

*Remarks to the  
Community Development Foundation  
Tupelo, MS  
October 5, 2001*

Thank you, Aubrey, for that introduction, and let me take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election as president-elect of the American Bankers Association. It is a well-deserved move for you and I am proud of the work you do for Mississippi.

This is a challenging time for our state and our country. The terrorist attacks of September 11 hit us and hit us hard. The market has fluctuated wildly since the attacks.

President Bush has encouraged the public to return to business as usual regarding spending habits and purchases. I have echoed this call along with my fellow governors, and visited New York and Washington last weekend in an effort to promote commercial travel and tourism.

Now, the Bush administration is calling for an economic stimulus package of up to \$75 billion to help jump-start the economy. This package would include tax breaks for business and possibly an increase in the minimum wage.

It is important for us to do everything possible to keep our economy strong, to demonstrate to those who attacked the greatest symbols of our free market that they did not succeed.

We must move ahead carefully, taking into account any possible effects from action taken in Congress. I have confidence in our President and Congress – the spirit of unity in our nation has us all ready to work together, and I know we will do the right thing.

While the terrorist attacks took place over 1,000 miles away, we have clearly felt the effects here in Mississippi. Our transportation systems have suffered from cutbacks due to travel concerns.

Our agriculture industry took a hit when cropdusters were grounded by the FAA. Every business in the state has been affected in one way or another.

If we're going to be successful in turning things around, we must focus on those things that can make a difference – and that work was already underway before September 11.

Let's look at education.

In August, we made a commitment to our teachers, a commitment that said we will pay them like the professionals they are.

Over the next five years, we will raise our average salary from 49<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> in the nation.

By the end of next year, we will have internet-accessible computers in every public school classroom in Mississippi – and we'll be the first state in the nation to reach this mark.

That sends a message that Mississippi is preparing for the economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an economy that will be wireless, borderless and global.

Let's look at industry.

Right now, down in Canton, the Nissan plant is taking shape. This plant, with its investment of nearly \$1 billion and 4,000 jobs, will have ripple effects across the state.

Just yesterday afternoon in Vicksburg, we held a groundbreaking ceremony for Calsonic, one of the Tier One suppliers for the Nissan plant and another investment worth millions of dollars and thousands of jobs.

As the Nissan plant nears completion, other suppliers will begin locating and building around the state – and I am confident we will see an impact from the plant here in northeast Mississippi.

And through our Mississippi Development Authority, we have put together a network of Workforce Investment Network, or WIN, centers. These centers, including one here in Tupelo over on Magazine Street, offer employers and job-seekers a “one-stop” shopping center.



They can receive job training, interview for positions, and search job databases in one single place. That's good for our industry.

We're not the same old Mississippi. We can compete with anyone, anytime, anywhere.

We've done great things in Mississippi, but our work has not been easy and it's not going to get any easier. We are in a difficult budget situation, one that will require uncomfortable and unpopular decisions to be made.

Our economy, even before September 11, was sluggish, at best. Overly optimistic revenue projections, combined with decreased tax revenue and other factors, have placed us in a tight spot.

But, despite the obstacles, I'm confident we can turn things around. It's been said you can't plow a field by turning the dirt in your mind; we can't bring about the change we need by just talking about what needs to be done.

I'm proud of the work that's been done here in the Tupelo and Lee County area. You have rolled up your sleeves and done tremendous work.

The economic outlook here is one of the strongest in the state. Lee County is still the number one manufacturing county in Mississippi.

Unemployment in the area is below the state average. Non-manufacturing jobs in Lee County were at an all-time high in August.

Tupelo and Lee County have great potential, and that potential is being realized. Goals have been set, plans have been made to reach those goals, and I am confident they will be met. The future looks good.

Why do I say that? I've had a chance to look over the information on your new "Future Focus" initiative, and I am impressed with the vision you have for this area. The five-year community and economic development plan laid out by the CDF is comprehensive, progressive, and focused.

I know the history of this area when it comes to projects like this, and I have no doubts about the success of “Future Focus.” I commend the CDF, its directors, members and staff for their good work and commitment.

I’ve been told more than forty CDF volunteers have been working on a fundraising campaign since the spring to support the “Future Focus” initiative.

Before I turn things over to Larry Kirk, chair of the Community Development Foundation and CEO of Hancock Fabrics, to talk about this campaign, let me thank you again for the good work being done here.

Mississippi has so much potential, such a great future. Let's work together to make it happen.

Thank you for the opportunity be here today, and now let me turn things over to Larry Kirk. Larry?