

Governor Bryant visits Lucedale to announce \$1.4 million highway grant

By Royce Armstrong, GC Times

Release: 6/27/19

Governor Phil Bryant was in town last week. As far as anyone can determine, it has been nearly half a century since a sitting Mississippi governor came to George County. And while some may feel that Washington, D.C. or Jackson is close enough for some politicians, Governor Bryant's visit was certainly welcome. He was here to extend his congratulations to George County for the \$1.4 million highway grant that was being announced by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA).

Assistant U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Dr. John Fleming, announce the grant to a room full of elected officials and local business leaders on Thursday morning, June 20. The announcement was made in the County Administration Building.

"This grant is crucial for Enviva and George County," said Governor Bryant in introducing Dr. Fleming. "EDA's investment in this project will further strengthen Mississippi's status as a leader in economic development. I am grateful for Secretary Ross and his team for their continued support."

The project will fund roadway, water and wastewater improvements for the George County Industrial Park to support the wood pellet plant and other businesses, Fleming explained. This project was made possible by the regional planning efforts led by the Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District. EDA funds the Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District to bring together the public and private sectors to create an economic development roadmap to strengthen the regional economy, support private capital investment and create jobs.

Specifically, the money will be used in constructing a truck entrance to the Enviva plant exiting off Hwy. 198 E. When the plant is up and running, it is expected 200 or more trucks each day will enter the plant with low-grade timber and sawmill byproducts used in manufacturing the high-density wood pellets. The pellets, an estimated 750,000 metric tons (or roughly 827,000 avoirdupois tons), will be transported to the Port of Pascagoula by rail.

The plant will take more than one year to build and will cost an estimated \$160 million. Enviva already has contracts in hand for the wood pellets to be produced over the next 10 years. When completed, it will be the largest industrial wood pellet plant in the world.

This project is funded under the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (PL 115-123) (PDF), in which Congress appropriated the EDA \$600 million in additional Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) Program (PDF) funds for disaster relief and recovery as a result of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, wildfires and other calendar year 2017 natural disasters under the Stafford Act.

Fleming said he was pleased to be a part of bringing this grant money to George County, explaining he had a connection to the area. In the early 1800's his ancestor and two of his ancestor's brothers moved from Georgia to homestead on what was then the Jackson and Greene County line (now George County). The family later moved to Wayne County and he was raised in Meridian. He earned his medical degree through the University of Mississippi before moving to Louisiana to practice medicine.

Later he ran for the U.S. House seat from that district in Louisiana and served in the House before being appointed to his current Assistant Secretary of Commerce position, he explained.

Joining the Governor and Fleming was Nic Lane, the Executive VP of Human Capital at Enviva. Lane spoke about the Enviva commitment to the people of George County. While the pellet plant expects to employ between 90 and 100 direct employees, Lane said the plant will result in the creation of 700 jobs in George County.