

Similarly, our state will never excel and succeed to our fullest potential if parts of our state are "flat" – or not performing. If we are bold and prepare for the race in front of us - South Carolina will beat the competition every time.

Months ago, I had a conversation with the district superintendent of one of our rural counties. Education suffers there, and once grown, young people are leaving. There is nothing for them there, except family.

Asked what the impact would be of a manufacturing company seeking 500 workers for a new plant in her county, which has none, she said - "It would change everything!"

That is what we intend to do: Change everything. My pledge to you today is that the words "Corridor of Shame" will soon be a fading memory.

This will require a state-backed economic development commitment to bring jobs to these communities by providing infrastructure in rural areas - not only in water, sewer and roads, but in school buildings and facilities. This will provide the spark. We must be bold.

Being perceived as weak in education is not good. But, being perceived as not committed to fixing it is disastrous. We will fix it and we will keep winning.

Coupled with the empowerment of investment - both private and public - envisioned by Jack Kemp twenty years ago and brought to reality by Senator Tim Scott with the creation of opportunity zones – we now have additional power to unleash the free market and public investment – to defeat the enemy of progress known as poverty.

We must also recruit and build the best team of teachers and educators in the country. This will require imagination and determination.

It will require providing South Carolina's teachers with compensation that is competitive – in the southeast and across the nation.

We must also embark on providing bold reform: Reforming education funding. Making our schools safe with school resource officers and mental health counselors. Restoring old-fashioned discipline in the classroom. Common sense relief for our teachers from testing, forms and paperwork. Consolidating school districts and giving our state superintendent the authority to remove and replace non-productive school boards.

Over the years in the education debate, the riddle about "the chicken or the egg" always comes up.

Which comes first? Is it the strong family, the job or the education? We don't know. But we do know that if we lack any one of the three – strong families, jobs or education – we will not have the other two.

In short, we know that our success in today's world-wide economic competition depends on our intellectual capacity, training, research and development, knowledge, innovation and imagination. In a word, on our brain power. That is why South Carolina's commitment to education must be second to none in the United States.