

Governor's Column – 12/16/01

Law Enforcement Officers Deserve Our Thanks

“Police are the only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.” – *Sir Robert Peel*

This past week, I attended a banquet in honor of law enforcement officers from around the state. It was a good opportunity to visit with these men and women, to thank them for the work they do every day, and to be reminded of the risks they take on our behalf.

Thanking a law enforcement officer is something we should do more than once a year at a nice dinner; we should take every opportunity to show our appreciation.

We're all familiar with that first impression of police officers, the ones we see when as children. Our grade school teachers always taught us to find a policeman if we were in trouble, because they're our friends.

That same respect must be maintained today.

The men and women of law enforcement do so much that is taken for granted. Unfortunately, it is usually the tragedies that remind us of the risks taken every day.

After the tragic attacks of September 11, our world changed and we were forced into a different frame of thinking. The issues we had always taken for granted, such as opening our mail or going to a large public event, were changed. Security increased everywhere, and nobody complained.

We all want to feel safe.

But in finding that safety, we can't forget the work done to get us there. As regular citizens, we are not the ones on patrol. We are not the ones faced with life-or-death situations on a regular basis. We are not the ones who are first on the scene of a fatal accident or disturbing crime scene.

That's the job of the men and women who serve in law enforcement at all levels across our state. It's a job they do well.

Department of Public Safety Commissioner David Huggins and Colonel L. M. Claiborne, Jr., Director of the Mississippi Highway Patrol, are doing a great job in leading our law enforcement efforts at the state level. Their dedication to ensuring the safety and security of our citizens is shared by officers around the state.

I believe all Americans have rethought the role of law enforcement officers in recent months. From the small towns of the Mississippi Delta to cities like New York, more and more average citizens are showing their appreciation, and with good reason.

The proof is in the numbers. For the year 2000, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, serious violent crime levels declined; property crime rates declined; and arrests for drug violations are up.

The work our officers do on a daily basis hasn't changed since the first law enforcement officers began walking a beat. The tools of the trade may be different, but the work's the same – it's the same in Mississippi as it around the nation and the world.

Working together, we can do so much more. It is important for communities and neighborhoods to become involved in public safety, to serve as unofficial back-up for their law enforcement agencies.

We can take back our neighborhoods that are on the brink. We can start neighborhood watches and community policing. We can do the things that help make law enforcement just a little bit easier.

So, to the law enforcement officers of Mississippi, I say this: You are our heroes. You are people of honor – in your instinct and in your actions. You are the best in your world, and more than good enough for any other world. You are the people who keep us safe – and we thank you for it.