

*Governor's Column for 8/26/01*

### **Moving the Capital for a Day Good for People, Government**

On November 28, 1821, the Mississippi Legislature designated the City of Jackson as the permanent capital for the State of Mississippi. On August 21, 2001, we moved it a few miles north.

This past Tuesday, the small town of Ripley, Mississippi, in Tippah County – with its population of about 6,000 good, hard-working people – became the seat of state government for the day.

It was our first “Capital for a Day,” and it won’t be our last. We took twelve executive branch agencies, along with agency heads and staff, to the Clayton Wommack Park Gym and set up shop. We hooked up phone lines and computer lines, we made sure we had everything we needed to do our work like we regularly do, and we opened the doors for business.

This gave the people of the area a rare opportunity to talk directly with agency heads and voice their concerns, questions or comments. But, perhaps more importantly, it gave those of us working in state government a chance to talk more directly with the people we serve.

While I travel all over the state in my role as governor, I rarely have the luxury of spending an entire day in one small town. This day was unlike any other I have experienced in some time.

We invested more than \$1 million in CDBG loans, just in Tippah County. A total of \$589,340 went to the Town of Ripley to help with the expansion of EcoWater Systems, the world’s largest water treatment systems manufacturer, which is doubling the size of its plant in Ripley as part of a \$9 million expansion. Over \$200,000 went to both the towns of Dumas and Blue Mountain, to help them extend their water service.

These are indicators that good work is being done in north Mississippi, that businesses recognize this as a good area to locate, and that a sound infrastructure is vital in recruiting and retaining business. EcoWater Systems has only two manufacturing facilities in the world, and one of them is in Ripley – further evidence that, as I have said before, the people of Mississippi can compete with anyone, anytime, anywhere.

I met with a group of doctors at the Tippah County Hospital and was able to hear firsthand their concerns about rural health care. The insight and advice they offered on issues like attracting physicians to rural areas, emergency services, and preventive health measures will be helpful as we consider the proposal I have offered for maximizing federal dollars for health-related issues.

I visited the South Tippah Math and Science Complex, a magnet school in the Ripley area, where students are building the foundations for the rest of their lives. The teachers there are energized and excited about their work, and that attitude is reflected in the students. These young people will do so much in the years to come, and I am confident about the great things they will make happen in Mississippi.

But, the greatest thing about the day was simply having a chance to visit with the people of the area. From the members of the Ripley Rotary Club to the group of folks having coffee at Renfrow's Café, from the shopkeepers on the square to the families who came to our office for the day, I sat and talked with them about the issues affecting their lives. And, in some cases, we just talked about how the Ripley Tigers were going to do in football this year.

At the end of the day, the people of Ripley thanked me for coming to their town. But, as far as I am concerned, it's the other way around. I thank them for a wonderful day.