

1 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Mayor Williams?

2 MAYOR WILLIAMS: Thank you. On behalf of Tunica, I
3 want to thank the commission for inviting me here today to tell
4 the story that we have to tell to you and what the gaming has
5 meant to our small community.

6 I've been mayor for five years. Before that I also
7 owned a small business in Tunica for 25 years and I can tell you
8 from my background and my business what it's meant to me is that
9 what we have today -- until five years ago in my business, from
10 the 1st through the 3rd of the month, I did 50 percent of my
11 business.

12 That 50 percent of that business came from welfare
13 checks and unemployment checks. Today, that's all changed. My
14 business is more regulated throughout the months as employees
15 bring their checks in from various casinos and other industries
16 they work.

17 You know, when we talk about what's happened to us,
18 it's kind of hard to tell you in five minutes what it's meant to
19 the Tunica over the last six years. Our community's on the other
20 end of the state from Mayor Holloway.

21 We have a population of 1200 out of a county of 9,000
22 and it's kind of hard for me to talk about the town of Tunica
23 without mentioning Tunica County. And, of course, you heard from
24 Mr. Ken Murphree earlier what the casino gambling has meant to
25 the county.

26 First off, let me say what -- before you say what
27 really has happened to us is to give you a little background of
28 what we had before casinos. We had high unemployment and low

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1 wages. We had high taxes and very low revenue. We had a high
2 welfare and low economy.

3 We were experiencing no growth and all of the
4 equipment that the town owned was old and worn out. Our sewer
5 lines were dilapidated, water lines were too small. The town
6 was, you know, was really going down.

7 I'd have to say that the mayors that served before me
8 did an excellent job of taking care of their business in Tunica
9 without any other revenue. And it's been good for me. I guess
10 I'm lucky to be elected mayor at a time I have been with all the
11 good things going on that's been good. I've enjoyed it.

12 The casinos came to Tunica back in '92 and it seemed
13 like since then everything has changed. The reason they came to
14 Tunica is because of the economy and we needed jobs. As you
15 know, Tunica County was been known for being the poorest county
16 in the world ever since I can remember, but you won't be hearing
17 that anymore.

18 So they have given us jobs and they've given us
19 growth. We've got construction. Everybody has a job in Tunica
20 that wants to work now unless he's disabled or they have small
21 children at home they have to stay with.

22 As you heard, unemployment now is a little under 5
23 percent where it used to be anywhere around 25 to 30, according
24 to the time of the year when the farmers were working or when
25 they weren't working.

26 The wages in our community have gone from minimum
27 wage to approximately \$10 an hour. That's raised the standard of
28 living for our people tremendously. It's given us a better
29 quality of life. Our people can now afford to buy homes, better

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1 vehicles to get to their work and to shop, and helps provide all
2 the things that make your life more comfortable and meaningful.

3 The county's experiencing millions of dollars in
4 construction. The town of Tunica hasn't seen much growth from
5 the casinos. I'd like to say one thing. The casinos are not in
6 town. They're ten miles out of the city limits in the county so
7 we don't see some of the growth that they have had.

8 But I would like to add that we do now have a
9 McDonald's, a Church's Fried Chicken and Subway in Tunica. And
10 before casinos, we would have never dreamed of that. That means
11 something to us.

12 Now let me tell you about the main thrust of the
13 impact has meant to the town of Tunica. This county has been
14 gracious enough to give us three -- I mean, 8 percent of the 3.2
15 that they receive. This past year that amounted to a little over
16 \$2 million.

17 The first year I was mayor our budget was \$750,000.
18 That's five times larger than before. Our sales taxes increased
19 50 percent. We have reduced our taxes 50 percent, and effective
20 with this budget for the year '98-'99, we have lowered our water
21 and sewer costs by 50 percent for our residents.

22 We can still afford back door garbage pick-up for our
23 residents and no one but Tunica County can boast about a low car
24 price with low car tag. The town has now replaced all of our
25 worn-out equipment with all new equipment. We don't have any old
26 equipment and we don't need any kind of equipment we haven't
27 bought in the last three years.

28 We can now furnish our employees with insurance.
29 They make a decent wage. Some of them make as high as \$10 an

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1 hour and you would have never dreamed that in the town of Tunica.
2 We can give them their sick days and holidays and benefits that
3 the much larger towns around me have been doing for years.

4 The town of Tunica has no crime problems. I don't
5 think it would even register. We have -- our main problem is
6 maybe bicycle theft and cat and dog problems, which everyone has.
7 We have an excellent police department and fire department second
8 to none with all new equipment.

9 When the casinos first came to town we had
10 approximately four police officers. Today we have 11. The
11 reason for that is when the casinos first came to Tunica they
12 were located west of town and everyone had to come through town
13 to get to the casinos. We woke up one morning and the traffic
14 was bumper to bumper going toward the Mississippi River.

15 So we felt like we needed to increase our police
16 department to get ahead of any problems that we may see in the
17 future, and that's what we've done. And we have -- since we have
18 no crime, we now still have the money to keep these policemen.

19 We have kept them on our payrolls because that's what
20 our citizens want. They told us do not mess with the police
21 department and we don't. They do an excellent job and it's a
22 first-class operation.

23 Our fire department is volunteer and they do an
24 excellent job. And they've got all new equipment there, the envy
25 of all of north Mississippi.

26 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Mayor Williams, thank you so much
27 for that. I would ask that you submit the rest of that -- I know
28 that you have it in writing -- so that we can have the benefit of

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1 all of that information as we make our deliberations. Did you
2 want to make one --

3 MAYOR WILLIAMS: I don't even have what I'm saying
4 now in writing.

5 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Did you want to make one closing
6 remark?

7 MAYOR WILLIAMS: I just have some notes.

8 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Would you like to make one closing
9 remark before we go to Mayor Short?

10 MAYOR WILLIAMS: You want me to finish, quit?
11 Well, let me say this. Okay.

12 CHAIRMAN JAMES: See, that's only what stop meant.

13 MAYOR WILLIAMS: I was really just getting started,
14 you know. Like I said, we have a lot of catching up to do. Let
15 me have just one minute.

16 CHAIRMAN JAMES: You may have one minute.

17 MAYOR WILLIAMS: We built us a new city hall which
18 houses all of our administrative offices, our fire department and
19 our police department. On the other end of town, we built a new
20 6500 square foot post office. We built a walking park.

21 We're in the process of replacing all of our 60-year
22 old sidewalks that have been broken up for years. We've just
23 completed installing sprinkler system in our downtown Rivergate
24 Park and we have begun extensive landscaping program.

25 Last year we completed a million dollar sewer project
26 in the north end of town and we're currently beginning a quarter
27 million dollar water improvement line through the north end of
28 town. I'd like to say we have a four lane highway coming into

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1 Tunica now because of casinos. We have a lot of things that
2 we've never had.

3 We don't have a problem with morality. We're about
4 ten miles from the casinos. We have a wonderful little town,
5 great atmosphere, friendly, kind, caring, with plenty of pride
6 and hospitality, a town anyone would love to call home, live and
7 raise a family. And we're trying to give all our citizens a
8 quality of life that they've never dreamed of.

9 As I close, I'd like to leave with you a very short
10 message that before the gaming industry came to Tunica, we had no
11 goals, there were no plans for the future. We couldn't have; we
12 had no revenue. Our tax base was sky high, and as Mayor
13 Holloway, sometimes we had to borrow money to pay our bills.

14 But today in Tunica we can't wait for tomorrow.
15 Thank you very much.

16 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Thank you, Mayor Williams.

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