

## **Governor's Column – 03/17/02**

Mississippi has many great natural resources, the greatest of which is her people.

The hard-working men and women of our state are the foundation for our economic growth and prosperity. When a company looks to locate in Mississippi, one of the first things they ask about is the labor force. We're proud to tell them we have one of the best.

The strength and skills of our people are just two of the reasons that, during a national recession, we've been able to create over 21,000 new jobs in the past two years and attract more than \$6 billion in new investments to the state.

Sometimes, though, simple economics drive a company to scale back or shut down an operation in the state. When we hear this might be happening, we step in and try to help turn things around. We will do whatever it takes to keep our people working.

Such was the case with the Alcoa facility in DeSoto County. Alcoa had decided to completely shut down their plant in Hernando, but we were able to work with them and convince them to stay in Mississippi. The result: An expansion of their facility and double the number of jobs.

In other cases where we may not be able to convince a company to stay, we have a Rapid Response Team from the Mississippi Development Authority that works with the company and its employees to ease the transition. This team has cooperated with businesses in Jackson, Winston and Clarke Counties, among others, and stands ready to help whenever and wherever it is needed.

Beyond the Rapid Response Team, we have other tools to help people who have found themselves out of work. Just this past Tuesday, I visited the grand opening of the Workforce Investment Network (WIN) Job Center in Canton. The WIN Job Centers around the state offer employers and hopeful employees “one-stop” services for jobs. Under this program, federal, state, and community workforce programs are combined in one location. Assistance is offered in education, training, human services and workforce development.

One of our most successful tools in putting people to work is the job fair, also known as a WIN Job Expo. Coordinated statewide by Joe Buckner, these transitional programs help displaced workers and recent college graduates find new employment as quickly as possible.

There are ten of these job fairs scheduled around the state this year. One of them will take place at the Trade Mart in Jackson on Tuesday, March 19. These fairs bring employers and job applicants together under one roof, and the success of the fairs speaks for itself.

A job fair in Pascagoula on February 26 hosted 41 employers and 1,500 applicants. By the end of the day, more than 500 job offers had been made. A similar event in Pascagoula last May saw 72 employers make 640 job offers in one day.

For more information on the job fairs, interested persons can call Joe Buckner at 961-7507 or visit the job fair web page at [www.mesc.state.ms.us/jobfair](http://www.mesc.state.ms.us/jobfair).

The people of Mississippi are good, hard-working people. We have always known that, and those doing business in the state know it as well. Our work to provide jobs is about more than statistics; it's about opportunity, self-respect, self-confidence and security.