

Clarion Ledger Article – 5-21-00

I have always felt that one of the best features of our state is our people. Mississippians have a kind and caring nature toward one another, and go out of their way to help others in need.

With that being true, how can we, as the people of the State of Mississippi let any portion of our state struggle? While much of our nation and our state have experienced growth over the last decade, many Delta communities have not participated fully in our newly found prosperity. It is time for us to come together and work as one to bring the Delta up to equal footing with the rest of our state. If any portion or region of our state is faltering, then we all suffer.

Mississippi must be strong and prepared for economic development in every corner of our state. From our northern most point to the southern tip, from our western and eastern borders and every piece of soil in between must be ready to compete for economic growth.

In March of this year we traveled to the Mississippi Delta to hold a roundtable discussion in Greenwood. The purpose of the meeting was to gather together various leaders from the Mississippi Delta to discuss important issues to the Delta Region and to determine how we can work together to address those issues.

Through the round table discussion we began developing a Delta-wide effort to make improvements in infrastructure, education, healthcare, economic development, agriculture, environmental issues and rural development. We know that to be effective, this effort will require the support of businesses, educators, colleges, universities, foundations, local, state and federal government along with all interested people throughout the state of Mississippi.

By partnering with other states, and by working with local leaders, we can create community-based development and tackle the toughest challenges facing Delta counties today. We listened to the participants of the round table discussion and took their concerns, thoughts and suggestions with us to the National Conference. It was important that the people of the Mississippi Delta be heard, and we delivered their message loud and clear.

Last week we took their voices with us to Delta Visions, Delta Voices: The Mississippi Delta Beyond 2000-A National Conference held in Washington. The conference included local, state and national lawmakers as well as business and community leaders, all realizing that a critical need exists in the Delta for renewal and revitalization of the economic, physical and social environments.

This was an opportunity for people to come together to share their concerns, ideas, successes and potential solutions to issues that the people of the Delta Region face.

We looked at new ways to work together to reach even more Delta communities and organizations to engage them and encourage their participation in improving life in the Delta and strengthening communities.

We are currently encouraging our Mississippi Congressional Delegation and our United States Senators to take a lead in passing legislation that would create the Delta Regional Authority. This organization would be developed to promote and encourage the economic development of the seven-state Lower Mississippi Delta Region. The Authority is based on the Appalachian Regional Commission, which was created over thirty years ago to address the chronic economic depression and poverty, which existed within that region of the nation.

If it worked for the Appalachian area of the nation, why couldn't it work for the Delta region? It is our goal to advance the economic standing of the entire state. We are committed to developing positive growth and finding solutions that work for the people who live, work and raise their families in every part of our state. We see the potential of the Mississippi Delta, and we know that the challenges we face are challenges that we can find answers for.

We cannot do it alone. We need the help of every Mississippian to help us make the Mississippi Delta strong, viable and ready for growth and opportunity. When our entire state prospers, the people of Mississippi prosper.