

Mississippi's economic history is based primarily in agriculture. Cotton, rice, soybeans and other agricultural products have driven our jobs and our marketplaces for nearly two hundred years.

The agricultural focus covers the state, from the Delta, where the rich soil and waters of the Mississippi River and its tributaries have fed and nurtured crops for generations, to the Gulf Coast with its marine resources, to the timber farming of the Pine Belt. The economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, is broadening this focus.

If we are to compete in the global marketplace, the sources for feeding and nurturing our competitiveness must change. The soil and water for this marketplace are found in the forms of research and development.

It's no secret that the best minds in research and development have been leaving Mississippi. Our universities and junior and community colleges are losing researchers and professors to better salaries in other states, and the end result is a slowing of our own technological growth.

It's time to reverse the flow.

We've demonstrated our commitment to the blending of education and technology through programs like the "Computers in the Classroom" initiative, which will place an Internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state by the end of this year.

That commitment must be strengthened, and the budget recommendation I have presented for the 2004 fiscal year does it through the Mississippi Brain Trust.

The premise is simple: Commit \$20 million a year over 10 years to recruit and retain the very best minds in Mississippi. These funds would be provided through a competitive grant process, and matched dollar for dollar by the institutions to help ensure accountability.

The result is obvious: The role of universities and community and junior colleges in driving our economy will be unparalleled in our history.

The number of endowed chairs and professorships at our institutions of higher learning will grow.

Our investment in graduate assistantships will support the growth of our own emerging scholars.

We will increase our research capacity and provide more and better opportunities to move technology from the laboratory to the marketplace.

Universities will drive the research process better and faster than ever before.

Community and junior colleges will take on a greater and more important role in workforce development and preparation.

Our schools will become centers of excellence.

Over the years, we've invested hundreds of millions of dollars in buildings at our schools. It's time to invest in the people.

Jean Piaget, a renowned 20<sup>th</sup> century Swiss psychologist, said it well: “The principle goal of education is to create people who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done – people who are creative, inventive and discoverers.”

That’s the goal of the Mississippi Brain Trust.

Mississippi’s competing in the global marketplace and the rest of the world is taking notice. Like a farmer uses soil and water to nourish his crops, we must use research and development to nurture our own growth as a state.