

*Clarion-Ledger column for 8/12/01*

### **Meetings with Congress and Governors Offer Opportunities for Mississippi**

If there was ever any question about whether or not Mississippi should have an office in Washington, D.C., the work of the past week should lay that question to rest.

By having a satellite office, we are very much attuned to the work being done in Congress and the administration and how it could affect our state. This allows us to closely follow legislation and, if necessary, get involved as much as we can to ensure Mississippi comes out ahead. Many other states have offices in Washington, and it is vitally important for us to be a part of that group. We simply can't afford to miss being involved with what's happening at a national level.

We are also able to work more closely with our delegation in Washington to make the most of federal programs and federal dollars for the state. The relationship between the two capitals of Jackson and Washington must be kept strong and vibrant.

I had the opportunity to meet with our congressional delegation, along with some of the key members of Congress during a recent trip up there. They are well aware of the issues that are important to our people and our state, and I appreciate the opportunity to meet with them personally on those issues.

In addition to our relationship with leaders in Congress, it is important to have strong ties with other governors around the country.

Last week, the National Governors Association held its annual meeting in Providence, Rhode Island. This meeting brought the governors of all fifty states and U. S. territories together to discuss the issues that affect our states.

Education was the issue that dominated most discussions, and other states were eager to discuss what has been happening in Mississippi. The work done by the Legislature during the special session has captured attention across the country, and we should be proud of the accomplishment of the special session.

During my time in Washington, and again at the NGA meeting, I called for mandatory federal funding of special education legislation currently under review in Washington, funding that could mean millions of dollars for Mississippi. Congress committed to funding 40 percent of this special education legislation when it passed in 1975 but, in reality, has never funded more than 15 percent. I will continue to work with our delegation and members of Congress, along with my fellow governors, to make this happen. As a member of the NGA Committee on Human Resources (which covers all health and education issues) and the NGA Executive Committee, I am able to work even more closely to positively affect legislation that impacts Mississippi.

Working for the best interests of our great state means building relationships at every level, from county clerks to governors to members of Congress. Issues that come out of Washington have the potential to change the way we run our government, our businesses and even our personal lives, so having the ability to call on these relationships can make a great difference.

Mississippi is becoming a strong player at the national level, thanks to the work being done because of our ties around the state, the country and Washington. There have been missed opportunities in the past because Mississippi wasn't visible or active when it was needed. We cannot let that happen again.

I have talked before about how we create our own opportunities. The events of the past weeks are more examples of just how true this is. By taking a proactive stance, we can continue to make a difference for the people of Mississippi.