

Governor's Column – 01/20/02

In last week's State of the State address, I spoke at length about the work we've done for high-quality, good-paying jobs to the people of Mississippi. A great deal of effort and energy has been put into bringing new jobs to the state and protecting existing jobs.

Some tremendous work has been done in the face of a national recession. More than 21,500 jobs have been created since January 2000, along with \$6.5 billion in new investments. The Nissan plant alone is bringing 4,000 new jobs; the suppliers moving to Mississippi to support Nissan are bringing at least another 2,000.

The Nissan project has the highest public profile of the work we've done. But for people in other parts of the state, it may not be the most important work we've done for jobs. In Greenwood, the opening of the Milwaukee Electric Tools plant, with its investment of almost \$2 million and 200 jobs has a great impact. So does the \$6 million investment by Service Zone in Starkville with its 600 jobs and the expansion of Chevron by 73 jobs and \$4 million in Picayune.

These jobs help provide the security that we all seek as a basic premise of the American dream.

A great deal of work has been done to put more Mississippians in good jobs. And while we have had successes during a recession, the current condition of the national economy has also caused some setbacks.

We've seen plants close and jobs eliminated. It's a difficult situation for our economy and our people. In some cases, plants are closing to relocate to areas where they can better control costs through a less expensive labor pool.

In other cases, such as the recent closing of the Burlington plant, the jobs are simply gone because of the economic situation. The Burlington closure means the loss of 850 jobs for the people of Stonewall and Clarke County, as well as the elimination of over 1,000 jobs in Mexico. Job loss isn't happening just because companies want to move somewhere less expensive.

Plant closings present difficult situations for our communities. When they happen, I send out our Rapid Response Team. This team, made up of representatives of local and state agencies, was created to react to a plant closing in the same way other emergency agencies react to a natural disaster or industrial accident. The team exists to make a difference and to make it as soon as possible.

The focus of their work is on working with employees to ease the transition by providing resources and services to meet specific needs, such as unemployment insurance, financial counseling, job search and job placement, and training. Employers receive assistance in easing the pain of the lay-off process, transition planning, meeting federal requirements, and maintaining their corporate image.

The Rapid Response Team has worked to make a difference in Jackson County and in Winston County. They will work to make a difference in Clarke County and any other county in Mississippi that needs their help.

The national recession has taken away, for many of our people, their opportunity to work. I have the opportunity to work, and along with the Rapid Response Team, I'm going to take it. There's too much at stake here.

Now more than ever, we can't afford not to invest in Mississippi and her people.