

Goals and Recommendations 2008



Presented to the Legislature
by the
**Special Task Force for
The Revitalization of the Delta Region**

Special Task Force for the Revitalization of the Delta - 2007

The Special Task Force for the Revitalization of the Mississippi Delta was created by the Legislature (H.B. #1034) and appointed by the Governor, legislative leadership and other organizations as prescribed by law.

The mission of the Special Task Force is to develop a “plan of action” to strategically revitalize the Delta Region and improve the quality of life for residents. The law further requires the State of Mississippi, through the work of the Special Task Force, to provide a policy, vision and framework to encourage an environment conducive to the revitalization of the Delta Region.

Task Force Members:

Mr. Robert G. Clark

Task Force Chairman
Speaker Pro Tempore, Retired
Lexington, MS

Mr. John Osborne

Task Force Vice Chairman
VP of Operations and General
Manager- Hollywood Casino
Tunica, MS

Mr. Robert Avant

President, Panola County Board of
Supervisors
Crenshaw, MS

Ms Clara Burnett

State Representative
District #9

Mr. Eugene “Buck” Clarke

State Senator
District #22

Mr. Bill Crump

Director of Governmental Affairs
Viking Range
Greenwood, MS

Mr. Walton Gresham, III

President, Gresham Petroleum
Indianola, MS

Mr. Tommy Goodwin

County Administrator-
Humphreys County
Greenville, MS

Dr. Rosetta Howard

Academic Dean, Coahoma CC
Clarksdale, MS

Mr. Ray Humphreys

CEO, Delta Regional Medical Center
Greenville, MS

Ms Helen Hunter

Purchasing Clerk, Jefferson County
Board of Supervisors
Fayette, MS

Mr. John Hines

State Representative
District # 50

Mr. Robert L. Jackson

State Senator
District # 11

Mr. Clifton Johnson

County Administrator
Tunica County
Tunica, MS

Mr. Larry Johnson

Leflore County Board of Supervisors
Greenwood, MS

Mr. David Jordan

State Senator
District # 24

Mr. John Mayo

State Representative
District #25

Mr. Willie Perkins

State Representative
District # 32

Ms. Judy Phillips

Stennis Institute
Mississippi State University

Mr. Bern Prewitt

Bolivar County
Board of Supervisors
Boyle, MS

Ms Clara Reed

CEO, Mid-Delta
Home Health & Hospice
Belzoni, MS

Mr. Gray Swoope

Executive Director
MS Development Authority

Mr. MacArthur Straughter

Mayor, Yazoo City, MS

Dr. Myrtis Tabb

Delta State University -Senior
Administrator for Special Projects
Cleveland, MS

Mr. George Walker

Retired President – Delta Wire
Clarksdale, MS

Mr. Johnnie Walls

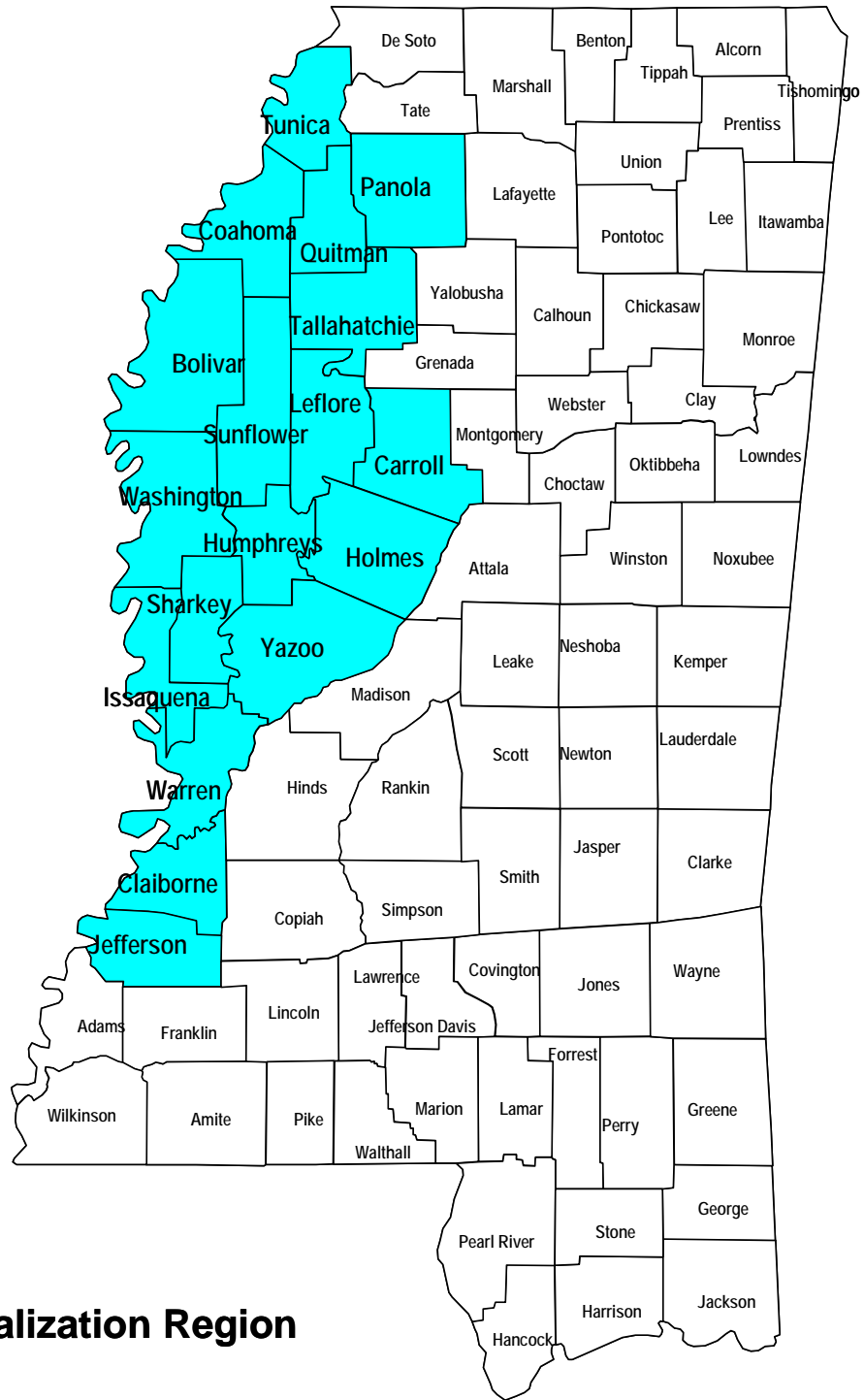
State Senator
District # 12

Staff Support –

MS IHL University Research Center-
Bureau for Long Range Planning

Debra Anderson

Pete Walley



**Delta Revitalization Region
HB 1034**

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Letter from Chairman

December 2007

Fellow Mississippians:

I bring you greetings from the Special Task Force for the Revitalization of the Delta.

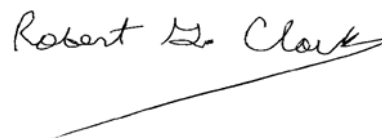
Year two of our work has included meetings with State agency heads and leaders of prominent organizations in the Delta and other parts of the State, in order to gain knowledge and understanding of what is currently being done to improve the Delta and to maximize our own role in the revitalization process.

Our research this year revealed close to 1300 non-profit organizations in the Delta, with various, but similar, missions to address the needs of the region. While many are sincere efforts with some measure of effectiveness, there is no coherence in the work being done. The lack of a clear, common vision with clear, common goals embodied in a State-backed plan to move the Delta forward remains a significant void and obstacle to revitalization.

The Special Task Force understands that progress and success are not always measurable, nor easy to see. However, significant in-roads have been made this year with some of the key state agencies that are now showing new interest in the Delta and are willing to work to address the region's special needs. We attribute this *new interest* to the presence and work of this task force.

We realize the problems of the Delta will not go away overnight, but we are committed to moving forward, regardless. On behalf of the Special Task Force, I present to the Legislature and the people of the state of Mississippi our goals and recommendations for 2008.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Clark

Introduction

According to Webster's Dictionary, *revitalize* means to “*restore life and vigor.*” The implication of the word “revitalize” is that there was once *life and vitality* which simply needs to be brought back and restored to the original state.

To the contrary, one might observe that the Mississippi Delta has never had a preexisting state of vitality, experienced by the majority of the population.

A more accurate mission of the Special Task Force for the Revitalization of the Delta might be better described as to simply “vitalize” the Delta: to increase the capacity of the region by creating an environment that allows every citizen the opportunity to thrive economically and socially, by making a decent living.

The mission of the Special Task Force for the Revitalization of the Delta is to make recommendations and encourage actions that will address the unique challenges that have been woefully neglected in the region for decades. Therefore, the work of the task force is a process, not a one time event. The work of the Special Task Force must be characterized by a consistent, systematic approach set in motion by a vision, coupled with long and short term goals, plans and a series of action steps to reach those goals. More importantly, the work of the Special Task Force must be backed and supported at the State level.

The Special Task Force has determined that the number one long term priority to revitalize the Delta is to increase the educational attainment and skills development levels of its citizens.

Education affects everything. It has the power to influence the pace of progress, affect social behavior, choices and attitudes, motivation, and the ability to be productive. Education and skills development bring proven benefits to individuals, families, communities and society-at-large, for generations to come.

The Delta needs to develop economically. The essence of economic development is the effective and creative use of knowledge. Education and skills development are connected with the overall quality of life including income, health, healthcare, jobs, careers, homeownership, business ownership, community involvement and overall productivity.

In the Delta region, attitudes and expectations regarding education need to be raised and the effort needs to start early. Educational indifference is reflected in high rates of poverty, school dropout, low graduation rates, teen pregnancy, single parent families that live in poverty, health concerns, and other issues – all of which are higher in the Delta, than state averages.

Decades of education apathy and neglect will not simply go away. Entrenched attitudes will change in the same way they develop - very slowly. But, the work must start somewhere.

In addition to attitudes regarding education, the Delta suffers from an “image” problem – inside the region, and outside. As a former high ranking economic developer stated, “You just can’t sell the Delta.” This line of thinking perpetuates a sense of “hopelessness and helplessness” exhibited by many who live in the region, as well as a sense of frustration by those who work diligently to attract economic development opportunities.

In order to properly “sell” the region, the Delta needs strong leadership. In addition, there must be an assessment of regional strengths and weaknesses and a plan to accentuate and build on the strengths, while working to eliminate the weaknesses.

The image of the Delta needs to be transformed. The Delta is more than poverty and despair and “bottom of the rung” rankings. Just as there is a need to change the educational mindset in the Delta, there is also a need to change the cultural mindset *about* the Delta.

Typically viewed as “too black, too poor, and too uneducated,” the Delta must be redefined, stereotypes dispelled and replaced with that which is positive and has potential. This will require marketing to help shape internal and external perceptions of the Delta. A new view of the Delta will be a starting point for regional development and more.

In 2006, housing emerged as one of the highest areas of concern for the Task force. It remains a high priority in 2007. While organizations are in place to develop decent affordable housing for low income people, they lack administrative dollars needed to carry out their mission.

The following goals and recommendations set by the Special Task Force for the Revitalization of the Delta and presented to the legislature, are intended to play a significant role in building a systemic foundation for addressing the cultural, educational and job skills issues; to garner support from state agencies while requiring them to be more responsive to the Delta’s needs.

Executive Summary

The following is a synopsis of conditions in the Delta that the Special Task Force wishes to highlight in 2008. Included are goals and recommendations to address each condition.

- 1. Condition:** Currently, there is no permanent, on-going mechanism in the 18 county Mississippi Delta region whose sole purpose is to research issues, evaluate needs and promote opportunities that would improve the well-being of all citizens in the region.

A formal permanent mechanism is needed to convene Delta leaders for the promotion of regional unity and cooperation, and to recommend strategies, develop solutions, gather resources, and implement actions that address the identified needs and opportunities of the region.

Goal: Create and have in place by July 1, 2008, a formal, permanent entity to address the needs of the Delta.

Recommendation: Create the *Commission on the future of the Mississippi Delta Revitalization Region* as the permanent, legal entity to encourage collaboration among regional leaders and organizations to rebuild and strengthen communities in the Delta.

- 2. Condition:** The Delta suffers from continuous economic stagnation, steady loss of population, and depletion of its critical mass. Conventional economic development tools have not been effective, as in other areas of the state. The Delta needs special assistance from the state to reverse negative economic trends and erase decades of neglect.

Goal: Give the Delta a competitive advantage in attracting business and industry.

Recommendation: Designate the 18 county Delta region as an “economic development zone” with unique business recruitment incentives determined, described, and supported by the Mississippi Development Authority.

- 3. Condition:** Workforce development and training is a long standing concern for the Delta labor force. Unemployment in the region is almost 10 percent. In some counties, unemployment is as high as 12 and 14 percent. The percentage of individuals between 18 and 64 that are *not* working is almost 50 percent, compared to the state, at 29.0 percent. School dropout is high in the region and there are many adults without a high school education; who function at Literacy Level 1. Labor force training and participation needs to be increased

Goal: Redirect and train underachievers and uneducated.

Recommendation: Have the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges, and the three Delta area community colleges (Coahoma, Mississippi Delta and Holmes) work together and follow and implement the job training program model developed by Holmes Community College that provides soft skills training and entry level, low skills job placement for the unemployed.

4. **Condition:** Based on literacy levels, high school dropout, and the percentage of adults in the Delta that do not have a high school diploma (35.5%), it is concluded that citizens in the region do not place proper value on education, skills attainment, and life-long learning.

Goal: Change the mindset of Delta citizens to desire and value higher levels of education, skills attainment and life long learning.

Recommendation: Establish an “Education Marketing Board” comprised of representatives from the state Department of Education, the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges and the Institutions of Higher Learning, that will conduct research and develop and implement a comprehensive education marketing plan to change the mindset of Delta citizens to value education and desire additional skills attainment and life long learning.

5. **Condition:** Numerous studies have highlighted the direct link between early childhood education and future economic growth. Research has also shown a direct correlation between early childhood development and education and overall success in life. High quality childcare is essential for children in the Delta; it is an investment in their future. Providers must be equipped to provide the adequate foundation needed.

Goal: Train every early childhood education provider in the Delta.

Recommendation: Establish Early Childhood Development Centers at Delta State, Mississippi Valley State, Alcorn State, Coahoma Community College, Mississippi Delta Community College and Holmes Community College – in collaboration with the Early Childhood Institute at Mississippi State University, to provide training and educational material to current providers.

6. **Condition:** The Delta region has the most negative education statistics than any other region in the State. Among them are: highest percentage of adults in the

state without a high school diploma ; highest percentage of adults functioning at Literacy Level 1 ; highest school drop out rate; lowest high school completion rate. As a result, the Delta has the highest percentage of people living in poverty. The Delta is a “special needs” region and should be treated as such in order to reverse these multigenerational trends.

Goals:

- Have at least 24 percent of teachers in the Delta region distinguished by the Master Teacher certification
- Have a minimum of 90 percent of third graders meeting or exceeding third grade reading levels within five years
- Achieve a 95 percent graduation rate for incoming ninth grade classes for the next 10 year.
- Have 75 percent of Delta high schools meeting or exceeding the national averages for math and reading and science within ten years.

Recommendation: The State Department of Education will develop a plan exclusively for the Delta to meet the “special educational needs and challenges” resulting from decades of neglect.

7. **Condition:** This Mississippi Delta has the highest percentage of births to single mothers and single teens. A total of 17 of the 18 Delta counties record births to single mothers higher than the state average, while 13 of the 18 Delta counties are in the top twenty counties for percentages of births to teens. Single parent households have been linked to increased poverty levels, poor academic performance of children born into single parent households, a higher dropout rate, and low retention and graduation rates.

Goal: Cut the teen pregnancy rate in the Delta by 50 percent in five years

Recommendation:

- (a) Direct the Department of Human Services and the Department of Health to work with other health related organizations and Department of Education to conduct research and develop a pregnancy prevention campaign that targets the Delta, exclusively.
- (b) Have the legislature take steps to fully fund Medicaid and use a cigarette/ tobacco tax to fund it.

- 8. Condition:** Large numbers of Delta citizens are living in substandard housing. Certified Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs) are in place to provide decent, affordable housing to low-income people. However, operating costs for CHDOs are insufficient to maximize their effectiveness. Housing is high priority to the Delta Revitalization Task Force.

Goal: Strengthen the capacity of Certified Community Housing Development Organizations to provide more housing to Delta residents.

Recommendation: Direct the Mississippi Development Authority to make available to CHDOs who are awarded HOME funds for housing projects, five percent (5%) of the State's annual appropriation of HOME funds for operating support, as allowed under federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regulations.

- 9. Condition:** The Mississippi Delta is a national treasure. Cultural Heritage tourism is a rapidly growing national and international industry that represents a significant opportunity for the Delta. The absence of sufficient dedicated resources to support the growth of Cultural Heritage tourism has acted as a significant barrier to the Mississippi Delta's ability to realize the full potential of its cultural heritage.

Goal: To have the Mississippi Delta designated as the Delta National Heritage Area.

Recommendation:

(a.) The Delta Task Force will write a formal letter to both houses of the Legislature and request that a joint resolution to be sent to the MS Congressional Delegation asking for their leadership on designating the Mississippi Delta as the National Heritage Area.

(b.) The Delta Task Force will send a separate letter to the Governor asking him to write a personal letter to each member of the MS Congressional Delegation, requesting the same.

(c) Direct the Mississippi Development Authority/Tourism Division to work with other cultural and tourism affiliates in the Delta to develop and implement a cultural tourism initiative for the Delta region

(d) Locate Mississippi's Civil Rights Museum or a "satellite" museum in the Delta

10. **Condition:** A significant amount of federal grant funding is available to fund cultural heritage development. In Mississippi, however, matching funds for leveraging other financial resources are inadequate or unavailable.

Goal: To have a readily available source of funds to support development and expansion of cultural arts and heritage tourism.

Recommendation: Have the legislature establish a fund of \$500,000 exclusively for the Delta, to provide cash match for federal grant applications that will fund heritage tourism.

11. **Condition:** The vestiges of racism, high levels of poverty and the general failure of state and local leaders to address the problems of the Mississippi Delta, have contributed to many citizens in the region having low expectations for the future – for themselves and for the region. Mississippians inside and outside the Delta have a negative view of the region as a whole. This negative view needs to change.

Goal: Transform the image of the Delta and give it a new and positive identity.

Recommendation: Have the Mississippi Development Authority identify the Delta's strengths and attributes and implement an aggressive marketing campaign, funded by the legislature.

12. **Condition:** The federal freeze on SCHIP allotments has affected Mississippi's ability to insure its children. The most vulnerable population of children with the greatest health care needs reside in the Mississippi Delta. An astounding 20 to 30 percent live in poverty and key health problems are prevalent among African Americans who account for 70 percent of the population. In the Delta, preventive health care has become even more critical.

Goal: To develop a system of preventive healthcare measures throughout the Delta

Recommendations:

(a) The legislature will make provisions to require, fund and provide free annual physicals for all needy K-12 students in the 18 county Delta region.

(b) Require the Department of Education to develop a system that supports preventive health care by requiring school districts in the Delta to show and report evidence that they have made attempts to pursue hiring a school nurse through exploration of funding sources and other options.

Recommendations for 2008

Recommendation #1

Create the “Commission on the future of the Mississippi Delta Revitalization Region”

There are numerous and complex issues that have prevented the Mississippi Delta from experiencing the quality of life and economic growth experienced by other areas of the State. The Mississippi Delta is most commonly described as “economically challenged.” Problems in the region cannot be summed up in a few issues and will not be resolved without a continuous and systematic approach.

The Special Task Force for the Revitalization of the Delta believes that one of the best long-term solutions for revitalizing the Delta is to establish what the region has never had before – *a voice*.

The Delta needs a permanent entity that continuously and systematically works to address issues in the region and to interact with the legislature, state agencies and other organizations on behalf of Delta.

The “Delta” refers to the eighteen counties described in HB 1034 that created the Special Task Force for the Revitalization of the Delta.

The Commission on the future of the Mississippi Delta Revitalization Region will be created as an agency and instrumentality of the State of Mississippi for the purpose of acting as a unified coordinating entity designed and intended to solve the common regional problems that inhibit the revitalization of the region.

The governing body of the Commission shall consist of:

- a. Two (4) state representatives and two (2) state senators elected by a simple majority vote of the representatives and senators from the districts that have all or part of their boundaries within the Delta Revitalization Region. Two (2) representatives and one (1) senator must be from any county that includes Jefferson, Claiborne, Warren, Issaquena, Sharkey, Yazoo, Holmes, Humphreys, or Washington.
- b. Two (2) presidents of the board of supervisors elected by a simple majority vote of the presidents of the boards of supervisors of the counties of the Delta Revitalization Region. One president of a board of supervisors must be from any county that includes Jefferson, Claiborne, Warren, Issaquena, Sharkey, Yazoo, Holmes, Humphreys, or Washington.
- c. Two (2) mayors elected by a simple majority vote of the mayors of each city within the Delta Revitalization Region. One mayor must be from any county that

- includes Jefferson, Claiborne, Warren, Issaquena, Sharkey, Yazoo, Holmes, Humphreys, or Washington.
- d. Five (5) members from the qualified electors of the Delta Revitalization region to be elected by simple majority vote of the elected officials of the Commission. Two (2) qualified electors must be from any county that includes Jefferson, Claiborne, Warren, Issaquena, Sharkey, Yazoo, Holmes, Humphreys, or Washington.
 - e. The governing body of the district may, in its discretion by a simple majority of the Commission, designate and appoint ex-officio and nonvoting members to the governing body of the commission from such public agencies and private and non-profit entities within the region as the governing body of the commission may deem desirable.
 - f. The Commission will reconstitute itself each time there is a statewide election of state representatives and senators.

The Commission will employ an executive director and professional staff to support its efforts with research and provide technical leadership and support to the commission. The executive director of the commission shall be a well-educated professional and have experience in regional development.

The general responsibilities of the executive director include:

As a Manager:

- Oversees operations of the Commission
- Implements the goals and objectives of the Commission's Strategic Plan
- Manages human resources of the Commission
- Manages financial and physical resources of the Commission

As a Leader:

- Advises the members of the Commission
- Advocates/promotes Commission and stakeholder change related to the mission of the Commission
- Supports motivation of volunteers (*and employees*) in organization products/programs and operations

As an Information Source:

- Ensures staff and Commission have sufficient and up-to-date information
- Looks to the future for change opportunities
- Interfaces between Commission and volunteers (*and employees*)
- Interfaces between Commission, agencies and community

As a Decision Maker:

- Formulates objective, non-political policies and planning recommendations to the Commission
- Decides or guides courses of action in operations by volunteers (*and employees*)

For Commission Development:

- Assists in the selection and evaluation of qualified electors for consideration as potential Commission members.

- Assists in the selection of ex-officio and non-voting members for consideration as potential Commission members.
- Makes recommendations to and supports Commission during orientation and evaluation of Commission efforts.

The Commission will have the powers to:

- 1 Adopt rules or procedures for the regulation of its affairs, to set forth policies and procedures for the conduct of its business, including the number of members sufficient to constitute a quorum, and to appoint, from among its members, a chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary to serve annually, and to form an executive committee from among the commission members to exercise the powers and duties of the commission between commission meetings.
- 2 Maintain offices at such place or places as it may designate, and meet at regular times at least six (6) times each year.
- 3 Employ and to compensate an executive director and such other personnel, consultants, and technical and professional assistants as shall be necessary to assist the commission in its efforts to revitalize the region.
- 4 Hold public hearings and sponsor public forums in any part of the region whenever the commission deems it necessary or useful in the execution of its functions.
- 5 Accept and receive, in the furtherance of its functions, funds, grants and service from the federal government or its agencies, from departments, agencies and instrumentalities of state, municipal or local governments and from private or civil sources.
- 6 Expend such sums of money as shall be from time to time appropriated for its use by any county, state or public agency, or other public or private bodies, corporations or persons, and to receive and expend federal funds.
- 7 Identify and document conditions within the region that inhibit the revitalization of the region, set goals for the revitalization of the region, and make recommendations to any county, state or public agency that would help revitalize the region.
- 8 Report annually to the Governor and the Mississippi Legislature on the progress and status of the efforts of the commission.

The Commission shall have the responsibility and is granted wide latitude and broad authority to:

1. Coordinate all activities, in planning for the redevelopment of the region;
2. Provide a mechanism for the solution of area-wide problems;
3. Develop more effective lines of communication by and between local, regional, state and federal governments and agencies, non-profit organizations and other entities working to improve the Delta;
4. Develop and maintain a long-term strategic plan for the revitalization of the Delta;
5. Detail programs for the long-term development of the region;

6. Develop and continually update comprehensive regional implementation plans;
7. Provide for the marshalling of the region's natural and human resources;
8. Determine and establish priorities for the consideration of regional projects.
9. Manage resources made available to the Commission.

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Recommendation #2

Designate the 18 county Delta region as an “economic development zone” eligible for special consideration and unique business recruitment incentives, as described and supported by the Mississippi Development Authority.

The state of Mississippi has never committed to a long term vision or long term economic development plan for the Delta region. While there have been numerous “piecemeal” efforts by various foundations and over 1300 non-profit organizations, none of these efforts have successfully redirected the Delta’s economic condition.

Continuous economic stagnation, steady loss of population, and depletion of its critical mass, the Delta needs special assistance from the state to reverse negative trends and erase decades of neglect. In order to “vitalize” the Delta the Special Task Force makes the following recommendation:

A description of special incentives needed to bring economic vitality to the Delta must be determined by the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) and outlined in a plan developed by MDA and submitted to the “Commission”. Both, the Commission and the MDA will work together to get legislation passed that reflects the incentives identified.

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Recommendation #3

Have the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges, and the three Delta area community colleges (Coahoma, Mississippi Delta and Holmes) work together and follow and implement the job training program model developed by Holmes Community College that provides soft skills training and entry level, low skills job placement for the unemployed.

Workforce development and training is a long standing concern for the Delta labor force. Unemployment in the region is almost 10 percent compared to 7.8 percent for the state. In some Delta counties, unemployment is as high as 12 and 14 percent.

The percentage of individuals between 18 and 64 that are not working is almost 50 percent (48.8) compared to the state, at 29.0 percent. In some Delta counties the percentage of individuals not working is as high as 53 to 55 percent.

The task force wants to reverse this trend and identify a reliable mechanism to recapture and train as many as possible, who have “fallen through the cracks” of the workforce. There needs to be a mechanism to serve as the first step in preparing for more intense employment and job training opportunities in the future.

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Recommendation #4

Establish an “Education Marketing Board” for the Delta, comprised of the Department of Education, the State board for Community and Junior Colleges, and the Institutions of Higher Learning to conduct research and develop and implement a comprehensive education marketing plan to change the mindset of Delta residents to value education.

In 2000, the percentage of adults without a high school diploma living in the Delta region was 35.5% compared to 27.1% for the state. Over half of the top twenty counties with the highest levels of adults without high school diplomas are Delta Region counties.

Education needs to be “marketed” in the Delta, not merely promoted as in other parts of the state. Aggressive marketing is needed to trigger behavioral and attitudinal changes in students, parents, teachers and communities.

A message must be conveyed that relates to the importance of educational attainment for individual and collective well-being, of the necessity of completing high school, as the first step to a better quality of life, and that individuals must continue a process of life long learning and skills development.

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Recommendation #5

Establish Early Childhood Development Centers at Delta State University, Mississippi Valley State University, Alcorn State University, Coahoma Community College, Mississippi Delta Community College and Holmes Community College, in collaboration with the Early Childhood Institute at Mississippi State University.

Study after study has highlighted the direct link between early childhood education and future economic growth. Research had also shown a direct correlation between early childhood development and education and overall success in life.

Much concern has been expressed over the educational needs of children in the early stages of life and the importance of early childhood education cannot be overstated in the poorest area in the poorest state in the nation.

The pace of learning depends on many factors. Some of the most glaring concerns are for children born into impoverished circumstances and/or born to parents with little education.

The high numbers of births to single and teen mothers, prevalent in the Delta, add to these concerns due to problems of maturity levels and education levels. In these kinds of situations, early childhood development and education become more crucial.

High quality childcare is essential for children in the Delta; it is an investment in their future. Care providers must be equipped to provide the adequate foundation needed, for Therefore, the Special Taskforce recommends the following:

The primary purpose of the Centers will be to provide training to current early childhood providers and educational material to help develop a high quality, affordable education system for Delta children.

The Institutions of Higher Learning, the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges and the Early Childhood Institute will provide to the “Commission” with a description and function of the Centers, as well as the cost for set up and operation.

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Recommendation #6

Have the state Department of Education to develop a plan exclusively for the Delta, to meet the special educational needs and challenges, resulting from decades of neglect.

The Delta region ranks at the bottom in the state in many areas. Education is included. Unfortunately, the Delta leads the state in the percentage of adults *without* a high school diploma; the percentage of adults performing at Literacy Level One; and in school dropout.

The Delta also has the highest percentage of people living in poverty and the lowest median household income of any other region in the state.

The Delta is a “special needs” region and should be treated as such, in order to reverse these trends.

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Recommendation # 7

(a) Direct the Department of Human Services and the Department of Health to work with other health related organizations and The State Department of Education to conduct research and develop a comprehensive, on-going pregnancy prevention campaign that targets Delta students, exclusively.

(b) Have the legislature take steps to fully fund Medicaid and use a cigarette/tobacco tax to do so.

The Mississippi Delta has the highest percentage of births to single mothers and single teens than anywhere else in the state. . Seventeen of the eighteen counties record births to single mothers higher than the state average of 48.3 percent. Some Delta counties record percentages as high as 79 percent.

The percentage of births to teens is 18.8 percent for the region, compared to 13.3 percent for the state average. A total of 13 Delta counties are among the top twenty counties for percentages of births to teens.

Single parent households have been linked to increased poverty levels, poor academic performance of children born in to single parent households, a higher dropout rate, and low retention and graduation rates. All of these impact the quality of the workforce.

The impact of teen pregnancy on the economy affects everyone. It is a drain on limited resources. A strong, targeted teen pregnancy prevention campaign will cost the state far less, in the long run.

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Recommendation #8

Direct the Mississippi Development Authority to make available to those certified Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs) that are awarded HOME funds for housing projects, five percent (5%) of the State’s annual appropriation of HOME funds for operating support, as allowed under federal HUD regulations.

Housing is a high priority to the Delta Revitalization Task Force. Large numbers of people are living in substandard housing. Decent affordable housing is critical to an improved quality of life.

Certified Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs) are private, community-based nonprofit corporations whose purpose includes the provision of decent, affordable housing to low-income people. A certain portion of federal HOME funding is set aside for housing developed, sponsored, or owned by CHDOs. Unfortunately, in the Delta, operating costs for CHDOs are insufficient.

While most states set aside a percentage of their HOME allocations on an annual basis for CHDOs operational support, Mississippi sets aside zero. Mississippi awards HOME grants without administrative/operating costs. CHDOs are burdened in implementation of their HOME awards because of the lack of administrative dollars. This burden minimizes the long term organizational capacity and increases organizational dependence on private and public resources.

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Recommendation # 9:

(a) The Delta Task Force will write a formal letter to both houses of the Legislature and request that a joint resolution to be sent to the MS Congressional Delegation asking for their leadership on designating the MS Delta as the National Heritage Area.

(b) The Delta Task Force will send a separate letter to the Governor asking him to write a personal letter to each member of the MS Congressional Delegation, requesting the same.

(c) Direct the Mississippi Development Authority/Tourism Division to work with other cultural and tourism affiliates in the Delta to develop and implement a cultural tourism initiative for the Delta region

(d) Locate Mississippi's Civil Rights Museum or a "satellite" museum in the Delta

Tourism makes a significant contribution to Mississippi's economy. Tourism creates employment, attracts capital investment, and contributes to both the Mississippi general fund and municipal tax revenues.

Tourism is the 5th largest sector of Mississippi's economy. In FY 2005, Tourism accounted for 126,500 jobs in Mississippi with an estimated payroll of \$2.4 billion for direct and indirect jobs related to the industry.

One of the most successful economic development strategies for rural communities, as those in the Delta, has been tourism and the multiple small business opportunities associated with it.

Cultural Heritage tourism is defined as traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of that past and present. The Delta is internationally recognized and full of possibilities for this form of development.

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Recommendation # 10

Have the legislature to establish a fund of \$500,000 exclusively for the Delta to provide cash match for federal grant applications that will fund heritage tourism.

The lack of cash available to match federal grants that are available to fund heritage tourism is a barrier to accessing federal funding. This needs to change. A fund needs to be established to provide matching dollars for federal grants. The fiscal agent for these funds should be Delta State University's Center for Culture and Learning. An advisory community for this activity should be established that includes at minimum representatives from the Mississippi Blues Commission, the Mississippi Delta Tourism Association and other geographically representative organizations.

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Recommendation # 11

Have the Mississippi Development Authority identify the Delta's strengths and attributes and implement an aggressive marketing campaign, funded by the legislature.

For decades, demographics and socio-economic conditions used to describe the Mississippi Delta have been used to bring financial resources to the entire state. However, the Delta has not benefited significantly enough from these resources to rise above its current condition or image.

Mississippians living inside and outside the Delta appear to have surrendered to the negative image of the Delta. The Delta is more than a poverty stricken region of the state. It has untapped cultural resources and other areas of potential that need to be explored, developed and publicized.

The Delta has never received adequate attention from the highest levels of state government and economic development, this is beginning to change.

The Delta needs a boost in its overall image while the process of revitalization takes occurs. The Delta needs assistance in showing its own residents, the rest of the state and the world that it has some good things to offer, right now. The Delta's strength's and attributes need to be identified and marketed.

State agencies must be instrumental in this endeavor by highlighting areas of success with their work in the Delta and working harder to create positive 'spin-off'.

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Recommendation # 12

(a) The legislature will make provisions to require, fund and provide free annual physicals for all needy K-12 students in the 18 county Delta region.

(b) Have the Department of Education develop a system that supports preventive health care by requiring school districts in the Delta to show and report evidence that they have made attempts to pursue hiring a school nurse through exploration of funding sources and other options.

The Special Task Force realizes that the most fundamental aspect of a good quality of life is good health. Healthy people are happier, more productive, and less costly to insure.

While seeking ways to address the many education and social problems that impact economic development in the Delta, the Special Task Force is determined to prevent key health problems prevalent among African Americans (obesity, diabetes, hyper-tension, heart disease) from crippling future generations and their productivity levels.

The Special Task Force is concerned about the impact of President Bush's veto of a bipartisan bill that would have dramatically expanded children's health. Because insurance dollars are scarce, the Special Task Force believes it is imperative that children in the most impoverished area of the state remain as healthy as possible.

In the Delta, with its high rates of chronic health problems, lack of a sufficient number of healthcare providers, and a population most likely to be uninsured, prevention health services become increasingly important. Preventive care should include free annual physicals for all K-12 students in the Delta region

At present, there is no legislative mandate for school districts to hire nurses. Hiring of school nurses is left to the discretion of each school district. Yet, a school nurse may be the only consistent source of health services for uninsured school-aged children. School nurses provide health education to students, staff and parents.

Superintendents, administrators and school board members must begin to realize the role of the school district in prevention services and health education and actively seek ways to provide health care to students through a school nurse.

1. Survey of Non- Profit Organizations

The Special Task Force contracted with Integrity Consulting Group, Inc of Greenville, Mississippi to conduct an inventory of non-profit organizations in the 18-county Delta region.

The purpose of the inventory was to identify and summarize the scope of work of each non-profit organization and to have knowledge of work currently being done to address the social and economic issues that hinder growth and development in the Delta. In addition, the inventory would help Special Task Force more clearly define its own role in the revitalization effort.

The inventory revealed the presence of roughly 1300 non-profit organizations engaged in activities to improve different aspects of life for Delta citizens. The inventory further revealed duplication of work and pointed out a lack of coordination of efforts.

2. “Delta NEXT” Publication

The Special Task Force established a contract with the Mississippi Business Journal to produce a special magazine exclusively for Middle school students and ninth graders in the Delta Region.

Modeled after the *Mississippi NEXT* magazine that focuses on life after high school and distributed to students in grades 10 – 12, the purpose of “*Delta NEXT*” is to start an even earlier effort to provide information on how to be successful in school and in life. *Delta NEXT* contains age appropriate, informative articles that encourage students to stay in school, and complete high school. The magazine features Delta personalities, residents, teachers, students and schools.

The one-of-a-kind magazine will be distributed to approximately 23, 000 students in 124 school districts in the Delta, exclusively, beginning in December, 2007. It is anticipated that teachers will encourage students to read the publication and discuss articles in the classroom and that students will share the magazine with their parents.

3. Early Childhood Development Forum

In May, the Delta Taskforce and Early Childhood Institute at Mississippi State University held an Early Childhood Development Forum which was hosted by Mississippi Valley State University.

The purpose of the forum was to develop recommendations on an early childhood development system for the Mississippi Delta region. The Forum was attended by educators, early childhood development providers, policy makers and others interested in this issue.

Studies in other states have indicated that children who go through quality pre-K programs perform better than those who do not. Therefore, the Delta Task Force lists early childhood development among its top priorities.