

1 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Becky Montgomery?

2 MS. MONTGOMERY: Good afternoon, Madam Chair --

3 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Good afternoon.

4 MS. MONTGOMERY: -- Commissioners. Maggie gave me a
5 perfect intro in going back to memory lane. Today I'm going to
6 talk about enthusiasm, economic growth and a spirit of economic
7 confidence that we hadn't known before.

8 NASA employees being recruited for Stennis Space
9 Center were told, when they were going to move to Mississippi,
10 that they might have to get vaccinations. If you look at Beau
11 Rivage's recruiting documents, it doesn't mention anything about
12 getting a vaccination.

13 We were commonly known 10 years ago, and probably
14 before that, as the Redneck Riviera because we were a cheap
15 vacation for Louisiana, Texas, Alabama tourists. Well, when the
16 oil field market went bust, so did our tourism market. I think
17 today you can see that we have a thriving tourism market.

18 Instead of staying in the nice hotel that you stayed
19 in last night, you would have stayed in one of our four Holiday
20 Inn hotels. That's because that was the best we had because
21 fortunately those owners reinvested in those properties.
22 However, the Hilton, the Ramada Inn, the Sheraton chose not to do
23 that.

24 Now, that's not their fault. Occupancy rates
25 averaged about 44 percent back then and we were dependent on the
26 snowbird golfers to come down from the frozen north and golf on
27 our 15 golf courses. Well, today we have thousands of hotel
28 rooms so things have changed.

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1 Another thing about United Way -- I was a volunteer
2 in 1998 and served on the board of directors. We didn't make
3 campaign back then. We were a one-county United Way, just
4 Harrison County, and I was on the funds distribution committee.

5 So it was pretty tough to go to those agencies and
6 say not only can we not give you what you ask for, we're going to
7 have to cut what you asked for. Well, today we have made our
8 budget.

9 We are three counties -- Harrison, Hancock and Pearl
10 River County -- and the casinos make up about an average of 21.7
11 percent of the revenues that were given to United Way, but it's
12 more than just giving to United Way. It's an investment of in-
13 kind of dollars and services of about \$325 million.

14 So things have changed on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.
15 I wish you could have been here then and see the changes that we
16 have now. I would venture to say that the term Redneck Riviera
17 is losing force, thank heavens, and we do wear shoes and we have
18 teeth and, you know, we are just good people.

19 We used to have to have hospitality training because
20 if you asked where to go, our frontline workers would say go to
21 New Orleans. Well, they don't say that anymore. And we had to
22 also say how to impersonate a happy person. Thank you. We don't
23 have to do that anymore either.

24 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Thank you. Courtney Blossom?

25 MR. MAHONEY: Bob Mahoney.

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