

STATE OF THE STATE
Governor Ronnie Musgrove
January 4, 2001
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Single-spaced version

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, the House of Representatives elected me as Mississippi's 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, I am pleased to be standing before you, as your Governor, as we begin a new century. Mississippi has experienced many changes this year, and we are ready for more great changes in 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 you all. With continued cooperation and support we can continue this success. This approach has proved successful, and I look forward to our continued spirit of cooperation.

Working closely with us and with you are our agency directors. I would like to recognize them and ask them to please 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; and 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 message outlining where we are in Mississippi. It is my assessment of where we should be, where we are going and how we are going to get there.

Mississippi is headed forward. I believe that we share a common goal. A goal to make Mississippi an even better place to live and work. We want Mississippi to reach its greatest potential, and then go even further.

Our state has improved. Our state is improving. And we will continue to work hard every day to make improvements in the lives of our people.

We cannot dwell on the past. Mississippi must push forward. We have to set new, unprecedented goals and achieve unparalleled progress for the people, all of the people, of our great state.

It is time for us to move forward. When we face challenges, we must look at what best serves the people of Mississippi. 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.

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

It is important how Mississippi is viewed by other states. Members of the Mississippi House of Representatives and the State Senate, I implore you to hear our people speaking. Listen to them and give them an opportunity to decide the destiny of Mississippi's state flag, our banner to the world. I urge you to put this issue on the ballot and let us move forward, honoring the will of our people. Let us not be distracted by the rhetoric on either side of this emotion laden issue. Let our people decide, and let our attention return swiftly to those matters of our common interest, of our common concern of our common destiny.

Our eyes must not stray from the road before us. If we are true to our to our agenda for opportunity, if we are truly committed to progress, 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.

Twenty-nine states across the nation are experiencing a slowdown in their economy, Mississippi included. Mississippi is growing, but we are not growing as quickly as projected. We are taking a responsible approach to the slowdown in the economy by affecting a slowdown in budgeting and spending. We have taken a different approach to the budget process for Fiscal Year 2002 using a set of guiding principles that include: attention to priorities, quality services, an emphasis on efficiency, discipline and maximum use of federal funds.

Our budget has many similarities to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee's proposal. However, our budget reflects different priorities than theirs. Our budget reflects our people's priorities. This budget is the people of Mississippi's budget. Their priorities are education, economic growth, public safety and health care.

We want to work in coordination with the Joint Legislative Budget Committee to develop the final budget. By working together in this process we are sharing ideas and priorities, and we are finding solutions that work for our people.

I want to thank all Legislators for their support this year. We have worked together to accomplish many great things for our State. This year, our teamwork will result in many more accomplishment for the State of Mississippi.

As we work to improve the quality of life for all Mississippians, the nation and the world are taking notice. Word is spreading quickly about Mississippi. Good things are being said about our state, because we have a lot to brag about.

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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.

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This was a milestone in our effort to strengthen education in Mississippi. The legislation also included 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: 1.) students achieving a grade level proficiency or, 2.) students exceeding an annual growth expectation in the number of students not testing at grade-level proficiency, but who are showing improvements. A team, appointed by the State Superintendent and the State Board of Education, to assist in the development of improvement plans, will evaluate schools falling below par. I would also like to thank Dr. Richard Thompson for his help in making this possible.

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 need to have faith in us. We will fund their raises, and we need to show our commitment to them and to our students.

To provide our teachers the ability to better prepare our children for a changing world and workplace, we have formed a Computer Technology Task Force. The goal of the task force is to oversee the placement of an Internet-accessible computer in every

classroom in the state by 2002. When we complete this goal, Mississippi will be one step closer to becoming a leader in the world of education. With the help of our Classroom Technology Task Force, we are well on our way to making this happen. Just this year, 6,000 computers will be placed in Mississippi classrooms for our children.

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A competitive teacher salary in Mississippi and a computer in every classroom in Mississippi are two major steps we have taken in education. We cannot do anything to hinder our stride to the top. A great line from the movie, "A Field of Dreams," says 'build it and they will come,' I say: invest in them and they will stay. That is the essence of this agenda for opportunity.

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If we cut one program to pay for another, we are not moving forward. We are only shifting resources. 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 move to the top of the list.

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. It is the cornerstone from which we build success in economic development and other areas that have a direct impact on the quality of life of our people.

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Economic Development

We have made improvements in education, and we have made the State of Mississippi competitive for economic opportunities and growth. Our bold new economic development plan, the Advantage Mississippi Initiative dramatically improves incentives designed to attract high-paying jobs to our state. It brings together in a unified manner a powerful set of tools, the vision and the drive for Mississippi to become a major competitor in economic development.

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. I would like to thank J.C. Burns for his leadership in helping secure the Nissan Motor Company.

We are building our momentum, but we cannot continue our success by following the Legislative Budget Committee's recommendation to cut the economic development

budget by 1/3. We cannot afford to let that happen. Our budget recommends \$10 million more than the Legislative Budget Committee's proposed budget. We realize the impact of those funds on our ability to help all 82 counties of Mississippi prepare themselves for economic growth.

Our people deserve good, high-paying jobs, and we have placed a priority on bringing those jobs to Mississippi. We are giving 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 jobs in Mississippi and stay in Mississippi to live, work and raise their families.

Small businesses and entrepreneurs are an integral part of economic growth in Mississippi. Small communities do not always hear about economic development projects. The Advantage Mississippi Initiative established a rural development office responsible for targeting smaller communities and manufacturers who stand to become significant contributors to our state's economy. We are helping communities across the state maximize their capabilities and assets.

With the new Capital Access Program, more Mississippi entrepreneurs than ever will have access to the resources they need to start new small businesses across our state. In addition, I would like to introduce _____ to you. _____ will be taking on the challenge of running the Minority Business Division of the Mississippi Development Authority.

By maximizing specific capabilities and assets, the On-TARGET Community Certification Program helps local communities recruit, retain and grow businesses tailored to their communities. Small business owners and entrepreneurs are the heart of our economy. Without their support and growth, the rest of the state will not thrive. We must continue to support them in every way possible.

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 look forward to the great impact the new Delta Regional Commission will make on the people of the Mississippi Delta. With this Commission we are taking accountable action to make improvements that creates 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 Commission can do the same. We have with us today the Director of the Appalachian Regional Commission Dr. Mabel Murphree. She is working to empower citizens and communities to enhance economic development and growth for Mississippians, and we appreciate her enthusiasm and hard work.

In 1996, Mississippi successfully hosted the Palaces of St. Petersburg Exhibition and in 1998 the Splendors of Versailles Exhibition, which together attracted more than 825,000 visitors to Mississippi. In January of 2000 Mississippi was chosen to host one of the largest, most beautiful and exclusive exhibitions ever presented by Spain in the

United States. The Majesty of Spain Exhibition brings educational opportunities to our students and teachers, increased tourism dollars and national attention to Mississippi.

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. This exhibit opens the doors of communication between Mississippi and Spain. As Mississippi looks at new opportunities for economic development, this exhibit will strengthen our international ties. Doors are opened for increased trade, as Mississippi seeks World Trade Center designation to further enhance international trade and development.

March 1, 2001, we will open the doors of the Majesty of Spain Exhibit, and 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 focus the nation's spotlight on the exhibit and on Mississippi. During the King and Queen's visit to Mississippi 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 close The Governor's Conference on Trade with the opening of Mississippi's World Trade Center. Bringing World Trade Center status to Mississippi provides a high-profile entity to promote awareness of international trade, enhances existing trade programs and sends a strong signal to national and international prospects that Mississippi has ready capabilities to meet their global market needs.

Technology

We are creating an atmosphere that fosters the growth of business with the assistance of cutting edge technology. The development of a Tier One Data Center in Mississippi will build the strategic base of electronic commerce companies. The Center will house 13 e-commerce companies in one location providing high-speed, broad-band Internet access for e-commerce transactions.

Technology is the key to a successful future in business and government. If business is providing greater customer service through the Internet, then government can 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 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 business with state agencies through the Internet from the convenience of their home, office, library or school.

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, who can help us make the right technology decisions. 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.

Health Care

Health care for Mississippi's children is more readily available since the start of 2000. We now have more than 18,000 Mississippi children enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program, which provides much needed insurance coverage to Mississippi children of working families. That is an increase of 36 times the number of children covered when we took office in January.

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This success in the CHIP program is the result of a cooperative effort of many Agencies and organizations. The Department of Human Services, the Division of Medicaid and the Department of Finance and Administration along with the Office of the Governor, have worked together to develop a new approach and effort to reach our uninsured children.

We must ensure that our people 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 creation of 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 the state that is designated as a critical needs area. We have also provided for the licensure and regulation of Physicians Assistants to practice in Mississippi. The availability of both the scholarships and the physician's assistants will offer our people increased access to medical care, which results in 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.

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. That is an increase of 32 deaths from this disease in 1998 when 397 Mississippians died of breast cancer. Our state has also experienced an increase in the 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 in 1999, we lost 435 babies. For every 1,000 live births in Mississippi in 1999, ten died. Even 1 death 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 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 assistance of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, we are doing just that under the direction of Charles Chisolm, Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality.

Charles is also leading the state's Water & Sewer Task Force, which was 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 grappling 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. The 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 our citizen'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 sled, too many older Mississippians struggled just to stay warm. In fact, too many older Mississippians are struggling 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. Such 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 member 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 working for the future.

Public Safety

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

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, comment on the fact that they don't know how we could have survived the wreck we had.

Making the use of seatbelts a law, and punishable as a primary offense, will improve the safety of our people on Mississippi highways and reduce the number of people killed on our roads.

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 so that the people of Mississippi, and those traveling our roads and highways are safer, and have a greater chance of reaching their destinations unharmed.

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 3 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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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 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 society.

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. It is pointless to sentence a person to time in jail, and not spend time teaching them a trade or a marketable skill that gives them the opportunity to find employment and become self sufficient when they leave prison.

The Governor’s Homes for Seniors Project offers a solution to Mississippi’s senior population housing needs while teaching marketable skills to prisoners who can return to society.

Inmates will learn skills in carpentry, mechanics, wiring, roofing and electronics, necessary to build homes that can then be purchased by senior citizens at low cost. These homes will be energy efficient and built with the needs of senior citizens in mind. The homes will be built on the grounds of the prisons and then moved and placed on property owned by the purchaser.

We are alleviating housing needs and providing affordable, efficient housing opportunities for our senior citizens while we are giving prisoners the opportunity to learn marketable skills so they are prepared to return to society and build a good quality of life for themselves and their families.

Closing

This year, we have worked together. We have formed alliances to accomplish great things for Mississippi. As we start this new year, we must look past political boundaries to do what is best for the people of Mississippi. The people of Mississippi elected us into office to work for them. We are here for that one purpose. It is our job, our obligation, to do the most with our time.

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 grow 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.

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?

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Mr. Speaker, Lt. Governor Tuck, members of the Legislature and other elected officials. We have our priorities. We can, and we must, find ways to achieve them for the people of Mississippi. Their priorities are our priorities.

Together, we can fortify Mississippi's position as America's State of Promise.