

*Remarks for the
Mississippi Economic Council "Hobnob"
October 29, 2002*

(recognize / thank Blake Wilson)

It is great to be here at the Hobnob! I read in the paper where Blake commented that this event gives people from around the state a chance to get together and discuss things they have in common.

I want to join in on that conversation and talk with you about some of the things I see that we have in common here in Mississippi.

First of all, I believe we have a common commitment to education, to providing the very best foundation we can for our children to grow up, compete and succeed here at home. I think you would agree with me that a quality education is the basis for a quality job.

We're making progress now in education that's making other states step back and watch what we're doing. We're not being reactive anymore; we're taking a proactive stance and making a difference.

We're putting Internet-accessible computers in every public school classroom in the state, and I want to thank Blake and the Public Education Forum with the MEC for their partnership in making this happen.

And we're not just buying these computers – they're being built by students across the state. I was up in Hernando last week, visiting a group of students during a computer “blitz build.”

With the help of ExplorNet, these students are building computers from scratch, putting their own knowledge into a vehicle to help teach the next class of students.

It's amazing watching these kids, because they get so excited about the work they're doing.

One young man said that building computers meant more to him than anything – except football.

Another one said it was the kind of practical, hands-on education that he enjoyed. What a great way for our students to learn and to lead.

It's important, too, to point out that Mississippi is going to be the first state in the nation to have these computers in every classroom. Just last week, a policy analyst with the National Governors Association commented on what we're doing here.

You know what he said? He said that this project "puts Mississippi at the head of the wave of technological innovations."

Mississippi. At the head of the wave of technological innovations. Not something most people would expect to be hearing, but it's true. It's happening around us every day.

I want to talk about something else we have in common, and that's growing Mississippi. I mentioned earlier about how we are working to offer quality education so we can attract quality jobs, and those jobs are already coming in.

When I visit with officials from other companies around the country and around the world, they don't ask me about tort reform. They are more interested in what we have to offer to them, about the land, about the available work force, about the skills of our people.

They're more interested in whether or not we're open for business. Make no doubt about it – Mississippi is open for business, and the numbers back it up.

We're growing jobs in this state. From Nissan to a small business, more people are working. You're all familiar with the good news of Nissan – the \$1.5 billion investment, more than 5,000 jobs, and the message that Mississippi can compete at the highest levels of the global marketplace.

You need to be familiar with something else.

You need to know – many of you already may know – that last month, Mississippi was named as one of the top ten states in the nation for small business survival. We've got more than 54,000 small businesses working in the state that support that statement.

The chief economist for the group that released the survey had this to say, and I want you to listen carefully because his words are important.

He said, “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.”

He’s right on target. We’ve got our policy mix right, we’re competing around the country and around the world. Job creation and incomes are rising.

The latest statistics from the Mississippi Development Authority bear this out. Over the past two years, more than 1,700 new facilities; over 47,000 new jobs; and \$12.9 billion invested in our state.

Over 21,000 of those new jobs – with investments of \$5.3 billion – came from the expansion of existing industries in the state.

We're recruiting new business, we're retaining existing business, we're making a difference in Mississippi.

The bottom line is this: Mississippi is growing, and it's not happening because we're sitting around waiting for someone else to help us out. We are working together to go after jobs, to improve our schools, to grow our economy, to show the world we can compete anytime, anywhere.

That's something we have in common. That's something we can talk about here today, and talk about with pride.

Thank you.