

*Remarks for the
Mississippi / Alabama Press Conference
April 1, 2003*

At the February meeting of the National Governors Association in Washington, I met with Governor Bob Riley of Alabama regarding the potential of a cooperative agreement between our two states.

The concept of such an agreement has been in the works for some time, and I want to thank Wade Jones of the East Mississippi Business Development Corporation for his work in this effort.

For the past several weeks, Bob Rohrlack, executive director of the Mississippi Development Authority, has been involved in strategic discussions with his counterpart, Neal Wade, director of the Alabama Development Office.

Their discussions have focused on laying the groundwork for a joint agreement between Mississippi and Alabama to cooperate in the growth of the east Mississippi / west Alabama corridor.

I'm pleased to say their discussions have been extremely positive, and we are working toward a cooperative agreement in the near future.

I was scheduled to meet today in Montgomery with Governor Bob Riley for a more formal discussion on this issue, but unfortunately, his schedule changed yesterday and we were not able to meet. My office is working closely with Governor Riley's staff to determine a specific date for a meeting.

The issue of working cooperatively with another state is not new to Mississippi. As part of my Advantage Mississippi Initiative, the Mississippi Regional Alliance Development Program was designed to promote the development of regional alliances at the local government level, including with local governments from another state.

The agreement will require Alabama to pass similar legislation that is already included in the Advantage Mississippi Initiative. In addition to our efforts with the Alabama Development Office and Governor Riley, my staff has been working with the staff of President Pro Tem Lowell Barron and Senator Hank Sanders, who Governor Riley appointed as chairman of the Alabama Black Belt Commission.

What we are talking about here today is an extension of that vision, and a new means by which Mississippi can continue to focus its potential and create quality jobs for its people.

The image of Mississippi has changed. We are setting a new standard in education, and the rest of the nation is watching.

We are also competing as never before in the economic development arena. Over the past three years, more than 50,000 new jobs have been created. More than 2,100 facilities have been opened or expanded. Over \$14 billion has been invested in the state.

So much has been done to build jobs, to build business, to build Mississippi. It has been done – and it will continue to be done – without raising taxes.

In my State of the State address, I called for the creation of the Rural Economic Impact Authority to specifically focus on bringing jobs to rural areas of our state. The program included job skill training for workers at community colleges and support for the economic development efforts of local governments, is nearing passage in the Legislature at this time.

Our fight to continue growing Mississippi will not stop.

Mississippi has been recognized as one of the top ten states for locating a business by Site Selection magazine, and as one of the top ten states for small business survival. In the January 2003 issue of “Expansion Management” magazine, four Mississippi cities were ranked in the 50 hottest American cities for expansion.

Companies around the world are well aware of what we are doing here. We are going to continue to make sure they’re getting the word.

There is so much promise and potential for Mississippi, and the line we share with Alabama fades away in the brightness of what we can accomplish here.

Governor Riley and I will meet, the party lines will blur, and we will work together to improve the quality of life for the citizens of our states.