

*Column for the
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Nearly 150 years ago, Charles Dickens wrote his classic novel “A Tale of Two Cities.” The book opens with the well-known lines, “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

Those words were used to describe the political situations in 18th century England and France – but can just as easily be used to illustrate the environment in which southern states operate in the 21st century.

Many of the challenges we face today in the American South have been with us for generations – but we are taking a new approach to those challenges, an approach which calls us to turn them into opportunities for our states and for our region.

It’s been said you can’t run a business without taking risks, and at every level, the constantly changing dynamics of the economy demand creative thinking and innovative planning. But, the rewards of meeting these demands can be great.

In the face of a national recession, we’re busy creating jobs in Mississippi. We’re doing it through innovative programs like the Advantage Mississippi Initiative. We’re doing it by convincing new companies to move here and old companies to stay, and the numbers tell the story.

Nearly 36,000 new jobs have been created in the past two years, and 17,000 of those have come through the expansion of existing businesses.

The latest figures from the Mississippi Development Authority show that, just from the beginning of this year, 133 businesses have announced expansions that will generate over 4,500 new jobs.

As governor, I have to play a lot of different roles – but the most exciting role is as chief salesman for this state. It’s a role that gives me the opportunity to share the story of Mississippi with companies around the world, and it’s a story companies want to hear.

They also want to hear stories about reports like the one recently issued by the Small Business Survival Committee, listing Mississippi as one of the top 10 states in the nation for small business survival. We’ve got more than 54,000 small businesses in this state, many of them minority-owned, and I’m proud of the role they play in building Mississippi.

The chief economist of the Committee had this to say: “When it gets its policy mix right, a state is well-positioned to compete both nationally and globally, with policies geared to help economic growth accelerate, incomes increase, and job creation improve.”

That's what companies around the world are hearing about Mississippi. They're not listening to those who try to say we're not a good place to do business. They want to hear about the work being done by people like you, who have demonstrated how business can be done in the state.

There's an old saying that the challenges of hard work affect people in different ways – some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their noses, and some don't turn up at all.

Our sleeves are turned up and we're ready to work.