

*Remarks for the
“Leadership in the Next Economy” Conference
September 17, 2002*

(recognize Jim Clinton, other dignitaries)

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.

That approach depends on one major factor for success – leadership. We cannot stand idly by and simply hope for things to turn out all right in the South. Rather, we must take a proactive stance and commit ourselves to doing the necessary work to help the South emerge as a leader for the nation.

We are in a campaign to grow the southern states, to help them reach the fullness of their promise and potential. And, as it was once said, there are many elements to a campaign — leadership is number one, and everything else is number two.

The leadership for a successful campaign must come from every level – from county clerks, from mayors, and from governors; from the smallest towns to the largest cities; from partnerships built between public and private entities and based on common goals and trust.

It's that type of leadership that we're seeing across the southern states today. We see it in the growth of our universities as world-class research centers, in the location of new industries in a region once focused more on agriculture, and in the heightened role of our people on the national and international stages.

We're working to prepare all our states for the economy of the 21st century – and I believe that the South, more than any other region, will be setting the standard for the rest of America to follow.

There is so much happening in each of the states represented here, but I can speak with more authority about how we are establishing our leadership for the next economy in Mississippi – and it's leadership that begins with our youngest citizens.

As I said, we're working to prepare for a 21st century economy – one that will be borderless, wireless and global. No longer can we depend on the industries or the education of the past to move our states ahead. We must focus on giving our people the skills to compete.

We're doing just that through our "Computers in the Classroom" initiative, which will place an Internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state by the end of this year.

By establishing a public-private partnership between the State of Mississippi and private industry, we are going to make sure our children are able to access the Internet through the simple click of a mouse.

We have joined forces with the Public Education Forum of the Mississippi Economic Council, America On-Line, and ExplorNet – based here in North Carolina – to bring the world to every Mississippi schoolroom.

In fact, hundreds of Mississippi students are working with ExplorNet leaders to actually build nearly 1,000 computers from scratch – computers that will be placed into classrooms around the state. The importance of their work for the future – and the leadership it will help grow – is supported by a \$4 million grant from the Mississippi Development Authority.

One student in particular – a young man named Ahn Nguyen (*On Win*) – has a great perspective on his work with these computers and the catalyst they can be for building Mississippi. He is known for leaving notes on his computers that read simply, “please take care of this computer, it was built with love for your education.”

Leadership is also demanded in monitoring the growth of our students and the quality of their learning.

As one of six states selected to participate in the “Following the Leaders” pilot project – a program developed to help implement the mandates of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation – Mississippi will build on the standards of accountability already in place.

I want to recognize two other Southern states – Tennessee and West Virginia – for their selection in this program as well. Together, we will work to present a common commitment to our children and the growth of this region.

Once the school years are behind our citizens, however, the need for leadership does not diminish. There is still much work to be done.

We have to focus on the creation of quality, high-paying jobs for our people, and the growth of industry through the recruitment of new business and expansion of existing companies.

The rest of the world has watched as the southern states have staked their claim in the new economy. In particular, the automotive industry has become an integral part of this claim.

A simple review of the industry in the 14 member states in the Southern Growth Policies Board shows the impact of this industry – cars are being built by BMW, Honda, Mercedes, Hyundai, Toyota, Ford Motor Company, General Motors, Daimler (*dime-ler*) Chrysler and Nissan.

According to the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, more than 1.5 million direct and in-direct jobs have been created in those states by the auto industry.

They were created because our states took leadership roles in the economic development process and demonstrated that we had the talent, the workforce and the infrastructure to support such industry.

We must continue to make every effort to attract industries that demand a new viewpoint from our states, that challenge our thinking and force us to lift our competitiveness to a new level.

That type of leadership cannot stop, nor can we allow it to waver in its commitment to the future.

The stories behind the jobs created in our states go far beyond the headlines about new industry or increased competitiveness in the world market. The stories are also about families who are able to put a roof over their head, food on their table and clothes on their children. It's about the sense of self-confidence and self-esteem that comes with making a contribution.

The leadership required in economic development must be aggressive and forward-focused. It doesn't matter if it's two men in a truck or 5,000 people building a truck – the people of our states demand and deserve strong leadership in helping build the future.

Just a few short years ago, all the talk was about the “new millennium” – the new period in our world’s history that would challenge us all and radically change the way business is done.

Now, in the year 2002, that new period is here – and we are ready for it. Our children are learning with new initiatives and new tools. Our people are working and using new skills in new industries. And the best is still yet to come.

A leader was once defined, in its simplest terms, as someone who know where he wants to go, and gets up, and goes.

That's the call to each of us gathered here – we have shown we know where we want to go, and we've stood up and started heading in the right direction.

And as we step forward, we have a responsibility to encourage and inspire others to be leaders as well. The leaders for the southern states must not be just the usual “front-page” leaders – they must be found in the common man and the common woman. They must be found in volunteers, in teachers, in small business owners, and students.

This will be my focus for the next year as chairman of the Southern Growth Policies Board. Through efforts such as the “Leadership Plenty” program of the Pew Partnership and through our own creativity and commitment, we will continue to set the standard for other states to follow – and a new standard for the rest of the world to admire.

Let’s keep moving, and we will send a message that we’re ready to compete – anywhere, anytime, anyplace.

Thank you.