

*Remarks for the
Governor's Conference on Tourism
Bay St. Louis
January 30, 2003*

It is a pleasure to be here today in Bay St. Louis to address an industry that is vitally important to our state.

Tourism is economic development, and I know you have all worked hard to make tourism the 6 billion dollar industry that it is in our state today. I appreciate the work that you do to keep 93,000 Mississippians employed and millions of visitors to this state happy.

This last year, I had the opportunity to work with the Mississippi Development Authority's tourism division, as we launched our new tag line, "Mississippi, Feels Like Coming Home." That really says it all. You are the ones responsible for making our guests feel like they are at home. And, it's up to you to make sure that they enjoy their experience while they are here.

Travel and tourism is an important industry. It is good business, and it's great for Mississippi. And, as our second largest retail industry, you are vitally important to our economic climate.

But, your industry is not just about economics. It's also about culture and entertainment, art and history, diversity and landscape.

Where could you find a more beautiful place to travel, have fun and relax than in Mississippi? From our rolling hills of the Delta to here on the coast, from our great cities and towns, to our festivals every weekend, Mississippi is a great experience.

I'm proud of the role you have played in making travel and tourism in our state successful. You're selling the best product in the world. You make it possible for people all over the world to discover Mississippi. Visitors may come for the Blues experience, golf, a business conference, or just to enjoy our beauty and heritage.

But when they do come to Mississippi, you are there to welcome them and to show them that we truly are the 'Hospitality State'.

I recognize that travel and tourism is a partnership - a partnership of industry and labor. I understand that it takes thousands of our smaller businesses working hard every day to keep this industry strong. My administration is committed to our tourism efforts, and we'll do everything we can to keep help this industry grow.

I pledge to give you my support in any way I can. And, I ask for your help in making our state a better place for our visitors, and most important of all, the people who call Mississippi home.

Tourism not only brings dollars to Mississippi's economy, but it also opens doors for the economic enhancement of our state. You have made tremendous strides these past few years, and through your continued commitment our state will prosper.

Throughout my entire career, I have asked people across the state to join me in working for a better Mississippi.

We have the resources. We have the people with the desire to shape our state's place in the world. But we must continue to devote the resources necessary to help our state succeed.

It's important that we build an atmosphere conducive to growth and the expansion of our existing businesses. And, we must continue to recruit more good-paying jobs for our citizens.

We can do this through education. Education is one of the smartest investments we can make, and education must remain a priority. Good schools attract good jobs, which build good communities.

Three years ago, I made a pledge to the people of Mississippi – unprecedented goals, unparalleled progress. We've found solutions to old problems because we dared to say 'We Can.'

Let's be willing to dare again as we move forward together.

Through your efforts, not only do Mississippians benefit from your profession, but so do our visitors. I commend you and thank you for having me here today.