

*Remarks for the
Delta Regional Authority Press Conference
July 11, 2002*

Good afternoon. We're here today to announce a great boost to our efforts to build the towns and communities of the Mississippi Delta. This area has needs as great as its potential, and we are in a position to make a difference.

A total of \$4.5 million has been made available to the state through the Delta Regional Authority, and applications for funding are now being taken through my office. Projects are prioritized in the following areas: basic public infrastructure, transportation infrastructure, business development, and job training and employment-related education.

The Delta Regional Authority, as an organization, is relatively new – but the issues before it are as deeply rooted as the history and culture of the region it serves. For generations, the Mississippi Delta region has lagged in education, employment and infrastructure.

Now, we're working to change that.

The charge to the DRA from Congress is, in short, to produce a development plan, assess the needs and assets of the region, and encourage public and private participation in economic development projects.

By investing in this region, we will make a difference for generations to come. That's the purpose of the funding we're announcing today. When we invest in infrastructure, when we invest in our people, we are going to make a difference.

As I've said, the needs are great. Our investments must range from the most basic to the most technical. The infrastructure of roads and power are as important as the infrastructure of wireless communication. The transportation needs of Highway 61 are as vital as the transportation needs of the new information superhighway.

I want to take this opportunity today to introduce two individuals who will help us follow through on this effort.

Armerita Tell, Director of Citizen and Community Services in my office, serves as my alternate to the DRA. She is a native of the Delta, from Shelby, and she has an intimate knowledge of the needs and, just as importantly, the people of the region.

Jim Owen is going to serve as State Director of the Delta Regional Authority. A native of New Albany, Jim brings a wealth of experience from both the public and private sectors to this job. He is currently in his fifth term as Vice Mayor and Alderman at Large for New Albany, so he is well aware of the unique needs of the Mississippi Delta region.

We have good news today. There are good people serving the people of the Delta and the Delta Regional Authority, and funds are available to make the necessary investments in the area.

Applications for this funding are available through Armerita Tell in my office, but it's important to note that the final decision on funding is made by the DRA. We will be accepting applications through Friday, July 26, so I want to encourage interested parties to contact my office as soon as possible.

We're building the Mississippi Delta region, and today's announcement is another section of the foundation for its future.

We'll be glad to take any questions.