

*Remarks for the
“Public Health Week” Press Conference
April 2, 2002*

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

In recent days and weeks, a great deal of attention has been directed at health care. Today, we focus that attention a little more with the proclamation of this week as “Mississippi Public Health Week.”

Public health and the State Department of Health are the first line of defense against infectious disease and the problems of the “worst firsts,” as Dr. Thompson has called them, of heart disease, diabetes and obesity.

With the threat of bioterrorism, we as a state have a new sense of importance for our public health, and the need to strengthen our health infrastructure to address the unpredictable, the unprecedented and the unthinkable.

Mississippi's public health workers help keep drinking water clean, milk products safe, restaurants sanitary, and the people immunized against deadly diseases. Local health departments, in cooperation with the State Department of Health, keep a vigilant eye on illnesses in the state – where they occur, how they are spread, and the action needed to control them.

Just look at what's been done with tuberculosis. Over 20 years ago, we had the second highest TB rate in the nation; today, we're below the national average.

That's good news for the people of Mississippi, and it's a strong indication of how our public health workers are making a difference.

The health care needs of the people of Mississippi are many and varied. No one plan can address them all, but we are getting close. The key now is to provide the funding and the flexibility to get us where we need to be.

Now, more than ever, the public health community and its partners are working on strategies to strengthen the public health infrastructure – and they need our support.

That’s why I’m proud to declare the week of April 1-7 as “Mississippi Public Health Week.” The health of our people affects the health of our economy, the health of our schools, and the health of our security. Let’s work together to build a healthy Mississippi.

Thank you.