

*Remarks for the
Delta Summit
July 5, 2001*

Good morning, and thank you for being here today. I appreciate you agreeing to serve on this Delta Summit Steering Committee – your dedication and commitment to the people and promise of the Mississippi Delta will play a major role in the success of our work here.

The Delta has a strange and unique history. It has some of the richest land in the nation but some of the poorest people.

It has produced artists in music, literature, acting, painting and folk art who are known around the world; but we have so much work to do regarding basic needs such as education, health care and economic development.

We are all aware of the details of this region, just as we are all aware of its problems -- and that's why we're here today.

This Delta Summit will lay the foundation for some exciting work ahead of us, work that will challenge and focus our energies on some problems that, while daunting, are not insurmountable.

As members of the Steering Committee on this effort, your charge is to help craft a strategy to overcome those problems.

I want us to work together and re-examine the people and the problems of the Delta. I want us to work together and promote the region and its resources.

Let's talk about what can be done in economic and workforce development, in housing, and education. What can be done to improve the infrastructure to help attract new business?

What can be done to better utilize legislation that's already on the books, such as the Advantage Mississippi initiative we passed in last year's special session?

How can we improve the visibility of the Medical Education Scholarship Program, so we can bring more doctors to the rural areas where they are so desperately needed?

The past few months haven't brought much good news as far as industry in the Delta. Issaquena County alone has seen three employers close, with another scheduled to close in September.

Modern Line in Sunflower County started downsizing just two days ago.

Baldwin Piano Company has closed, with a loss of about 300 jobs.

These are specific examples – and there are more – of the depth of the work ahead of us; and they are also opportunities for us to make new things happen.

Many times, out of our problems, we can create opportunities. There's an old adage that says that "problems are opportunities in work clothes."

There is great promise here. I want us to make it happen. Let's get our work clothes on and get started.

Thank you.

