CHAIRMAN JAMES: Mayor Short?

MAYOR SHORT: Thank you very much. First of all, let me welcome you to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. It's a pleasure to have you here. Before the last 14 years, I was a member of the House of Representatives. I've been a member -- mayor of Gulfport for the past year so I have been on both sides of this issue.

I also like to give credit where credit is due. Yesterday I was in charge of the weather; today Mayor Holloway's in charge of the weather on the Gulf Coast.

Let me start by taking you back to 1992 and tell you about the economy in the City of Gulfport. Our businesses were closing. The ones that was staying open was hoping that gaming would come along. We had a 7 percent unemployment rate. There was very few jobs that had good insurance packages, health benefits or both members of the family working. This is all before gaming.

Now let's look at 1998. The economy in Gulfport on the Mississippi Gulf Coast is as strong as it's ever been in our history. In Gulfport, every month we have approximately 200 businesses with building permits and 200 residential building permits.

We've had our first large apartment complex that was built in the last ten years. More people are employed now than ever before. As these gentlemen have said before, if you don't have a job now it's because you don't want to work.

Our city taxes -- our tax increase of sales tax has more than doubled. We're approximately a million dollars a month
right now, and this is also because of the gaming industry and the draw.

Before I go on to some other things in the gaming, I want to tell you something that the gaming families has done when they've moved to the coast, and when I say families, I'm talking about the people who work at the casinos. And I'm going to use one example out of many, the Special Olympics, which I have been involved in for 29 years.

We have casinos who take their employees, and when we have our state games and our area games, they develop what's called Olympic villages. They bring out gifts and toys for our kids. They man these games for my Special Olympic kids that come here, 2500 in the month of May.

If I have my very special fishing rodeo, another casino furnishes all the food. Now, they give money, but money is not the most important part. It is the type of people that they have working here that get involved with our community and with the people that come down from our state. So they are very good corporate citizens and we are very pleased to have them.

Now, I'd like to talk to you a little bit about some false information that's come out about crime. Sure, you see some crimes rates that's going up in our city but let me tell you the things that you probably don't read, is that we had an annexation in Gulfport that doubled the size of my city.

We have millions of new tourists that come to town now that we did not have before. So we basically have the same type of problems that they have in Orlando and other major cities where you have a tremendous amount of growth.
You're going to have more crime but it's not related indirectly because of the gaming industry; it's because of more and more people coming in. So I want you to remember that when you look at statistics, look at both sides of the statistics of the numbers because of the number of people we have here now.

We've been able to add more police department and our police in our departments so naturally they're out more often. But the casinos have not brought an increase of crime anymore than what has happened in Disneyworld or other areas where you've had a large number of growth.

Another thing I want to talk to you about is the problem gambler. I know that you all hear about this. You listen and say, we've got to do something. These people suffer from addictions and we know that, but people also suffer from addictions from alcohol, tobacco, food and computer Internet.

Very seldom do you see an industry like the gaming industry who helps fund programs to help these people. They can't do it by themselves. We have to have people in our churches. We have to have people in our civic organizations that try to help. But the gaming industry is putting money in here, trying to solve or help solve this problem.

They don't get rich off of an addicted gambler so they have looked at this problem and they are working very hard to try to solve this problem. And also, those with addictions must try to help themselves. We can't do this by ourselves in this industry. So they are working to do that and we're proud of that.

In closing, I want to take the opportunity to thank you today. The gaming industry has reshaped the future of my
city, our counties throughout the state. Many of our residents
wake up every morning, knowing that our city, our state, now
offers career and social opportunities far beyond what we had
before.

I can tell you as a member of the Mississippi House
of Representatives when this was passed, no one ever had the idea
that Mississippi would grow and we would reach the type of
economic boons that we have.

It's because we had legislators who looked at laws
from other areas of the country who had gaming and we wanted to
make it strict; we wanted to try to do what was right. And
because we have got the type of gaming industry to come into our
cities that want to also make it right.

They're not the answer but they were the spark plug.
They're what's opened up to give us more opportunities to go out
and bring in other industries and to help the citizens of our
state and our city who we represent. Again, thank you for giving
me this opportunity.

CHAIRMAN JAMES: Thank you, Mayor Short.