

*Remarks to the
Mississippi Bar Association Annual Convention
July 12, 2002*

(open with story of lawyer on plane)

It doesn't always matter, though, what we do for a living. It's what we do for each other that makes a difference. It's what we do for our children, for our senior citizens, for those who can't do for themselves, that makes a difference.

The work you do each day as attorneys is spent in the pursuit of justice, with a dependence on a set of laws and standards by which you operate. Those laws and standards, I will grant you, are not perfect – they are, as Raymond Chandler once wrote, an “imperfect mechanism.”

But they are the guidelines by which our judicial system adheres. They are fluid – always subject to change and interpretation – but I challenge you to find a better system anywhere else in the world.

The laws and standards by which we operate do more than provide us with a process for seeking justice. They are also useful in the management of state affairs, in the daily work of building our towns and communities across Mississippi.

I'm proud of the work we're doing for our people. In my State of the State address last January, I laid out four priorities for our state – jobs, education, health care and public safety. All very different priorities, but all dependent on each other for our ultimate success.

And, the cooperation and partnerships we build together will help determine our success in putting these priorities into action.

Look at what we're doing as far as jobs. As I'm sure you've heard, Nissan will be expanding their facility in Canton by 1 million square feet and 1,300 jobs to accommodate the production of the Altima sedan.

This \$500 million investment is being made because Nissan wants to build their best car in their best plant.

The ripple effect from this expansion will be felt around the state. We recently released an economic impact study on the first phase of the Nissan project. The study found that for every job at the Nissan plant, four more would be created in support areas.

With Nissan's Tier 1 suppliers locating around the state – construction is already underway in Vicksburg, Forest, Tupelo, Canton and Greenville – the impact of this expansion will be felt in communities statewide.

And, as the other support facilities begin to move in, even more jobs will be created – jobs that will help put food on the table, clothes on the back and a roof over the head.

I'm proud of what we've been able to do with this project and the hundreds of other expansions in Mississippi, especially in the midst of a national recession. I'm also proud of the message this growth sends about the business climate in our state – regardless of what others would say about us.

There's an old saying that "many an opportunity is lost because of time spent looking for four-leaf clovers."

Not here. We're always looking for opportunities and, in the times when we don't see them, we're creating them. That's how we're moving Mississippi ahead.

For all the publicity surrounding the Nissan project, however, the expansion of jobs around the state has been occurring on a regular basis. We've been creating jobs in the midst of a national recession, something that we can look to with pride.

We may not be able to control what's happening on Wall Street, but we can work as hard as possible to affect what happens on Main Street. The work we do with a small business is just as important as the work we do with a company like Nissan.

We've had great success in places like Monticello, Nettleton and Magnolia. We've helped businesses locate and expand in Greenwood and Prentiss. Whether it's 10 jobs or 1,000 jobs, the effort we put into building communities and towns benefits the entire state.

There is an on-going effort to sell Mississippi to new businesses. At every level across the state, the recruitment process never stops, and it is important for us to be ready to go anywhere in the world to promote the state.

It is in growing our existing businesses, however, that we will always experience our greatest success, and the numbers in this category speak for themselves.

Over the course of the past two years, over 23,000 new jobs have been created in the state. Of those jobs, more than 18,000 came from the expansion of existing businesses.

Looking back to this past January, here's a quick snapshot of what's been done: Northrop Grumman Ship Systems in Harrison County added 520 new jobs. Lane Home Furnishings in Lee County added 400 new jobs.

The Alcoa plant in DeSoto County was targeted for closure, but we worked with the company and convinced them to stay. The end result was an expansion of their facility through a \$17 million capital investment and 200 additional jobs.

When Whirlpool was looking to consolidate its operations, it decided to close facilities in Canada and other areas and expand its operation in Oxford. The \$10 million capital investment there led to 150 new jobs.

Hart & Cooley just took over a facility in Olive Branch, saving 85 jobs and creating another 300. And, they chose that location over others in Alabama and North Carolina.

I always tell my fellow governors to watch out, because I'm going to work as hard as I can to take jobs away from them and bring them to Mississippi.

The list goes on, but in the first two months of this year alone, 60 companies expanded their facilities. These expansions represented a total capital investment of more than \$286 million and 1,204 jobs.

Again, this is strong evidence about the business climate in Mississippi.

The work of growing Mississippi doesn't stop, even during a national recession. When times are tough, that's when we have our chance to show what we can do.

The message is out to the rest of the world –
Mississippi's open for business.

The other priorities I mentioned are also vital to building Mississippi. In education, it is so important for us to adequately fund programs at the state level, rather than shifting unfunded mandates to the counties and communities.

Out of our \$3.5 billion budget, I believe we can find a way to make education a stronger cornerstone for Mississippi's foundation.

After the events of September 11, the issue of public safety moved to the forefront of people's thinking – and we are working hard to prepare for any scenario. With the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency leading the way as our contact agency for homeland security, we are conducting emergency preparedness exercises with emergency responders around the state.

God forbid anything ever happen in Mississippi – but if it does, we will be prepared.

And the final of the four priorities – health care – we are poised to set a new standard for the rest of the nation to follow. Earlier this week, the Health Care Commission I appointed in May to offer recommendations for Mississippi’s Medicaid program released its report.

It offers very important ideas toward affecting positive change in the program, and the people of our state would be well served by the Legislature making a serious study of the report.

Representative Steve Holland, a member of the Public Health and Welfare Committee, paid the Commission members a high compliment when he said, “if the Legislature could work as fast as this group worked and produce this kind of report, we might be in better shape.”

The issue of health care has been at the forefront in recent months. The arguments regarding medical malpractice insurance and civil justice reform – passionate from both sides – have been made in the media statewide.

I've said it before, and I want to say it again – I support civil justice reform, as long as it is fair and balanced. Francis Bacon, the great 20th century British painter, said it well: “if we do not maintain justice, justice will not maintain us.”

There is room for change to the civil justice system in the state; and when the legislative leadership can demonstrate they have an agreement on a package that can make it past the committee process and onto the floor, I will call a special session.

I want to commend the legislative leadership for appointing committees to look at the issues of civil justice reform, and the speed with which they've been working. We have pledged our support to work with them toward a reasonable solution, and I believe we will see movement on this issue in the near future.

The bottom line is this: The success of our state – the success of our people – is determined by the cooperative network of minds and manpower we build in our state. You are at the core of that network, and the work you do helps keep it strong.

Earlier, I mentioned the saying about four-leaf clovers. We're not spending our time looking for four-leaf clovers. We'll leave that to somebody else. There are too many opportunities for us to create on our own.

Thank you for inviting me to be with you today.