

REMARKS OF:
Pete Johnson
Delta Regional Authority Swearing In Ceremony
Clarksdale, Mississippi
October 23, 2001

THANK YOU VERY MUCH. I AM HUMBLED AND HONORED TO HAVE BEEN NOMINATED BY THE PRESIDENT AND CONFIRMED BY THE SENATE AS THE FIRST FEDERAL CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE DELTA REGIONAL AUTHORITY.

ENCOMPASSING PARTS OF EIGHT STATES, THIS AUTHORITY WILL SERVE A REGION LONG IN HISTORY AND THE LORE OF LITERATURE AND MUSIC; BUT TOO OFTEN IGNORED IN THE WORLD OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY.

MY MESSAGE TODAY RELATES TO THE CENTRAL THEME OF THE DELTA REGIONAL AUTHORITY. “ONE REGION, ONE UNIFYING VOICE.” WITH THE DELTA REGIONAL AUTHORITY AS THE ONE UNIFYING VOICE FOR THIS REGION, WE CAN DO WHATEVER WE SET OUR MINDS TO DO.

GREAT THINGS HAVE NEVER BEEN ACCOMPLISHED WITH SMALL IDEAS. WE MUST CHANGE THE WAY WE HAVE BEEN THINKING ABOUT OURSELVES, OUR REGION, OUR NATION, AND OUR PLACE IN HISTORY. SO TODAY I WANT TO CHALLENGE YOU TO THINK, DREAM, AND DARE.

THINK OPENLY AND HONESTLY ABOUT THE CHALLENGES WE ARE FACING. SET REALISTIC, ACHIEVABLE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR OUR REGION AND ITS PEOPLE WHETHER THEY INVOLVE HEALTH CARE, TRANSPORTATION, EDUCATION OR THE MANY OTHER FACITS OF OUR SOCIETY.

THEN I WOULD LIKE FOR YOU TO JOIN ME AND DREAM WITH AN EXCITED IMAGINATION AND VISION OF THE GREAT THINGS WE CAN ACCOMPLISH WORKING TOGETHER.

BUT JUST THINKING AND DREAMING WILL NOT GET US WHERE WE WANT TO GO. IT WILL TAKE COURAGE AND

COMMITMENT IF WE ARE TO DARE TO MAKE THOSE DREAMS COME TRUE AND OUR VISIONS BECOME A REALITY.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT ONCE SAID:

“FAR BETTER IT IS TO DARE MIGHTY THINGS, TO WIN GLORIOUS TRIUMPHS EVEN THOUGH CHECKERED BY FAILURE THAN TO JOIN RANKS WITH THOSE POOR SOULS WHO NEITHER ENJOY MUCH NOR SUFFER MUCH, BECAUSE THEY LIVE IN THAT GREY TWILIGHT THAT KNOWS NOT VICTORY OR DEFEAT.”

FOR TOO LONG WE HAVE BEEN IN THAT “GREY TWILIGHT” AND THE TIME HAS NOW COME FOR THE PEOPLE OF OUR REGION TO COME TOGETHER WITH A COMMON PURPOSE SO THAT EVERYONE CAN NOW ENJOY THEIR TIME IN THE SUN.

WE HAVE THE RESOURCES AND THE PEOPLE TO MAKE THIS ONE OF THE BRIGHTEST SPOTS AND HAVENS FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY IN 21ST CENTURY AMERICA.

AS A PART OF OUR EFFORTS TO STIMULATE THE ECONOMY OF OUR REGION WE MUST MARSHALL THE VAST RESEVOIR OF INTELLECTUAL TALENT AND RESOURCES OF THE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES THROUGHOUT OUR REGION.

BY CREATING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN THESE FINE INSTITUTIONS AND THE CITIES, TOWNS, COUNTIES AND PARISHES OF OUR REGION WE WILL BRING TO THE DOORSTEP OF OUR RURAL AREAS WORLD CLASS IDEAS, RESOURCES AND TECHNOLOGY.

LOCAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS WORKING HAND IN HAND WITH STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT WILL HELP FORM THE FABRIC OF OUR REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS AS WELL.

THESE DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS HAVE A PROVEN TRACK RECORD OF DELIVERING MUCH NEEDED EXPERTISE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND WE WILL BE WORKING CLOSELY

WITH THEM IN THE MONTHS AND YEARS AHEAD TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR REGION.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DELTA REGIONAL AUTHORITY NOW GIVES US THE REAL OPPORTUNITY TO WORK TOGETHER TO BRING PROGRESS TO OUR REGION.

ACTUALLY, AS WE LOOK BACK OVER THE LAST 50 YEARS WE HAVE HAD WHAT I WOULD CALL A “HUMPTY DUMPTY ECONOMY.” THAT IS WHEN OUR ECONOMY BEGAN TO FALL APART DUE TO THE MECHANIZATION OF OUR MOST BASIC INDUSTRY, AGRICULTURE. ALL THE KING’S HORSES AND ALL THE KING’S MEN HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO PUT IT BACK TOGETHER AGAIN.

ESSENTIALLY WE HAVE HAD HUNDREDS IF NOT THOUSANDS OF WELL MEANING PEOPLE WORKING, DOING THEIR OWN THING, TRYING TO PUT HUMPTY DUMPTY BACK TOGETHER AGAIN WITH NO ONE COORDINATING THE OVERALL EFFORT. NO WONDER WE HAVEN’T ACHIEVED THE SUCCESSES WE HAD HOPE FOR.

NOW IT IS OUR JOB TO GET ALL THE KING’S HORSES AND ALL THE KING’S MEN WHETHER THEY BE GOVERNORS, MAYORS, COUNTY JUDGES, SUPERVISORS, U.S. SENATORS AND CONGRESSMEN AND, YES, EVERYDAY COMMON CITIZENS BEHIND ONE WELL THOUGHT OUT EFFORT TO PUT OUR ECONOMY BACK TOGETHER AGAIN AND USHER INTO THIS NEW MILLENNIUM A THRIVING ECONOMY WHERE PROSPERITY AND SUCCESS IS COMMON PLACE AND NOT THE EXCEPTION.

WE RECOGNIZE THAT THE MISSED OPPORTUNITIES OF THIS PAST HALF CENTURY HAVE CREATED A “LOST GENERATION” WHICH WILL NOT EXPERIENCE THE ECONOMIC BOOM WE SEE FOR OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS. HOWEVER, WE MUST NOT TURN OUR BACKS ON THEM. WE MUST MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO SEE THAT THEY ARE CARED FOR IN THE SUNSET OF THEIR LIFE.

**OUR PRIMARY FOCUS, HOWEVER, WILL BE --- AND MUST BE -
-- ON THE FUTURE WHILE AT THE SAME TIME LEARNING
FROM THE LESSONS OF THE PAST. AS A REGION, WE HAVE
PROVED TO BE VERY ADEPT AT CHRONICLING AND
ANALYZING THE PAST – OFTEN IN A “WHAT MIGHT HAVE
BEEN” SCENARIO.**

**IT IS NOW TIME FOR US TO ACCEPT THAT PAST AS
PROLOGUE --- THE PREFACE TO A NEW DAY OF ECONOMIC
GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE DELTA.**

**THE PSALMIST OF OLD BEGGED, “HEAR ME, OH ISRAEL.”
TODAY WE URGE, “HEAR US, OH AMERICA.”**

**WE URGE CORPORATE AMERICA AND AMERICAN NON-
PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS TO COME TO
OUR REGION AND HELP US IN OUR QUEST FOR
OPPORTUNITY AND PROGRESS.**

**THOSE WONDERFUL INSTITUTIONS WHICH ALREADY HAVE
A PRESENCE IN OUR REGION HAVE BEEN QUITE GENEROUS.
HOWEVER, WE ARE FINDING THAT THEY TOO NEED ONE
SINGLE VOICE TO COORDINATE THEIR EFFORTS TO
ADDRESS THE PARTICULAR NEEDS OF THE REGION.**

**WE WOULD INVITE THEM TO JOIN US IN DEVELOPING A
LONGTERM STRATEGIC PLAN FOR ADDRESSING THE
PHYSICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC NEEDS OF OUR REGION.**

**JOHN F. KENNEDY ONCE SAID, “THE GREAT ENEMY OF THE
TRUTH IS VERY OFTEN NOT THE LIE --- DELIBERATE,
CONTRIVED AND DISHONEST --- BUT THE MYTH ---
PERSISTENT, PERSUASIVE AND UNREALISTIC.”**

**THE LIE IS THAT WE CAN DO NOTHING MORE FOR OUR
REGION AND THAT OURS IS A LOST CAUSE.**

**THE MYTH IS THAT WE CAN CONTINUE TO GO OUR
SEPARATE WAYS AND ACHIEVE OUR GOALS.**

THE TRUTH IS THAT WE MUST COME TOGETHER UNITED, UNSHAKABLE, COMMITTED TO A BETTER LIFE FOR ALL OUR PEOPLE IRRESPECTIVE OF RACE, RELIGION OR NATIONAL ORIGIN.

AS I WAS PREPARING FOR THIS DAY I WAS REMINDED OF A STATEMENT VERY SELDOM READ OR REPEATED IN OUR DAY AND TIME:

“WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF EVIDENT, THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL. THAT THEY ARE ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS, AMONG THESE ARE LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.”

LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

IN THESE WORDS WE CAN FIND THE TRUE MEANING OF THE AMERICAN DREAM. FOR WE LIVE IN A COUNTRY WHERE LIFE IS A PRECIOUS THING – NOT A VALUELESS COMMODITY EXPENDABLE ON A MOMENTS NOTICE.

A COUNTRY WHERE EVERY MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD HAS THE LIBERTY TO SPEAK OUT FOR OR AGAINST THOSE THINGS THEY FEEL ARE IMPORTANT WITHOUT FEARING POLITICAL PERSECUTION.

A COUNTRY WHERE WE MAY PURSUE ANY VOCATION OR OPPORTUNITY OUR HEARTS MAY DESIRE, WHERE WE ARE LIMITED ONLY BY OUR TALENTS AND IMAGINATION.

I BELIEVE THAT THE AMERICAN DREAM IS NOT A FORGOTTEN IDEAL, A VISION OF THE PAST STRIVED FOR AND ENJOYED ONLY BY OUR FOREFATHERS.

FOR I BELIEVE THAT AT THE CORE OF OUR AMERICAN DREAM LIES THE AMERICAN SPIRIT, BURNING WITH INTENSITY UNDER THE ASHES OF DEFEAT AND DESPAIR, WAITING ONLY TO BE REKINDLED BY HER PEOPLE.

YOU SEE, I AM ONE OF THOSE WHO BELIEVES THAT OUR PEOPLE ARE THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE AMERICAN SPIRIT.

I AM ONE OF THOSE WHO KNOWS THAT IT IS YOUR SPIRIT, YOUR COURAGE, YOUR LOYALTY, AND YOUR DETERMINATION THAT HAS MADE THIS THE GREATEST NATION ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH AND THE HOPE OF THE FREE WORLD.

PRESIDENT BUSH AND THE CONGRESS RECOGNIZE OUR NEEDS AND SHARE OUR GOALS. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DELTA REGIONAL AUTHORITY IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD REACHING THESE GOALS.

I URGE YOU ALL TO JOIN US IN THIS EFFORT. WE NEED YOUR IDEAS; WE NEED YOUR ENERGY; WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT; WE URGE YOUR COMMITMENT.

THE PLACE IS HERE AND THE TIME IS NOW. LET'S ALL MOVE FORWARD TOGETHER FOR A BRIGHTER 21ST CENTURY FOR THIS REGION AND HER PEOPLE.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.