

STATE OF THE STATE
Governor Ronnie Musgrove
January 4, 2001
Draft (January 3, 2000)

Lieutenant Governor Tuck. Speaker Ford. Members of the Mississippi Legislature. Chief Justice Pittman and Justices of the Supreme Court. Elected Officials. Agency Directors. Distinguished Guests. My fellow Mississippians.

Just one year ago to the date, I became the 62nd Governor of the State of Mississippi. It has been an exciting year. It has been a successful year!

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Ladies and gentlemen of the Mississippi Legislature, we have begun a new century. I am pleased to be standing before you, as your Governor, as we enter a time where Mississippi has come to expect many changes. We are poised to achieve even greater changes for the people of our State.

This past year, we have worked together to produce progressive legislation for the State of Mississippi. Lt. Governor Tuck, Speaker Ford and Legislators, I commend, and thank, you all. This approach has proved successful, and I look forward to strengthening our partnership.

Working closely with us, and with you, are our agency directors. I would like to recognize them and ask them to stand.

- John Allison, Executive Director of the Department of Banking and Consumer Finance
- Gary Anderson, Executive Director of the Department of Finance and Administration
- Janice Broome-Brooks, Executive Director of the Department of Human Services
- J.C. Burns, Executive Director of the Mississippi Development Authority
- Glen Carpenter, Executive Director of the Department of Marine Resources
- Charles Chisholm, Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality
- Robert Latham, Executive Director of the Mississippi Emergency Management Authority
- General James Lipscomb, Adjutant General of the Mississippi Military Department
- David Huggins, Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Public Safety
- Don Strange, Executive Director of the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics
- Rica Lewis-Payton, Director of the Division of Medicaid
- Robert Johnson, Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Corrections.

Thank you to each of you for your hard work and dedicated service to the people of Mississippi.

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The State of the State is a report outlining where we are in Mississippi. We are gathered to inventory our victories, to take advantage of opportunities, to redefine and

refocus our collective priorities, to provide improvements statewide and identify our challenges.

Our state has improved. Our state is improving. And we will continue to work hard every day to make greater improvements in the lives of our people. Mississippi must be able to compete. We must be competitive in education – competitive in economic development – competitive in health care and in public safety. Mississippi must be in a position to compete with any state in the nation.

How do we make Mississippi competitive?

We can honor and recognize our past, but we must not dwell there. It is time for us to move forward and face new challenges. It is important how Mississippi is viewed by our neighbors, our nation and our world.

Next week, I encourage the members of the State Legislature to adopt a referendum vote of the people to determine the design of the Mississippi state flag. Let our people speak, and give them the opportunity to decide the destiny of Mississippi's state flag.

Immediate action must be taken by the legislature. We must act now so that we can move forward as one state – as one people.

Our eyes must not stray from the road before us. If we are true to our agenda for opportunity, if we are truly committed to progress, if we are truly committed to making Mississippi competitive, then we must lay aside our differences on this matter and move together, in one accord, toward a future endowed with success and security for every community, for every Mississippian. Mississippi's destiny and future is in our hands. We have a big obligation to provide future Mississippians with every advantage possible.

Mississippi is growing, and our economy is growing, but not at the rate that was first projected. Twenty-nine states across the nation are experiencing a slowdown in their economy, Mississippi included.

If we are going to address our budget constraints, and create a budget that meets the needs of our people, then it can't be business as usual. To find solutions, we must look at every single possible solution. Let's not continue to say why we can't make it happen, but let's find ways that we can make it happen.

We have to look at the priorities of this state, and we must start with education. Education is the cornerstone on which we build a stronger, better, more competitive Mississippi. Our success in economic development, health care and other areas begins with how we educate our children.

We are a state that cares about her children. One that will not rest until we have made sure that every child has been afforded the opportunity for success that allows them to build their lives, homes and families right here in Mississippi.

Education

We are working to make Mississippi competitive in education. We have taken one of the largest steps forward for the State in the area of education by passing legislation to raise teacher pay to the Southeastern average. A raise in teacher salaries will, in turn, lead to an even better education for our children. We will be able to recruit new teachers and retain the great ones we have.

Passing the teacher pay raise plan was a milestone in our effort to strengthen education in Mississippi. Our teachers deserve to know that we believe in them - that we believe in education in Mississippi. Removing the 5% growth rate provision of the teacher pay raise plan will show our support. We have faith in our teachers, and our teachers want to have faith in us. By funding their raises every year, with no excuses, we show our commitment to them and to our students. A great line from the movie, "A Field of Dreams," says 'build it and they will come,' I say: invest in education and our best and brightest will stay.

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The teacher pay raise plan also includes incentive grants for improving schools and accountability plans for low-performing schools. The 2000 Educational Accountability Bill provides for schools to be evaluated based on students achieving a grade level proficiency, or students exceeding an annual growth expectation in the number of students not testing at grade-level proficiency, but who are showing improvements. It is important that we hold our teachers and administrators responsible for the effectiveness of their teaching of our students. I would like to recognize and thank Dr. Richard Thompson for his leadership in the development of this accountability program.

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Education is a good example of where the Legislative Budget Committee and I disagree on funding priorities. I believe that if we cut one program in education to pay for another, we are playing games with our educators and with our students. Let's leave the games on the playground.

The JLBC has cut money from the adequate education fund and used that money to pay for teacher pay raises. Adequate education funds keep our schools open without a local tax increase. This money cannot be shifted from one area to another. It is all important. We must commit 100% to education, if we plan to make our students competitive.

Our budget to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee funds teacher pay raises and funds education general support. A strong educational system is vital to all future successes for the people of the State of Mississippi.

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Economic Development

Looking into the future to the summer of 2003 – Nissan trucks and SUVs will drive off the assembly line, as a result of 4,000 Mississippians working for Nissan in Canton, Mississippi. Why will that happen? It will happen because we made Mississippi competitive. We competed against states across the nation for Nissan, and Mississippi won. This was not a small victory. It is a victory that puts Mississippi in the spotlight of the nation and the world.

Nissan is proof that our efforts to bring good jobs to the people of Mississippi are working. We can celebrate this victory for Mississippi.....<Pause>....., but we will not stop with Nissan. J.C. Burns and the MDA staff are working diligently to address economic opportunities and increase the profile brought to Mississippi by Nissan.

We are building our momentum, but that momentum will come to a screeching stop if we follow the Legislative Budget Committee's recommendation to cut the economic development budget by 1/3. We cannot afford to let that happen.

They have gutted the economic development budget for Mississippi. That means cutting back on money to help rural counties and the minority business program. The loss of those funds means we will have less opportunity to help our people in all 82 counties of Mississippi prepare themselves for economic growth.

Our people deserve good, high-paying jobs, and we placed a priority on bringing those jobs to Mississippi. We have given many of our people hope for a good quality of life. Some of whom may never have had that kind of hope before. We are providing the opportunity for our children to be educated in Mississippi, get good jobs in Mississippi and stay in Mississippi where they can create a good quality of life for themselves and their families.

Small businesses and entrepreneurs remain an integral part of economic growth in Mississippi and they are located in every corner, and places in between across our state. But some of those people who could prosper from knowing about economic development projects don't get the information they need. Many of you asked for our help, and we listened. Through the Advantage Mississippi Initiative we established a rural development office responsible for getting that needed information to the people in our smaller communities who could thrive with the knowledge and assistance we can provide. We are helping people, and their communities, across the state maximize their opportunities.

It starts at a grass roots level. The new On-TARGET Community Certification Program helps local community leaders across Mississippi recruit, retain and grow businesses that are best suited to their communities. We help them help themselves by

looking at the needs of the people of the community and matching them with businesses that fit those needs.

While much of our nation, and part of our state, has experienced growth over the last decade, many Delta Communities have not participated fully in our newly found prosperity. We expect a great impact from the new Delta Regional Authority for the people of the Mississippi Delta. With this Authority we are taking accountable action to make improvements that create a culture ripe for growth.

Just as the Appalachian Regional Commission has addressed the chronic economic depression and poverty that existed in that part of the nation, and our state, the Delta Regional Authority will do the same. We have with us today the Mississippi Director of the Appalachian Regional Commission, Dr. Mabel Murphree, who is working to empower citizens and communities to enhance economic development and growth for Mississippians, and we appreciate her enthusiasm and hard work.

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Just as the Appalachian Region and the Mississippi Delta crosses borders and requires regional cooperation to advance, our economy as a state will become more and more entwined with economics around the globe. It is important for us to realize that physical boundaries on a map are only geographic distinctions. Geographic boundaries no longer limit Mississippi to the South and to the United States. We must think on a global scale. In March of 2001, Mississippi will be the temporary home of one of the largest, most beautiful and exclusive exhibitions ever presented by Spain in the United States.

When Mississippi opens the doors of The Majesty of Spain Exhibit, we open its doors to the people of our state, the nation and to the world. We also open the doors of communication between Mississippi and Spain. As Mississippi looks at new opportunities for economic development, this exhibit gives us the opportunity to strengthen our international ties.

As we welcome the people of our state and nation to experience the Majesty of Spain Exhibit, we will welcome to our state, for the first time in history, the King and Queen of Spain. This is a great opportunity for us to once again focus the nation's spotlight on Mississippi. During the King and Queen's visit to our state we will facilitate a Governor's Conference on Trade, which will be hosted by the Mississippi Economic Council.

I would like to recognize Blake Wilson, Executive Director of the Mississippi Economic Council. Blake, please stand. Thank you for your hard work and the work of MEC to help us make positive differences in the landscape of business across our state.

We will mark the close of The Governor's Conference on Trade with the opening of Mississippi's World Trade Center. Bringing World Trade Center status to Mississippi gives us the opportunity to promote the awareness of international trade, enhance existing

trade programs and send a strong signal to national and international prospects that Mississippi has the capabilities to meet their global market needs.

Technology

To meet the needs of the marketplace, and compete for new and existing business and industry Mississippi must be on the cutting edge of technology. As technology becomes a more and more integral part of our everyday lives, it is important that we have people in place with superior knowledge and skills in the area of technology. Dr. Angie Dvorack is that person for the State of Mississippi. She will help us make a seamless transition into the new economy, which is technology driven. Dr. Dvorack, thank you for helping us make sure that Mississippi is on the cutting edge of technology.

Technology is the key to a successful future in business and government. If business is providing greater customer service through the Internet, then government should provide the same, quality service to our customers, the people of Mississippi, future Mississippians, and potential business and industry. That is why we created the Governor's Commission on e-Government.

We now have in place a plan that will make government services more easily accessible to our people while allowing us to provide more efficient and effective services. Within the not too distant future our people will be able to conduct their day-to-day business with state agencies through the Internet from the convenience of their home, office, library or school.

Health Care

We are providing health insurance to more of Mississippi's children since the start of 2000. We now have more than 18,000 Mississippi children enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program, which is an increase of 36 times the number of children covered when we took office in January. We continue to look for new, innovative ways to reach every child in Mississippi in need of health insurance coverage.

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Are we competitive in Mississippi when it comes to providing health care options? Our people must have access to health care options they need for themselves and their families.

We have made progress in bringing better health care access opportunities to people in all areas of our state. The Medical Education Scholarship Program provides up to 20 new recipients each year with a full scholarship to obtain a medical education. When a scholarship recipient has completed their residency, they agree to practice family medicine for at least ten years in an area of Mississippi that is designated as a critical needs area. There are students across Mississippi who would love the opportunity to follow their dream of having a career in medicine who simply cannot afford to attend medical school. We are giving them that opportunity, and the chance to give back to the people of their state.

We have also provided for the licensure and regulation of Physicians Assistants to practice in Mississippi. Their active presence in our state offers our people increased access to medical care. The results - healthier people living and working longer in our state.

One group of Mississippians who need our special attention are the dedicated men and women who work diligently to make sure that Government works efficiently and effectively. For the upcoming budget year, the Legislative Budget committee has budgeted \$7.6 million for state and public school employees health insurance, where our budget proposes \$10 million. We are committed to doing what can be done to make sure that our state and public school employees have access to affordable, quality health insurance. We must provide not only access to health care, but also health care and preventive health care information.

Illness has probably touched all of our lives in some way. Whether it was a mother, father, sister, brother, relative or a friend who was affected, it is terrible to have a loved one suffer through an illness. During 1999, 429 Mississippians died from breast cancer. We also have an alarming number of people dying from cervical cancer.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize, and thank, my wife, The First Lady of the Great State of Mississippi, Melanie Musgrove, for her work with the American Cancer Society, and her efforts to promote Breast Cancer awareness across the state.

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I would also like to thank my children Jordan and Carmen Rae for being here today to support their mom and dad.

Melanie and I are very fortunate to have two healthy and happy children. All Mississippians are not so blessed. The infant mortality rate in Mississippi has remained steady for the last two years. 436 infants under the age of one died in 1998, and 435 in 1999. The death of even one child is too many. That is why we must continue the work of the Infant Mortality Task Force. We must continue to look for new ways, and more ways, to prevent infant deaths. We need healthy children and healthy adults to create a stronger and better Mississippi.

Environment

The health of our children and families, and the protection of our natural resources is of the utmost importance. The quality of water in our state has a profound effect upon the quality of the health and welfare of our citizens, wildlife, fish and aquatic life, as well as domestic, agricultural, industrial and recreational activities. It is our responsibility to ensure clean water for our citizens. With the leadership of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, we are doing just that, under the direction of Charles Chisholm, Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality.

Charles is also leading the state's Water & Sewer Task Force, developed through the Advantage Mississippi Initiative. This task force will unite public and private entities to craft a long-term plan of action to install, repair or upgrade water and sewer systems across the state.

Many of Mississippi's rural and urban communities are struggling with this basic need. Working together through state, local and private partnerships, we can maximize available state and federal resources dedicated for this purpose.

The Clean Water Act requires states to review their surface water quality standards every three years and revise the standards as necessary. MDEQ is now in the process of reviewing Mississippi's criteria. The newly revised standards will be designed to safeguard the uses and quality of Mississippi's surface waters. This review is another way of improving and protecting the people of our state's quality of life.

Housing

A lot of Mississippians woke to snow on the ground the first day of this new year. And while the children were excited to build snowmen and find hills worthy of sledding, too many older Mississippian struggled just to stay warm. In fact, too many older Mississippians are struggling just to stay in their homes or find affordable places to call home. The statistics nationally are staggering. In Mississippi, our senior population is expected to increase by 84% over the next 25 years. This growth will strain our housing market and our health care systems unless we act now to find innovative ways to allow our seniors to maintain their independence as long as possible.

Today, I am pleased to suggest an answer to this housing need. Working with Commissioner Robert Johnson and the Mississippi Prison Industries Corporation, we can make a difference for older Mississippians in need of smaller, affordable homes of their own while providing a unique opportunity to drive down the number of offenders returning to our Department of Corrections by helping them change careers.

I am asking members of the Prison Industries Board to conduct a feasibility study for the Governor's Homes for Seniors Project. Inmates can learn advanced carpentry, wiring and roofing skills inside the penitentiary fences by building low-cost, energy-efficient, quality homes designed with elderly Mississippians in mind for purchase and placement on their property anywhere in Mississippi. Building homes for our parents and grandparents builds real opportunity for offenders and expands the pool of skilled people working for the future.

Public Safety

We punish people who choose to break the law by sentencing them to prison. The time they serve there should serve to punish them for the crime they committed. It

should also be time spent rehabilitating those offenders who can one day return to their communities and become self-sufficient when they leave prison.

Our prison population is increasing, and we do face the question – Do we invest in building more prisons? or Do we invest in our people? I strongly believe we invest in our people, and one way we do that is to rehabilitate our prisoners.

For the first time in fifteen years, the State of Mississippi's Department of Corrections is in compliance with prison overcrowding. In less than a three-month period of time, the Department brought prison population into compliance for the state, and has now developed a long-term solution to prison overcrowding in our state. I would like to congratulate Commissioner Robert Johnson and his staff at the Mississippi Department of Corrections for their tireless efforts to bring us into compliance and for searching for new and innovative ways to better manage our correction system in the state.

We are creating a safer Mississippi. Safer streets. Safer neighborhoods. Safer homes. A safer Mississippi.

While we are strengthening our efforts to provide safe environments for our people, we must take steps to make our highways safer. In 1999, more than 1/3 of the traffic fatalities in Mississippi were alcohol related. Lowering the legal blood alcohol limit to .08 will help reduce that number and help prevent more senseless deaths

Wearing seat belts save lives. In 1999, three times as many drivers and passengers killed in auto accidents were not wearing seatbelts than those who were wearing them. Wearing seatbelts greatly increases the likelihood that the driver and passengers of a vehicle will survive an accident.

I am living proof that seatbelts save lives. Members of my family, and countless numbers of highway patrol officers who saw our car after we wrecked in 1996, could not believe we survived. We survived because we were wearing seatbelts.

Making the use of seatbelts a law, and punishable as a primary offense, will save lives.

I support lowering the legal blood alcohol limit to .08, and I support making the use of seatbelts a law. I urge the members of this legislative body to pass these bills into law this legislative session so that the people of Mississippi, and those traveling our roads and highways are safer, and have a greater chance of reaching their destinations safely.

We must continue to make advancements in public safety through the reduction of illegal narcotic trafficking. The Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics has created three new district offices and added over 30 narcotics investigators this year, without an increase to its budget. Also, Mississippi became the first state in the nation to implement a 5-year strategic drug plan. In the short time it has been employed, over 25-targeted kingpin drug

organizations in Mississippi have been disrupted or dismantled. Their proactive decisions are helping make Mississippi an even safer place to live and visit.

The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency is working with local officials across the state to ensure that our communities have local emergency management officials working to assist communities in preparation for disasters. Since January of 2000, eleven new local emergency management agencies have been established across the state.

Please join me in welcoming three of the local emergency management directors: Hugh Hollowell from Marshall County, Jim Britt from Oktibbeha County and Eugene Martin from Wilkinson County.

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Closing

We must be a unified state. A state that works together, as we compete with the nation and the world in education, economic development, technology, health care, the environment and public safety. Many factors outside our state will challenge us as we fight to improve as a state. We cannot let internal or external battles keep us from achieving our goals.

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As we work together, Mississippi will prosper. We are becoming a national and international power. Mississippi can compete. Our children can achieve great things. Our quality of life can be the envy of the nation.

It has been a good first year of our administration, and we look forward to continued success and growth in our state. The improvements we have made in education, economic development, health care, public safety and other areas offer our people the opportunity for a good quality of life, right here in Mississippi. We are creating a Mississippi that can compete with any state in the nation.

I challenge you to work together for the people of Mississippi. I challenge you to do great things for our state. I challenge you to help lead our state into the next century. Will you accept these challenges?

If you will, then together, we can fortify Mississippi's position as America's State of Promise.