

2018 State of the State Address

Thank you, Mr. Lieutenant Governor, for that kind introduction. And thank you for the friendship you and the Speaker continue to offer me as together we honor our great state and her people. I will always consider myself fortunate to have served with both of you and your respective members.

Speaking of Mississippians, my favorite one is seated right behind me. The past six years, she has devoted herself to improving the lives of all of our citizens — particularly our children. And for 41 years, she has lovingly and patiently put up with me. Ladies and gentlemen, the First Lady of Mississippi and my wonderful wife, Deborah.

To the members of the House and Senate and other elected officials and guests here tonight: Thank you for your attendance. I do not take your kind attention for granted. And, thank you for allowing me to stand in our beautiful Capitol and highlight all we have achieved

and offer you my continued vision for how we can reach even greater heights together.

I realize that, to many of us here tonight, and to those watching and listening, there seem to be two Mississippis occupying the same time and space.

The proverbial critics would have you believe that one is a declining state whose people are suffering mightily. They search for problems as if there is a reward for finding them. Whenever I am even mildly agitated by these detractors, I remember one of my favorite presidents, Theodore Roosevelt, who said: “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles; or where the doer of good deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man — or I may add, the woman — in the arena.”

The Colonel, or “T.R.” as many knew him, would have had little patience for today’s cynical climate — headlines that daily, sometimes hourly, trumpet failure or supposed misdeeds, where any audit or

compliance review is called an investigation, and any study, from any source, that labels Mississippi last or least is blasted across the front page.

Fortunately, the other Mississippi is filled with progress. It is inhabited with caring, hard-working people of all races and ages who strive valiantly every day to make this wonderful state a better place to live and raise our children. Many of these dedicated Mississippians are in this chamber tonight. You serve your state as a citizen legislator and as leaders in your community. Most of you have a career, a family and all the responsibilities that accompany our busy lives as public servants. I know that each of you believe in his or her own way that we are making a difference. I can assure you here tonight that indeed we are.

I know we still have much work to do. But, there are so many accomplishments to celebrate and be proud of. Twice last year, the unemployment rate in Mississippi fell to 4.9 percent, and was 4.8

percent in November. That is the lowest since unemployment levels began to be recorded in 1979.

I believe every Mississippian deserves an equal opportunity for a good job, and I am working hard to make this belief a reality. As Ronald Reagan once said, the best social program is a job. Now, that's a program we have been very successful in expanding. In the past, Mississippi has had people looking for jobs. Today, we have more than 40,000 jobs looking for people.

Since we began this expansion, we have added more than 60,000 jobs and billions of dollars of foreign and domestic investment in Mississippi industry. I am also encouraged to report that existing industry continues to grow. For example, Milwaukee Tool just added 660 new jobs to the 1,400 team members already working in advanced manufacturing in Jackson and Greenwood and a distribution center in Olive Branch. This is a corporate investment of \$33.4 million.

Milwaukee Tool makes the best power tools in the world. I am proud to say they are made in America and perfected in Mississippi.

I am honored to have with us in the gallery tonight the manager of Milwaukee Tool's plant in Greenwood, Mississippi, my friend Jack Bilotta.

Currently, 70 percent of the U.S. Navy's combat service vessels protecting America's interests on the high seas were made at Ingalls in Pascagoula, Mississippi. With the expansion of the shipyard and the re-opening of the east shore, Ingalls is where the Navy builds the warships that keep America free and secure. It is now the nation's most productive shipyard.

Roxul expanded a second plant in Marshall County adding 90 additional employees and a \$40 million investment.

Northrop Grumman in Jackson County has added 60 new aerospace jobs and made a \$3.7 million corporate investment at its UAV assembly plant.

Borg Warner announced an additional corporate investment of \$20 million and added 75 new jobs to its Water Valley plant.

These and so many other projects and expansions are proof that when government creates a tax and regulatory climate that encourages growth – and then gets out of the way so the private sector can harness its innovative character – our economy thrives, more of our citizens experience the dignity and affirmation of a good-paying job, and our state is made stronger.

I could continue with many more businesses large and small that have expanded, but in the interest of time, I will tell you simply that the numbers are impressive and encouraging. And, they are growing.

By now, all of us know the amazing story of Continental Tire coming to Mississippi — a \$1.45 billion investment by one of the world's most respected and successful tire companies, a state-of-the-art plant that will be more than 1 million square feet spread over 900

acres. It will be the most sophisticated plant ever constructed by Continental.

This facility is scheduled to open late next year and will ultimately employ 2,500 Mississippians. It was identified as the top economic development project for 2016 and led to another milestone. “Area Development” magazine awarded Mississippi our first Gold Shovel for excellence in economic development.

Because of these and many other successes, Mississippi now ranks in the top ten states in the nation for economic development opportunities.

Working together, we have also made it easier for our entrepreneurs to pursue the American dream, ridding our occupational licensing system of red tape that for too long had served as nothing more than a barrier to market entry. Other states are just now moving to adopt our plan to reduce regulatory burdens on professional services. It has become known across the United States simply as the

“Mississippi Model.” This session, I will have some other recommendations to reduce more government regulations and unleash the independent spirit that will make Mississippi the most job-friendly state in America.

I want to say how sincerely grateful many of us are for your approval last session of a new trooper school. With your help, we will bolster public safety by putting more Highway Patrol officers on our roads. I will ask you for another trooper school this year, in order to meet enforcement needs and save lives on our highways. If we accomplish this goal, we could have more troopers on the road by next year than at any time in the history of the Mississippi Highway Patrol.

Like most other states, Mississippi is struggling with an opioid and illicit drug epidemic. In December of 2016, I issued an executive order creating the Governor’s Opioid and Heroin Task Force to address this problem. Law enforcement, physicians, pharmacists and mental health professionals came together and began to attack these killers that have

taken the lives of over 200 Mississippians just in the last 12 months. I am proud to say the recommendations and resulting actions by the task force members were swift and courageous.

The path toward a solution was not easy, nor was it popular in some instances. Fortunately, I have extremely competent directors at both the Department of Public Safety and Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics, who were at once courageous and compassionate.

They have done an outstanding job, and I am proud to have the commissioner of the Department of Public Safety, Marshall Fisher, and the director of the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics, John Dowdy, with us here tonight.

At the risk of affecting her status among her co-workers in the media, I want to take the opportunity to recognize a reporter who has done an outstanding job informing us all of the horrific events resulting from opioid and illegal drug-related criminal activity. We should all thank Therese Apel of the Clarion Ledger for shining a light on the

horrible consequences of this behavior. Therese, you stand as an example of a journalist who has made a difference.

Our educational system, though far from perfect, is clearly better than it has ever been before. For the first time in Mississippi's history, more than 90 percent of our third graders have passed their reading exam, and our high school graduation rate has risen above 80 percent. More than \$100 million has been directed to teacher pay raises, we ended the election of local superintendents and dyslexia identification and response all became a reality. Charter schools, early learning and school choice for special needs children all exist today because of the difficult decisions made by many of you here tonight.

Still, we have far too many failing schools whose students lag behind their counterparts across the nation. The reasons are systemic and are often related to a variety of conditions. Poverty, abuse, neglect and lack of leadership can all be listed. To address these issues, we created the Governor's State Early Childhood Advisory Council. SECAC

is composed of state and national experts in education, health care, child welfare, mental health and early childhood learning.

The council has become the central meeting place for all stakeholders in Mississippi's early learning system. Its family-based system is the new blueprint for managing the spectrum of problems affecting children and for ultimately finding solutions.

Working with the Mississippi Department of Human Services and our Community Colleges, the council began a program where child care workers will be receiving training to provide a learning component in day care centers. Remember, most of our children will spend an average of 12,000 hours of their most formative years in child care or a custodial environment. SECAC also provides help, where it is needed, with health care, workforce training or even additional educational opportunities for the parents themselves. Our next generation of leaders are today in a childcare facility. Mississippi is looking to the horizon to make sure they have the skills needed to succeed.

You should know, Mississippi spends almost \$97 million per year on federally funded day care through the Department of Human Services and \$199 million of federal funds on Head Start centers across the state.

Jobs for Mississippi Graduates spends another \$3.4 million on the state's only dropout prevention program. Last year, \$800,000 of JMG's total came from the General Fund. Much of the remainder was raised from private donations from concerned corporations such as AT&T and Entergy.

I will ask you to return funding for Jobs for Mississippi Graduates to 2016 levels to help increase graduation rates to the national average and build our workforce. Over 90 percent of these at-risk students graduate, and 80 percent of those find jobs or go on to higher education.

Combined, these programs represent more than \$300 million in public education investment that is rarely — if ever — reported. It is

time we begin to maximize the use of these federal and private funds and demand evidence-based results for every taxpayer dollar.

It should be no surprise to anyone that I am a strong supporter of updating the adequate education funding formula. I believe it should serve as a road map to success for every child in Mississippi's public schools. It should not be a political prop used to allege someone's failure to support education. That old trick hasn't worked in the past, and it won't work this year. By the way, most of us want more than just an adequate education system in Mississippi. We want a great one.

One thing I am certain of, that greatness will not be possible without every classroom having the right teacher. We must do all in our power to allow good teachers to become great ones. This should include continuing to fund at the highest level Teach for America and National Board Certified Teachers. Data proves these dedicated teachers, in most every instance, produce better results. We have

many great teachers across the state and I know, like me, you are very proud of them all.

This session, I will ask you again to expand school choice for certain categories of children, offering special needs scholarships to even more students. I continue to believe parents should have the freedom to use their tax dollars to send their child to the school of their choice, not one decided by the government.

I want to thank you again for creating the Department of Child Protection Services to attend to our foster children. Nothing we do here will be more important than caring for them. I am forever grateful to former Supreme Court Justice Jess Dickinson for assuming leadership of the agency.

I will remind you that Jesus admonished the Disciples, “Let the little children come to me, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” I will implore you to provide for the least of these again this year as the children now come unto all of us.

Our community colleges are the center of workforce development. Thousands of Mississippians have been taught the skills that will allow them to get a good job and live the American dream right here in Mississippi.

We can do more to help our community colleges bridge the skills gap that exists today. There is little doubt our employers consider an educated and skilled workforce as their top priority. To meet this demand, we have targeted certain industries and emphasized training for these needs. For example, we have created a furniture academy in northeast Mississippi, and two coding academies have started in Jackson and Columbus. Our community colleges and universities continue their work to provide the skilled labor needed in our robust automotive and aerospace industries.

With your help, we have invested millions of dollars from the Mississippi Works Fund. That revenue has been generated by savings in Mississippi's unemployment compensation due to record growth in

employment. This has been a great resource when recruiting new industries and expanding our existing ones. But, we must do more.

I will ask you to create the Mississippi Works Scholarship Fund to provide more opportunity for community college students who qualify for targeted workforce training. We must increase our workforce and we must do it now!

Working together, we have also built a new world-class medical school at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. It will train the physicians so desperately needed in a state underserved by medical professionals. Because of your help, we are well on our way to achieving our goal of adding 1,000 new physicians by 2025.

The medical profession as an economic driver has become a reality in Mississippi. Physicians today are responsible for over 51,000 jobs and have a total economic output of over \$8 billion annually.

Our beloved Blair E. Batson Children's Hospital in Jackson has announced a \$180 million expansion. The medical corridor I have long

hoped to establish is becoming a reality. It stretches from the Medical Mall in Jackson to new clinics, medical specialty centers and even medical device manufacturers located just across the river in Rankin County.

With the leadership of the First Lady, UMMC and the Department of Human Services, we will soon begin construction on a long-term palliative care unit in Jackson's medical zone. The center will offer a home-like treatment facility for the medically fragile children who are now living at Batson. This will be a life-altering experience for those patients and their families.

If there is ever a mission of mercy we can achieve, it is this palliative care medical home for the children of Blair E. Batson.

We have an additional opportunity in Jackson's medical zone. I believe real potential exists to move the Department of Public Safety headquarters. We have a good location in Rankin County near the state crime lab. The current building, located in the heart of the medical

corridor, was constructed in the 1970s and is in deplorable condition. A new medical conference center could be constructed in its place. This facility would become the gateway to the medical corridor.

A medical city is rising out of the Piney Woods of Harrison County, complete with a new pharmacy school, a nursing and simulation center, and the National Obesity and Diabetes Research Center. It is the result of a partnership between William Carey University and the Cleveland Clinic, one of the top-rated medical entities in the world. This partnership at Tradition will help us fight obesity and the diabetes often associated with it. With the help of the Cleveland Clinic, this is a fight I expect us to win.

But, even with all this progress, the health of our population continues to lag behind most of the nation. Unfortunately, many of these problems are of our own making. We have an overwhelming tendency to be our own worst enemy when it comes to obesity, substance abuse and sexually transmitted diseases. If we are to solve

these problems, we must face the uncomfortable facts, then take the necessary steps to assist those suffering while encouraging them to be more responsible for their own preventative health care.

These poor health choices have resulted in higher mortality rates and treatment of even more disabling illnesses. Consequently, Medicaid costs have continued to increase, straining our state and federal budgets. Frankly, we have spent far too many years believing that funding for Medicaid is unlimited and should be unquestioned. We must change that way of thinking. We must also insist that positive health care outcomes be the first responsibility of the Medicaid recipients. Patients, providers and managed care companies should realize a new normal will exist from this day forward. Our goal will be to prevent poor health care from getting worse, and to get Medicaid patients well.

As you know, I have requested a workforce requirement for able-bodied adults from the Center of Medicaid and Medicare Services. This

is not, as some would have you believe, a punitive action aimed at recipients. It will actually help this population reap the rewards of a good job, and one day receive health care coverage from their employer, not the state or federal government.

Recently, I tasked the Department of Human Services and Medicaid to work together to identify needs of beneficiaries and address them in a more proactive and effective manner. I have contemplated moving Medicaid eligibility to DHS, something done in 46 other states. However, with the change in leadership at the Division of Medicaid, I now believe it would be prudent to delay such a transfer until a complete review of its benefits to providers and beneficiaries can be completed.

I believe with the current leadership of these two agencies, a seamless service model can be implemented.

We must not only manage Medicaid for today's needs, but assure sustainability for future demands. Those in extended care facilities

should not be told we cannot continue to fund their existence. If we manage the system properly and eliminate the waste, fraud and abuse, we can assure a better quality of life for those truly in need. Your assistance in properly framing the Medicaid Technical Amendments Act will certainly make all the difference in maintaining an effective and sustainable Medicaid program for years to come.

I am honored to report to you that Mississippi has completed an amazing, year-long celebration of our Bicentennial. A record 23 million visitors came to Mississippi. Hundreds of events took place across the state. Many included music, the arts and educational opportunities. The grand finale of this once-in-a-lifetime celebration was the opening of the Museum of Mississippi History and the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum. I am thankful the president of the United States of America came to Jackson, Mississippi, to honor the opening of our two great museums.

I am told some 20 million people watched the president's tour and remarks that day at the Civil Rights Museum. It seemed the entire world was watching as Mississippi told our own story. To quote the iconic Myrlie Evers, "I was proud of the state of my birth." Myrlie's kind and gentle soul was captured in the inspiring speech she delivered that cold and snowy day on LeFleur's Bluff.

At that remarkable event, Mississippians of every color and persuasion came together with an understanding of the tragedies and violence perpetrated on innocent people who simply wanted to exercise their right to vote. But there was more than our collective condemnation of the racial atrocities on exhibit in the museum. There existed a feeling of mutual reconciliation and joy in the realization that this day, at long last, had become a reality.

The museums display thousands of years of our state's history. They tell the story of our original and first inhabitants, the proud and

strong Native Americans. They recount the tragic Civil War, and celebrate our iconic athletes and world-renowned entertainers.

There was no effort to conceal the transgressions of the past. The horror of slavery, the indecency of Jim Crow and the dark days of segregation are laid bare, for all the world to see. But, it all lies in a museum — put away, we hope to never be witnessed again.

All of us participating that day experienced something very special. The anger and fear fell away, and political agendas melted with the morning snow. We saw what Mississippi could be when our common bonds overpower our differences and we accept the reality that we can disagree without being disagreeable. We peered into Mississippi's soul, and saw that it was cleansed of any deceit or malice. The soul of Mississippi now contained a love for all its people, its traditions and most of all, our future.

As my dear friend and Civil Rights legend Dr. John Perkins said, "It all comes down to love, and love will always be our final fight." Ladies

and gentlemen, please welcome to this chamber my dear friend and someone who loves Mississippi, Dr. John Perkins.

Each year I have asked you to set aside your political agendas and focus only on what would be best for Mississippi — understanding that we may have different paths to a better tomorrow, but remaining hopeful that we can at least agree on the direction and destination for our state.

This year the plea to work together will be no different. However, I do have a renewed faith in the outcome. I have seen the results of our mutual efforts and know they far surpass the perceived and temporary gain of political posturing.

I have witnessed two world-class museums open in the Capital City. I have seen dramatic improvements in Mississippi's public education system. I have worked with you to turn our state into a leader in health care and economic development. When we press forward together, we can, and have, achieved greatness.

If Mississippi is to make the permanent leap from good to great, we must all have a dedication to achievement. We must inform our people that self-destructive behavior is contagious and can cause an entire state to struggle. They must know that individual responsibility will guarantee better outcomes for each of them and collective success for all of us.

After 200 years of trials and tribulations, wars and reconstruction, storms and recessions, we continue to persevere. With your help, I believe this legislative session can be our best ever. It can be the year we come together in a common bond of commitment to our people's best interest. I promise you my door will always be open. I will always listen to your concerns and be unoffended by our mutual disagreements.

In closing, I wish to thank you again for this opportunity to reflect on the state of our state and rededicate myself to being governor for all our people. Now, let us go from this appointed time and place,

committed to serving the people of Mississippi and making this wonderful land an even better place for tomorrow's generation.

May God bless you, the Great State of Mississippi and the United States of America.