

Governor's Column – 02/10/02

As part of my State of the State address last month, I outlined four main priorities; topping the list was jobs for Mississippi.

I returned this past week from my second economic development trip to South Korea. The governor of a state is not just a chief executive; the governor is also the chief salesman. It doesn't matter if it's a company looking to bring 4,000 jobs or one bringing 40 jobs. My role is to close the deal.

We've been working hard to bring quality, high-paying jobs to Mississippi. In the past two years, according to the Mississippi Development Authority, more than 21,000 new jobs have been created and over \$6.5 billion has been invested in the state. Businesses are investing in our state, our people and our promise.

Every new business that looks at coming to Mississippi or expanding a current operation in the state gets our full attention. Whether it's an automotive manufacturer like Nissan or a small technological operation like Partners for Progress in Prentiss, the bottom line is jobs for the people of Mississippi.

One of our greatest tools is the Advantage Mississippi initiative. Passed in a special session of the Legislature in 2000, Advantage Mississippi is recognized as one of the most aggressive and innovative economic development programs in the nation. This program helped us bring one of the top economic projects in the nation to the state in the Nissan plant. The variety of incentives and services offered in the program can be tailored to any size company or project.

The Mississippi Development Authority, with Executive Director Bob Rohrlack, is working all corners of the globe to sell our state. In London, Japan, Chile and Singapore, representatives of the MDA are educating business leaders about Mississippi's people and products.

The days of the rest of the world looking at Mississippi as a purely agricultural economy have passed. Now, we are seen as an emerging leader in technology and manufacturing. And here's the impressive part: We're doing it all in the face of a national recession.

There are still challenges we have to deal with. We've had some businesses consolidate their operations; we've seen some plants close. When this happens, we are prepared to respond.

We do it with the Rapid Response Team, created for economic development emergencies. This team was in Jackson County last year when International Paper closed its operations. It was in Clarke County last month after Burlington announced its plant was closing, resulting in the loss of 850 jobs. They're ready and available for any community in this state that needs our services.

My hope is that we don't have to use the Rapid Response Team very often. But, when the team is needed, the people who need them most will have it.

The current recession does mean there are Mississippians who don't have the opportunity to work right now. It also means the work we are doing to create jobs is more important than ever. We will not stop this work, and we will work longer and harder to get it done.

In the end, the work we do to bring jobs to this state is about more than statistics. It's about opportunity – the opportunity to work, to build, to dream. It's about the opportunity of a state and a people determined to shape a future built on the promise we know exists.