

*Remarks to the
Gulf Coast Real Estate Awards Banquet
August 28, 2001*

Good morning, and thank you, Ree, for your invitation to be here with you tonight. I appreciate the opportunity to visit with you about the great things happening in Mississippi.

As governor, I spend a good bit of time talking with people about our state, and it's always interesting to hear their opinions.

(perhaps tell story about recent flight to Washington)

Tonight, I want to touch on three important issues for the State of Mississippi – education, economic development and health care.

Each of these has an impact on our everyday lives and businesses, affecting everything from where we go to school, where we shop, which doctor we go to, and yes, where we choose to live.

First, we have done something fantastic here in Mississippi. We have made a commitment to our teachers, one that says that we are going to pay them as the professionals they are.

The work that's been done in the legislature will carry Mississippi, over the next several years, from 49th to 19th in the nation in terms of teacher pay.

And our work has been noticed – the day after the special session in July, the New York Times ran an editorial about what we had done. In short, the editorial said that Mississippi had put together the type of package that New York still couldn't match.

That's a great thing for Mississippi.

In fact, I was recently doing a taping for CNN's "Inside Politics," along with Governor George Pataki of New York. The taping was being uplinked to a satellite feed for CNN to edit and air later that day.

I was prepared to begin at the scheduled time, but ended up waiting about another 15 minutes. When the explanation for the delay was made, I had to chuckle – New York couldn't get its equipment to work.

But, sitting in a small studio in Jackson, we were perfectly connected and ready to go.

Mississippi can compete.

Another great technology story for the state is the “Computers in the Classroom” initiative currently underway. This fall, we will be halfway to our goal of placing an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state – and on track to be the first state in the nation to do this.

As our students prepares for a future in an economy that's borderless, wireless and global, this technology will make a huge difference for them.

That's a great thing for Mississippi.

The economic development outlook for the state is good, despite the sluggish national economy.

You are all aware of the Nissan plant currently under construction just north of Jackson. So, I'm going to tell you some other success stories in Mississippi. They may not get as much press as a certain auto plant, but they are just as important.

Let me start by going back one year, to August of 2000. In a special session, the legislature overwhelmingly passed the Advantage Mississippi Initiative – and the way business is done in Mississippi changed.

This initiative created a number of new programs and incentives, all designed to help the state retain existing industry and attract new industry.

For example, the Advantage Jobs program offers incentives to companies who bring quality jobs to Mississippi. But, in order to qualify, a business is required to pay an annual salary of 125 percent of the state or county average, provide a health plan, and supply a specific minimum number of jobs.

The end result is new industry, new jobs,
and new revenue for the state.

Advantage Mississippi created eight
regional offices to assist in better service to
rural communities. With these offices in
place, we are better positioned to attract
industry to areas that before may never have
had a chance to compete.

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That's what we're doing in Mississippi.

Listen to what we did in fiscal year 2001, the year just ended. In that year, there were 195 new business locations announced throughout the state. Nearly 12,000 new jobs were created, with an investment of over \$2.5 billion.

Now, those numbers did include Nissan.

But let me take that plant out and let's see what remains – 194 new business locations, almost 8,000 new jobs, and over \$1.5 billion invested in Mississippi.

That's good news.

As part of our effort to compete in the global marketplace I mentioned earlier, we have built a network of foreign offices to support the growth of Mississippi exports.

Today, we have offices in Santiago, Chile; London; Singapore; and Yokohama, Japan. Through their support of our products and services, Mississippi companies are reaping the benefit.

Last year, these offices generated nearly 2,000 trade leads, as well as providing 185 foreign clients with on-site assistance here in the state.

But, not every economic development success story has to have investments in the billions and thousands of new jobs. Just ask Charley Dumas, the mayor of Prentiss, Mississippi.

He's got a new business there in town, a business based out of Michigan, that re-engineers cellular phones. The jobs, about 140 of them, don't call for unskilled labor, and start at about \$8.50 per hour. The technicians can make as much as \$21 per hour.

For Prentiss, Mississippi, that's a major step in the right direction.

I was in Ripley, Mississippi, last week for our first "Capital for a Day" program.

While I was there, I went to a press conference announcing the expansion of a business in Ripley.

The business is called EcoWater Systems, and they are the largest manufacturer of water treatment systems in the world. They make the filter systems that many of us have on our kitchen sinks at home.

Their manufacturing plant in Ripley is one of only two plants they have in the world. Keep in mind they are the largest manufacturer in the world.

What great news for small Ripley, way up north in Tippah County.

One week ago today, I traveled around the state promoting our newest innovation in worker training and employer recruitment. The Workforce Investment Network, or WIN, as we call it, has established six Job Centers around the state.

These centers provide “one-stop” shopping for both employers and hopeful employees. People looking for work can get information from the internet and from staff, and they also have access to an array of job training opportunities.

Employers have a central location where they can post job openings, interview potential employees, and recruit for expanding businesses.

We are also taking an aggressive role in setting up job fairs in areas where businesses may have moved away. Just this past June, we held one in Jackson County, which has had some of its businesses move out recently.

Over 5,000 people went to that job fair. More than 1,000 job interviews were held on-site, and nearly 600 people went home with jobs that day.

It's estimated that another 950 people will get jobs based on their applications and interviews from the job fair.

There are great things happening in Mississippi, and it's making a difference.

That's good for economic development.

I have also proposed using a portion of our annual tobacco payments – not the principal in the trust fund, but a portion of the payments – to maximize federal matching dollars for health care.

We have the opportunity to capture over \$400 million in federal funds to use for the health care needs of the people of Mississippi.

Just imagine what can be done with that level of funding. We can improve access to rural health care for those who desperately need it.

We can provide screenings for cancer and heart disease to a population at risk of these threats to their health and livelihood.

We can provide ambulance services in areas of the state where such service is, today, just a hope and a dream.

There's no reason why the people of Mississippi shouldn't have every opportunity for quality health care, and we can make that happen.

We make it happen by being creative, by making our own opportunities, by thinking in new ways. Because in the end, the health of our people is a reflection on the health of our economy.

Businesses look for a strong, able-bodied workforce. Communities need a good quality of life, one that begins with a good quality of health.

These things are good for economic development.

I'm excited about what's happening here.

We have done, and we are now doing, great things in economic development – and I never even had to mention the auto plant being built just north of here.

Thank you.