

March 10, 2000

Mr. Butch Hewitt
217 Homo Chitto Street
Natchez, MS 39120

Dear Mr. Hewitt:

Per our conversation of earlier today, I am enclosing a copy of Governor Musgrove's February 9 "State of the State" address. I have also included Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 602 (1999 Regular Session) commending the Columbus Municipal School District's Lee Middle School's 1998 "World Champion" Odyssey of the Mind team.

Thank you again for your inquiry.

Very truly yours,

Michael Boyd
Policy & Planning Director

MB:klr

Encl.

OFFICE OF GOVERNOR RONNIE MUSGROVE
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: TELL
FROM: RILEY
SUBJECT: BUTCH HEWITT: GOVERNOR'S EDUCATION AGENDA
DATE: 3/10/00
CC: FILE

Mr. Butch Hewitt of Natchez phoned 2/28 after seeing the Governor on C-SPAN during the NGA meeting. Mr. Hewitt stated that he did not vote for Governor Musgrove, that he is a Republican, and that he would like more details on the Governor's education agenda. He said that the Governor sounded good, but he wants to know the Governor's plan for accomplishing everything he says.

Mr. Hewitt does not feel as if money is the solution. He thinks we spend too much money on education now (\$350 billion on the U.S. Department of Education, but only \$290 billion a year on the military). He also feels as if too many people are employed in the field. He feels as if smaller classes are just going to result in more teachers.

My conversation with Mr. Hewitt was quite lengthy, so I summarized his request at the conclusion of our conversation. Here is the info he requested:

- overview of education agenda and funding for such
- average salary of Mississippi teachers
- number of school personnel (he specifically requested teachers, superintendents, principals, assistant principals, school administrators, and "other")
- number of seniors who graduate
- Governor's position on charter schools
- Governor's position on class size
- Governor's position on eliminating schools of education (Mr. Hewitt stated that schools of education should be dissolved because a degree from a school of education is worthless. He feels as if teachers should come from their area of expertise – math, science, business, English, etc.)

I prepared a written response, w/ above information, for the Governor's signature and gave to you and Boyd to review. Boyd wanted to speak to Mr. Hewitt by phone, which he did today. Michael sent him the attached letter and information.

This case is closed.

March 8, 2000

Mr. Butch Hewitt
217 Homo Chitto Street
Natchez, MS 39120

Dear Mr. Hewitt:

Thank you for your request to my staff for an overview of my education agenda following my appearance on C-SPAN. Although I understand that you and I share different political affiliations, I appreciate your interest in the future of Mississippi's educational system.

My 2000 education agenda for the Mississippi legislature encompasses five key components that I feel are critical to ensuring an adequate and effective public education for Mississippi's children. These components build upon the strong foundation of the Mississippi Adequate Education Program, which will reach its full implementation by the year 2002. I will briefly describe these five components of my education agenda:

1. Computers in every classroom: Technology and the world wide web offer exceptional educational resources for Mississippi's school children and teachers. The public and private sectors, working together, have the capability to make technology and the world wide web resources available to Mississippi school children and teachers by placing an Internet-accessible computer in every primary and secondary public classroom in the state. I announced today the formation of the Governor's Task Force for Classroom Technology. This task force will be charged with supporting legislative initiatives to finance the project, with pursuing private sector financial support and with raising public awareness of the project. This initiative will be funded with 50% state funds and 50% matching funds from the private and non-profit sectors. The members of this task force, from both the public and private sectors, will not receive any compensation for their services.
2. Raise the average teacher pay to the southeastern average: Mississippi cannot be expected to attract and retain qualified teachers to educate our children if we are

not willing to pay a competitive salary for such qualified teachers. Mississippi's 1998-1999 classroom teachers' average salary was \$29,500, while the southeastern average was \$35,817. We must pay our teachers competitive salaries so that we don't lose experienced educators to neighboring states and so that top students are encouraged to go into teaching

We can accomplish our goal of raising Mississippi's average salary to that of the southeastern states in four years by investing \$22 million the first year and staggering increases over the next three years. We can do this and also protect the fiscal integrity of our budget. With five percent growth in any given year, Mississippi will be able to afford to pay our teachers what they deserve. I am committed to reprioritizing the budget in any year when our growth is less than five percent so that we can attain this goal.

Recognizing teachers' accomplishments and their qualifications is already paying off for Mississippi teachers and students. Rewarding teachers for meeting National Board Certification standards has resulted in Mississippi ranking third this year among all 50 states for the number of teachers achieving this prestigious certification. Mississippi now ranks third in the nation overall for the number of National Board Certified teachers. Our teachers are committed to excellence and my administration is committed to supporting public education in Mississippi.

3. Appointed superintendents: Leadership of our schools is critical to students' success. I believe we should take partisan politics out of running our schools and require that all superintendents be appointed. According to the Southern Regional Education Board, Mississippi, with 69 elected and 80 appointed superintendents, leads the region in elected superintendents. I believe we must elect our school boards and appoint our superintendents in order to keep politics out of the leadership of our school districts.
4. Reading Incentive Program: I believe that we must encourage children to become more active participants in their own education. Reading is an effective means of accomplishing this. My office will be developing a Reading Incentive Program. I am encouraging children to obtain library cards in order to participate in the Governor's Reading Honor Roll, which will recognize children who read twenty or more books a year. My office will be working closely with the First Lady's efforts to promote reading across Mississippi.
5. Respect legislation: It is time to remind our children and society what courtesy and conduct mean. I believe we should re-enforce what many parents across Mississippi are teaching their children at home by requiring students to address their teachers, principals and other school officials with respectful phrases of "Yes Ma'am" and "No sir."

I understand that you feel as if the schools of education at our universities should be dissolved, with teachers obtaining degrees in their areas of specialty rather than a

degree in education. I respectfully disagree with you. I believe that our schools of education are critical to instilling the skills and principles necessary for our teachers. I do not think that our teachers would be adequately prepared to manage our classrooms and to educate our children if they did not receive specialized training from our universities' schools of education.

My staff obtained the data on the number of school personnel that you requested. As shown on the enclosed pages from the *2000 Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Education*, Mississippi public schools employed 34,836 certified staff and 62,377 other personnel during the 1998-1999 school year. As to the number of graduating high school seniors, this same report documents that 95% of twelfth graders graduated in the 1998-1999 school year.

I also believe that class size is critical to effectively educating our children. The average class size of top ranked states in education is kept under 15 students so that these young minds get the attention they need to flourish into successful students. Our students are worthy of their teachers' attention.

I support any initiative that will improve public educational opportunities for Mississippi's children. Under my leadership as Lieutenant Governor, the Senate, in conjunction with the House of Representatives, passed Mississippi's charter school law in 1997. This law allows charter schools within existing public schools. Charter schools must address and align with state educational goals and address state standardized and performance-based assessments. The Hayes Cooper Center for Math and Technology in Merigold is Mississippi's only charter school.

Thank you again for sharing your opinion with me. I appreciate your holding me accountable to my platform and your interest in the future of public education in Mississippi.

Very truly yours,

RONNIE MUSGROVE

RM:klr

Encl.