

Governor's Column – 10/14/01

### **Mississippi's Economic Development Efforts Strengthened with Rohrlack**

Last week, I named Robert J. Rohrlack, Jr., as the new executive director of the Mississippi Development Authority. I made this announcement after a two-week nationwide search to bring the very best economic developer I could find to build on our successes here at home.

Bob Rohrlack has all the qualifications we need to continue building Mississippi. After receiving his undergraduate degree at Troy State University, he earned a Certified Economic Developer designation after completing a three-year program at the University of Oklahoma.

And, his greatest credential comes from right here in Mississippi. Bob Rohrlack was the first Certified Economic Developer in the nation to receive a master's degree in economic development, and he did the coursework at our very own University of Southern Mississippi.

Bob Rohrlack brings an impressive track record with him, a record built over the past sixteen years. He was recognized in 1990 by Site Selection and Industry Development International magazine as an Outstanding Young Leader in economic development – a strong endorsement for someone not even thirty years old. He also has experience in working with Mississippi developers, and they are extremely pleased he is coming here.

I look forward to working with him on the issues of importance to Mississippi's economic growth, and I am confident we will see tremendous results. His grasp of the issues affecting our state is strong. He is well aware of the fact that Mississippi has been a leader and an innovator in its economic development efforts, particularly with the Advantage Mississippi Initiative passed last year. As he said last week, the Advantage Mississippi program is setting the tone for the rest of the country and other states are working to duplicate it.

The key for the Advantage Mississippi Initiative, he has said, is that we have planned our work, and now we have to work our plan. This means making the most of every opportunity to bring communities all over the state into the process and make them part of the work that builds into success.

His goal is to bring quality jobs to each of those communities, and effectively demonstrate the strength of our workforce and the ability of our people to take on new challenges. From the largest cities to the smallest towns, Mississippi and its people have something to offer; Bob Rohrlack's job will be to make sure that message is shared around the country and around the world.

There will also be a strengthened commitment to existing businesses and industries within the state. We will get their roots deeper into the rich Mississippi soil, deeper into the communities they serve, so they will have more than just a financial interest at stake. By keeping companies here and demonstrating the quality of life and quality of business in Mississippi, we can help ensure a strong foundation for other companies looking to invest in our state.

As we deal with an economy that has been struggling for over a year and is now showing the effects of war, the work of economic development becomes more difficult. We have to work hard to keep companies open and operating. Even in these tight financial times, we must also work to attract new business and industry; if we are on their radar screen during the tough times, we know we have a chance to bring them in during the flush times. We have to let the world know that we are still open for business and eager for business.

It's all about thinking ahead, thinking fast, and thinking outside the box.

Bob Rohrlack can do that. He has the negotiation skills, the management skills, and a broad view of what is considered by businesses when they look at moving into a new

area. Mississippi has so much potential in its people and its places, and now we have a new member of the team to help reach that potential.

Welcome to Mississippi, Bob.