

Clarion Ledger Article – 5-7-00

At the close of the first legislative session, in my term as Governor, there is the chance to reflect on the goals I set for our administration, and the opportunity to chart the progress we have made in achieving those goals.

In my State of the State Address on February 9, I delivered a message outlining where we were in Mississippi, my assessment of where we should be and where we could be if we commit ourselves to a shared vision of the future. The topics I covered were in the areas of education, health, public safety, and economic development.

Raising teacher salaries to the Southeastern average was the most critical issue that has faced the people of the state of Mississippi and thanks to the hard work of the leadership and membership of the House and Senate along with the Governor's office we have found a solution that works for the people of Mississippi. On Monday of this week I signed House Bill 1134, which places into statute a multi-year teacher pay raise plan. Signing this bill shows the state of Mississippi's commitment to education, to teachers and to children.

In March we formed the Governor's Task Force on Classroom Technology. The men and women on this task force have been charged with the responsibility of placing an internet-accessible computer in every elementary and secondary classroom in the state of Mississippi by the end of December 2002.

Both the teacher pay raise bill and the task force are steps in the right direction to make sure that education is a priority in our state. After all, it is the education that we make available to our children that will have a determining factor on their future success.

Mississippi is also making great strides in health care. We recently announced newly established Trauma Care Network Hospital designations across the state, and next week we will be unveiling a new action plan and advertising materials to promote the Children's Health Insurance Program also known as Mississippi Health Benefits Program. We are dedicated to making sure that all Mississippi children have health insurance coverage.

Tuesday of this week we signed House Bill 729, which establishes a medical education scholarship program to provide up to 20 new recipients each year with a full scholarship to obtain a medical education at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine. Scholarship recipients agree to practice family medicine for at least ten years in an area of the state that is a critical needs area for primary medical care. This program will not only provide medical assistance to Mississippians in rural areas of our state, but it will also provide opportunities for students wanting to enter the field of health care who could not because of financial barriers.

The Economic Development Plan for the State of Mississippi is currently undergoing a redevelopment as we design new goals and incentives to attract business and industry to

our state. We have formed the first-ever Mississippi Partnership for Economic Development, a coalition of Mississippi's public and private sector leadership, which is working now to redesign a plan that will move Mississippi forward.

The legislative session has been productive as we have worked hard to find real solutions for real people. We are committed to continuing that hard work for every Mississippian.