

Exchange Club of Downtown Jackson
Monday, April 17, 2000
Capitol Towers, Downtown Jackson
12:00 p.m.

You will be speaking to approximately 50 people. Meade Mitchell will introduce you. You have approximately 15 minutes to speak. Remember to use low tones and stand up straight.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you today. I know that we are somewhat limited on time, but there are some important issues that I campaigned on, and that I highlighted in my State of the State address that I gave on January 11 of this year, which remain on the top of my list of priorities for the people of this state, and I know they are important to you. Those issues are:

- 1) Education
- 2) Economic Development
- 3) Healthcare

The most critical issue facing our state is raising teacher pay to the southeastern average.

I believed when I was campaigning, and I believe now, that the single most important issue to move education forward is increasing teacher pay.

From the beginning of my administration I outlined a plan that would allow the Legislature to bring Mississippi teachers' salaries up to the Southeastern Average. It is a multi-year plan which, if followed, will meet our goal in four years. I believe we still can, and will reach that goal. We cannot afford to wait on this critical issue. The time to invest in our children is now.

Computer Technology

One investment that we have already started working on is the improved computer technology for our students.

Computer Technology Task Force

This task force has been charged with the challenge of placing an Internet-accessible computer in every public elementary and secondary classroom in Mississippi by the end of the year 2002. The men and women on the task force are representative of the people of our state. They are educators, parents, business owners and professionals with one common goal of working together to increase the educational resources available to Mississippi students. They are working diligently to reach their goal, which when completed, will positively influence all of our

students in Mississippi.

Our young people's education determines the future of economic development in Mississippi. To provide employers with the best qualified workforce, we must have well-paid teachers in the classroom who are responsible for educating our children, Mississippi's workforce of tomorrow.

Better education equals better jobs.

Economic Development

We are determined to improve the quality of life for our people.

One way we can do that is to move our workforce into the twenty-first century with the skills and the training needed to provide a better life for all

J. C. Burns, the new director of DECD and his staff recently completed a 13-city tour across the state to gather input from our people on ways to improve our economic development efforts.

There was a great turnout of people statewide from private business, education, government, neighboring cities and the community at large.

More than 1,300 people attended these meetings statewide to help us create a coherent agenda for advancing our state economically.

We know that it is time for us to move forward, to think bigger and put into place a plan that works for the people of Mississippi.

In an effort to do just that, I am pleased to say that we have established a coalition of Mississippi public and private sector leadership to develop the first ever Mississippi Partnership for Economic Development. This group is being co-chaired by myself and Dwight Evans, President and CEO of Mississippi Power. This is a dedicated group of Mississippi leaders will give their time and energy to create a new plan for economic growth in our State.

Mississippi has an economy that is strong and growing faster than it has in decades. We are seizing the opportunity to develop a strong plan that will map the direction that we want our state to take in the next decade.

Healthcare

We are also taking steps forward in the area of healthcare with the redevelopment of the Mississippi Children's Health Benefits Program.

- 4,000 MS children are now enrolled out of an approximate 85,000 eligible.
- Governor Tommy Thompson
- My administration is working to develop a new action plan and marketing strategy to ensure that all Mississippi children have health coverage.

Workers Compensation Commission

- Ben Barrett Smith
- Ask around about him.

Census

- Education, economic development and healthcare issues are all affected by Mississippi's Census results.
- It is vital that we have an accurate count.

- Census workers will soon begin knocking on doors of the households that did not return their Census forms.
- If you are approached by a Census worker, please take a few minutes to answer their questions.
- It is vital to Mississippi's future.

Closing Comments

I would like to be able to stand up here and tell you that we have all of the answers to Mississippi's challenges.

It will take more than just me, and more than just you, to make changes that are sensible and accountable for the people of Mississippi.

We need your help. We need you to work together with us to find solutions that make sense.

There are no quick fixes, but together we will find responsible approaches to making life better for all Mississippians.

Thank you.