

Governor's Column – 03/03/02

For the past several months, whenever someone has asked me about the proposed Hyundai plant, my response has been “it is our policy not to discuss economic development projects.”

One of the basic principles of economic development is discretion. Businesses looking to locate or expand within our borders have made it clear they appreciate our ability to work in confidence. In fact, this discretion was noted by Nissan as a positive sign of the work of the Mississippi Development Authority and others involved in the project.

This is part of the trust we work to develop between the state and a potential business or industry, in large part because that trust will need to remain long after a business locates within our borders. Steve Kitson, a Hyundai spokesman, was quoted in January as saying the company values “silence and discretion” regarding potential projects, especially since “it’s hard to tie the mouth of a politician.”

We were one of four final states Hyundai met with, and that in itself is a great testament to our economic development efforts. There were 46 other states watching what we were doing here. Mississippi is on the radar screen of the automotive industry, and many others. We’re a force to be reckoned with.

Almost two years ago, Mississippi was the focus of worldwide attention with the announcement that Nissan would build a \$930 million plant outside Canton. Today, the Nissan plant is taking shape, suppliers are moving in and building their facilities, and our people are preparing to begin new jobs in an exciting industry.

Along with the Nissan announcement, the Hyundai project demonstrates to the world that Mississippi can compete with anyone when it comes to creating jobs and attracting investments. Our team worked hard to win this plant, traveling to South Korea on three separate occasions to meet with Hyundai officials and convince them to locate their new plant here.

Not every economic development project we work on is worth \$1 billion, like Hyundai, but every project is important to our state and our people. Every project means a job, an investment in a community, and a chance to make a better life.

There are examples all over the state where we're rolling up our sleeves and getting things done. In DeSoto County, Alcoa was looking to close a facility and phase out more than 200 jobs. We were able to convince them to not only keep their plant open, but to invest \$16 million in the facility and eventually provide jobs for 500 people.

That's good news for DeSoto County, and it's even better news for the people of Mississippi.

In the end, our work depends on a shared vision and a shared voice for what we want to accomplish. I remain committed to working for Mississippi, to telling the rest of the world what we have to offer, and to sharing the vision and the voice.

We made the final four this year, and that's something for us all to be proud of. It also means we're going to work even harder to win next time.