

*Remarks for the
“Partners in HOPE” Awards Banquet
May 2, 2002*

Thank you for the invitation to be here tonight. I want to begin by recognizing the great work done this year by Donnal Ash and Debbie Childers – their leadership is helping make the Marshall County School District one of the best in the state.

It’s nice to be up here and away for a while from the politics found in Jackson. There’s an old saying that laws and sausage are the two things you should never watch being made, and there’s a lot of truth to that saying.

I was thinking about my remarks for tonight and the theme for this year's banquet, "success comes when we all pull together."

If we could make this the theme for the way we live and the way we do business, how much more could we accomplish?

If we apply this theme to the everyday, mundane tasks that we all face, the work of completing those tasks becomes much easier.

If we apply it to our workplace, apply it to the goals we set and the manner in which we work with others, there's no end to what we could do.

It's been said that some people dream of success, while others wake up and work hard at it. That's the foundation behind tonight's theme – and when we wake up, work hard, and do it with a focus and a goal – imagine what can be done.

It's a theme we've worked hard to follow for Mississippi, and we're making strong progress.

In his State of the State address in January, Governor Musgrove laid out four main priorities for the state – education, jobs, health care and public safety.

People are learning that we're doing business differently from before.

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. Great things are happening in our state, and here in Marshall County.

We're capturing the attention of the world outside our borders because of the exciting things we've got going on, and I know you will agree that it's good for Mississippi to get some positive recognition for the work we're doing.

We're on the cutting edge in education.

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

This process recognizes the very best in teachers, as determined by their peers.

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're 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 the year.

We've put together a unique partnership between the public and private sectors, a partnership that has raised money and solicited used computers for the classrooms.

We are going to ensure that our children are ready to compete in the economy of the 21st century, an economy that will be global, borderless and wireless.

Now, combine this with our commitment to pay teachers like the professionals they are. Last year, the Governor signed this commitment into 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.”

High praise for our work here, and it’s about time for our teachers to get what they deserve. The rest of the country is learning that we’re serious about education in Mississippi, we’re serious about building a better world for our people, we’re serious about shaping a brighter future for our children.

We show that we're serious by making education a priority, by making it a foundation for all the other work we have to do.

And on that foundation, we're going to build an economy like our state has never seen.

We got a lot of national attention with the Nissan plant, but that's not the sole focus of our work. A plant that brings 100 jobs is just as important as a plant that brings 4,000 jobs.

That's why the Governor focused his attention on the Alcoa plant in Hernando. This plant was scheduled to close up, and instead will be staying open, expanding its facility, and doubling its workforce. That's good news.

Now, we can't discount the fact that Mississippi is competing like never before for major economic development projects. As one of four states in the final running for the \$1 billion Hyundai plant, Mississippi showed again that we can compete with anyone, anywhere, anytime.

That's the way we're handling economic development now. With the Advantage Mississippi Initiative that Governor Musgrove crafted two years ago, 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. In the past two years, more than 21,000 new jobs have been created more than \$6 billion has been invested in the state.

And while we've had successes during a recession, the current condition of the national economy has also caused some setbacks.

The bottom line is this – now is not the time to back off our investments and efforts to bring jobs to Mississippi. That's why it is so important that the Legislature followed the recommendations the Governor offered in his budget proposal.

The Mississippi Development Authority was facing budget cuts of up to 28%, but the Governor fought hard to prevent those cuts – because every dollar we take away from economic development is a dollar lost in workforce training, or a dollar lost in keeping jobs in Mississippi.

Our potential stretches to every corner of Mississippi – from the Gulf Coast to Tishomingo County – and it stretches to every Mississippian. It cannot and will not be wasted.

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

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. That's why programs like Medicaid must be fully funded and managed in the proper way.

Mississippi has the most legislatively constrained Medicaid program in the country, and it just doesn't work that way.

Now, with the flexibility to manage the program in place, we can make a difference in peoples' lives – a difference between life and death, a difference between continuing to work and earning disability.

I was always taught that believing “I must do something” solves more problems than saying “something must be done.”

You won't hear us say, "something must be done." We live in America's state of promise. It is a promise too long unkept. That has changed.

Mississippi is doing more and doing it better than ever before. The momentum is there, and it is growing. With all of us pulling together, we'll succeed.

One last illustration: A father had three sons. One day, the sons were all arguing – about what, we don't know – but they were fighting with each other and accomplishing nothing. The father picked up three sticks, gave them to his sons, and asked each one if he could break his stick.

Each of the sons was able to break the stick handed to him. Then, the father took three more sticks and bundled them together.

“See if you can break the sticks now,” he told his sons.

Each one tried, but none could break the bundled sticks.

“That is the strength of family,” the father said. “Alone, you can be broken. Together, you are stronger than anything that comes against you.”

We’re all part of the Mississippi family.
We’re all tied to each other through the promise and the potential of this great state.
Success does come when we pull together –
it’s up to us to start pulling.

Thank you.