

*Remarks for
Leadership Madison County
February 19, 2002*

(tell story of traveling to DC; lawyer on plane who didn't believe you were governor)

Whether it's one lawyer on a plane or one thousand people who read an article in The New York Times about what we're doing here, people are learning that Mississippi is changing.

They're learning that we're doing business in a different way.

They're learning that we're being recognized for our forward-thinking approaches to education.

We're doing great work for the state of Mississippi and Madison County. Great things are happening in our state. We are capturing the attention of the world outside our borders because of the exciting things we've got going on, and I'm sure you will agree that it's good for Mississippi to be recognized for being on the cutting edge.

We're on the cutting edge in education.

We've got 405 teachers across this state who have earned National Board Certification.

We now have over 1,100 teachers in Mississippi with this certification – the sixth highest number in the nation. Let me repeat that – the sixth highest in the nation. Not 50th, not 40th, not 10th – sixth highest.

Mississippi was also the first state in the nation to offer more pay to teachers with national board certification.

We are also on track to be the first state in the nation to place an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom, a goal we'll meet by the end of next year.

Now, combine this with our commitment to pay teachers like the professionals they are. In July, we made this commitment law and the rest of the nation stood up and took notice.

The day after the special session on teacher pay, the New York Times ran an editorial piece commenting that “Mississippi had been able to put together the kind of package that continued to elude New York.”

Now, our work must focus on crafting a budget in which education is a top priority. This wasn't the case for this year's budget.

You're all aware of the budget reductions that were made last week, and the severe impact of about \$63 million on education.

These reductions were required by state law, because of the use of overly optimistic revenue projections for the current fiscal year.

I vetoed the legislature's education budget last year because I disagreed with their revenue projections. They overrode that veto, and now we're paying the price. It didn't have to happen this way.

We simply have to make education a priority.

And on that priority in place, we're going to build an economy like our state has never seen. Last year, we landed the top economic development project in the nation, and we did it like no one else.

We did it because we were ambitious, we were aggressive, and we wanted the project more than anyone else.

And we put it in Madison County.

That's the way we're handling economic development now. With the Advantage Mississippi Initiative, we are making great progress in recruiting new businesses and retaining existing ones.

A great deal of work has been done to put more Mississippians in good jobs.

The bottom line is this – now is not the time to back off our investments and efforts to bring jobs to Mississippi.

Our potential stretches to every corner of Mississippi – and every corner of Madison County – and it stretches to every Mississippian. It cannot and will not be wasted.

Finally, to make the most of that potential, we must have a healthy Mississippi.

You know, and I know, it's tough to do your best at work or in school if your health isn't good. We recognize that a healthy child goes to school ready to learn, and a healthy adult goes to a job ready to work.

In the end, believing “I must do something” solves more problems than saying “something must be done.”

I want to commend each of you on the leadership role you’ve taken on, and your commitment to do something for the state of Mississippi.

Your leadership, combined with your efforts to give something back to your communities and your state, will help make a difference in the successes to come in our future.

Mississippi is doing more and doing it better than ever before. The momentum is there, and it is growing.

I am excited about the goals we've set for ourselves. I know you share those goals with me, and I look forward to reaching them with you.

Thank you.

