

*Governor's Column for 8/19/01*

**New investment, new jobs always on our agenda for Mississippi**

Over the past few months, there has been a great deal of talk about the Nissan plant currently under construction near Canton, Mississippi.

This plant signifies an investment of over \$900 million from Nissan and 4,000 new jobs for the area. The first announcement of Tier 1 suppliers in July revealed an additional \$140 million in new investments and the potential of 1,000 new jobs. As more suppliers at the Tier 2 and Tier 3 levels are selected, we will see even more investment and jobs, and more suppliers located around the state.

There is no doubt the Nissan plant has shown the rest of the world that Mississippi can compete with anyone, anytime, anywhere, and the economic impact of this new business in our state is obvious. Nissan's decision to move to Mississippi demonstrates our ability to land top economic development projects and provide a willing workforce to make them succeed.

However, we cannot and will not ignore our companies already here, or the smaller economic development projects that also add to the growth of our economy and the reduction of our unemployment rate.

For example, several days ago I was in Prentiss, Mississippi, to welcome a new business there. Partners of Progress is a Michigan-based company that re-engineers cellular phones, and they have expanded into Mississippi. I was in Prentiss to present Mayor Charley Dumas with a \$650,000 Community Development Block Grant check to help establish this new business in his town.

Partners of Progress is not a low-tech business. They are part of a market that is consistently growing, and they have located here because they recognized that

Mississippi wanted them here. They are in Prentiss because the location was right and the workforce was available.

This business isn't just paying minimum wage, either. They are paying on the same scale as their plant in Michigan. Workers start at \$8.50 per hour, and technicians can make as much as \$20 per hour. The owners realize that by investing in their people, rather than simply keeping costs down by paying minimum wage, they attract a quality workforce, they strengthen the potential for other companies to locate in the area, and they demonstrate a commitment to giving a quality product to their consumers.

There are more companies like this out there, and we are making every effort to bring them home to Mississippi. It is our action, rather than our talk of action, that is generating attention from businesses around the country about our state. When they see what we are doing, when they see what they can accomplish here, their decision of where to expand or relocate becomes much simpler.

In addition to our efforts to bring in new business and investment to the state, we are also working to keep businesses here. The companies and employers who have been doing business in Mississippi need to be attended to as well, and their importance to our economy cannot be underestimated. We will work tirelessly to meet the needs of our existing industries.

A recent news column in a Louisiana newspaper referred to Mississippi as the "new North Carolina," meaning that we are building a reputation for attracting high-tech, innovative businesses in search of a good location and a good workforce. That's a reputation I am proud of and will continue to develop with all my energy.

We have to be aggressive, we have to be innovative, we have to do the things that need to be done to bring jobs and new investment to the people of Mississippi. This work is being done now, and rest assured, it will not stop.

Mississippi has too much to offer.