

*Remarks for the  
Law Enforcement and Firefighters Appreciation Program  
November 10, 2002*

Thank you, Colonel Claiborne, and thank you for the good work you do every day with the Mississippi Highway Patrol to help keep Mississippi safe.

And, I appreciate this opportunity to say “thank you” to the law enforcement and firefighting professionals who give, and have given, so much to our state.

This is something we should do more often; we should take every opportunity to express our appreciation.

I believe we were reminded last year – all too tragically and quickly – of the importance of the work done by the men and women who patrol our streets and run into burning buildings.

We watched in collective disbelief as the attacks in New York and Washington happened live on television. Then, we gathered in a collective embrace for the emergency responders, the victims, and our nation.

In short, we have a new outlook – a new respect – for those who so much more than just wear a badge or put out fires.

We're all familiar with that first impression of police officers. 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 that are taken every day, risks that you here in this room know all too well.

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. We all wanted – and still want – to feel safe.

But in finding that safety we cannot forget the work that's done in leading us to it. 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 law enforcement officers – and they do it well.

The numbers prove the results of their work. 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.

Here in Mississippi, from the troopers of the Mississippi Highway Patrol to the officers of the smallest police department, a difference is being made in our communities, in our homes, and in our lives.

The work that's done 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.

One interesting thing about law enforcement work – at the end of the day, there's no tangible product.

There's no way to measure what you've done in the day, other than to see kids playing outside; people wearing their seatbelts; families walking through their neighborhoods in the evening.

We don't see the dark streets patrolled at night.

We don't know about the thoughts that run through the mind of an officer as he or she goes into a dangerous situation with a gun drawn.

We don't know the feelings in their heart at the end of a long and difficult shift.

We do know that every man and woman who wears a badge and takes an oath "to serve and protect" has qualities that help them rise above the rest.

Those same qualities are found in every individual who responds to a home that's burning. The firefighter – whether a volunteer or professional – puts everything on the line every time a situation arises.

The recent tragedy in Tchula, where six innocent young children lost their lives in a fire, affected that community and our state. The firefighters who responded, though, probably were affected more than anyone.

They dealt firsthand with that tragedy, and were involved from the beginning to the end. They responded quickly to that burning trailer; they fought the fire; they served as pallbearers for the children.

September 11 saw firefighters dealing with another normal call that turned into one of the most horrific tragedies in our nation's history. Despite the enormity of what they faced, they responded with the same professionalism that defines firefighters across our nation.

I had the honor of meeting with some New York City firefighters less than three weeks after the attacks. Ladder Company 3, on East 13<sup>th</sup> Street, lost twelve good men on September 11.

As I talked with these firefighters, I was struck by their genuine gratitude for our brief visit and their desire to share their thoughts, even as a pile of ash-covered boots lay off to one side as a reminder of what had happened.

The bottom line is this – from the smallest Mississippi town to the largest American city, law enforcement officers and firefighters are a unique and amazing group of people.

Working with them, we can do so much more. We can show our appreciation for the work they do by our own efforts in helping out.

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

And to all the law enforcement officers and firefighters here today, let me simply 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. May God bless you and your families, our state and our nation.