and organizations, with the Public Education Forum helping lead the way. The Forum's underwriting of the administrative costs of this project ensures that every dollar raised goes toward a computer in a classroom.

To date, over \$4 million in cash and computers has been donated. This year, we will place 6,325 internet-accessible computers into public school classrooms.

By the end of next year, we will have 12,602 computers in place – and Mississippi will be the first state in the nation to reach this goal.

Mississippi will be the first. Doesn't that sound great?

The support of the business community has been tremendous, through donations of both money and computers. Our keynote speaker today, Edward Rust, has been a leader in this support.

Thank you, Edward, for being a believer in what Mississippi's students can achieve, and for helping make it happen. We are grateful for the support of State Farm, and look forward to exciting results.

Through this initiative, our kids will be ready to compete in an economy that will be borderless, wireless and global – and that will make the difference.

We're exploring the 10,000 different ways to do business, and we're not going to slow down any time soon.

We will keep the momentum going with the support of the Public Education Forum, and I specifically want to recognize Blake Wilson and Peggy Howard for their hard work on this project. With their help, we are on track to meet our goal.

I look forward to speaking with you again this afternoon. Thank you.