

Governor's Column – 5/19/02

The message of Mississippi has been heard loud and clear on the other side of the world.

During last week's economic development mission to Japan, I met with dozens of government officials and private industry leaders. Their response to the message I brought to them was strong, and sent a clear signal that Mississippi is taken seriously by the global business community.

It's important to do everything possible to create quality, high-paying jobs for the people of the state, and that includes traveling to other countries to let them know what we have to offer.

It's good, though, to be back home. There's no better feeling than coming back to a place that's familiar, comfortable and welcoming. It's something we all know. It's in the sights, the sounds, and the smells.

We experienced it as children, heading back into the house after being in school or playing all day. We feel it as adults, returning from a long business trip or after a particularly hard day at work.

It's a feeling people around the world know, but haven't really experienced, until they come to see us.

It's time for the rest of the world to come home to Mississippi.

The new tag line for the Mississippi Development Authority's Division of Tourism is simple, and says it all: "Mississippi: Feels Like Coming Home."

For those of us who have grown up here or lived in Mississippi for any length of time, we understand how true this new advertisement is. We can appreciate the smell of the woods on a fall morning, the taste of true southern "comfort food," and the gentle comfort of visiting with friends and family on the front porch.

We're focusing on sharing this feeling with others.

Since September 11, the importance of tourism has been raised to a new level. Now, more than ever, we have the opportunity to emphasize and promote tourism as a major industry in Mississippi.

Tourism brings in more than \$6 billion per year to Mississippi. And, with more than 94,000 jobs in the tourism industry, it is obviously an important part of our business community.

Last year, more than 34 million people visited the state. Those people left with a new appreciation for our history, our culture and our entertainment venues. I don't have any doubt those people will want to return to visit again.

Our work now is to convince those who haven't visited that it's worth their while.

You'll be seeing and hearing more about this new promotional effort in the coming weeks and months. Listen to your radio for a great new song written just for this promotion, a song that really captures what Mississippi's about. Raphael Semmes, Jesse Robinson and Jewel Bass – three Mississippi originals – combine to paint a picture of the state in words and music.

We're blessed to live in this great state, and it's important for us to share what we have with others. Mississippi is familiar, comfortable and welcoming. Mississippi is full of the sights, the sounds and the smells people enjoy and relate to.

There's nothing quite like coming home.