

*Remarks for the
United Nations Day at Millsaps
October 24, 2001*

Thank you, Jaesa, and I appreciate the opportunity to be here with you tonight. I want to compliment you on your involvement with the United Nations, and your obvious commitment to being a part of improving our nation and our world.

America has changed dramatically since the 11th of September, and the world has changed with it. We have experienced a direct attack on our shores, and we are now in the process of extracting justice from those responsible.

The rest of the world recoiled in horror at the attacks, because they were attacks on the one country in the world that stood as a symbol of everything freedom-loving people hold dear.

Now, the community of nations is joining us in our efforts to bring a stop to terrorism masked as religious acts. We all realize the true nature of Islam is based on peace, not on the distorted views of those who claim to fight now in the name of that great religion.

I'm proud of the way our nation has responded as whole to those who practice the Muslim faith. I believe we are truly acting in the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, who urged us to judge a man not on the color of his skin, but on the content of his character.

I want to talk for a minute about a trip I took at the beginning of this month, a trip with some other governors and the mayor of Washington, D.C., to New York City and Washington.

We traveled to those cities to encourage people to travel, to tour, to shop and spend money. We wanted to send a message that to alter or change our schedules and lifestyles would be a victory for the terrorists, and that simply cannot happen.

We spent some time in the restaurants and stores of New York while we were there, but more importantly, we spent some time at Ladder Company 3 on East 13th Street.

This fire company lost 12 men on September 11. We stopped by their station to let them know that Mississippi and the rest of the country were behind them, and it was a very moving moment.

I was struck by the genuine gratitude of these heroes to our visit. They had seen and experienced the worst tragedy in American history, and were still standing strong and doing work that needed to be done. They showed the very best of America.

We didn't travel to ground zero. That was not the purpose of our trip. The heroes I just mentioned were doing their work at the site, and they did not need to be interrupted.

There will be another time for that visit.

After New York, we traveled to Washington and stopped by the Pentagon. We stood no more than 50 yards from the impact site, listening to a briefing from an Army officer. I couldn't take my eyes off the building.

Pictures still hung on walls in what used to be offices. Windows sagged and bulged, the glass melted and reshaped by the intense heat. The concrete walls were black with soot and ash. It was an ugly and sobering sight.

And, I thought of two Mississippians – both from the tiny town of Durant – who died that day. Joe Ferguson was on the plane; Lieutenant Colonel “D.D.” Dickerson was in the Pentagon.

In the weeks since the attacks, we have begun the battles in Afghanistan against Bin Laden. We are also fighting here against enemies that are just as much of a threat – biological weapons and the fear of biological weapons. Both of them have the ability to inflict great damage.

I have confidence in our leaders and the action being taken in the battle against anthrax and other biological threats. We must be equally aggressive in dealing with the fear of the American people regarding the threat of biological warfare.

Franklin Roosevelt once remarked, “we have nothing to fear but fear itself.” That statement is just as true today as it was 60 years ago. We cannot allow our fears to hold us hostage from our normal routines of life. Again, to do so is a victory for our enemies.

Let me take a moment to share some more positive thoughts with you, thoughts about what is happening in Mississippi today and the role we are playing in our nation and our world.

We are setting a standard for the nation in terms of education. We have passed a teacher pay package that will, finally, pay our teachers as the professionals they are.

With the full implementation of this program, the average teacher salary in Mississippi will climb from 49th in the nation to 19th in the nation.

Our efforts earned an editorial in the New York Times, an editorial that asked the question “why can’t New York do what Mississippi is doing?”

It's good for Mississippi to be seen as a leader by other states, and it's happening more and more.

As we move toward a technology-based economy, an economy that is borderless, wireless and global, we are making sure our students are prepared.

Right now, the “Computers in the Classroom” initiative is underway in Mississippi. This partnership between the state and the private sector is working to place an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state.

We will reach this goal by the end of next year, and we will be the first state in the nation to do so. Again, Mississippi is leading the way.

And we're doing it by being imaginative, by thinking outside the box, by creating our own opportunities.

I was with my children a few weeks ago at a Tennessee-LSU game in Knoxville. My 16-year-old son, Jordan, was looking out over the crowd and commented that “there must be 10,000 different ways to wear orange.”

That statement has since struck me in a different light – there must be 10,000 ways for us to do business in the new economy. We will explore every one of them.

That is the commitment I have made to the people of Mississippi, and it is a commitment I hope you will share with me.

Each of you here this evening has tremendous gifts and talents, and I want you to have a chance to put them to work here in Mississippi.

It's been said that you can't plow a field by turning the dirt in your mind. I am excited about the new ground that we're breaking in Mississippi. We're not thinking about it; we're doing it.

I want you to do it as well.

The work you are doing here at Millsaps with the United Nations Association is a great start, and I encourage you to keep it up. I am pleased that Mississippi has a role to play with the United Nations, and that you are among the leaders making that role a success.

I have a proclamation to share with you this evening, but I'd like to have it read by a great Mississippian, Dr. Wallace Conerly, head of the University of Mississippi Medical Center, who I have appointed as United Nations Day Chairman for the State of Mississippi.

Dr. Conerly has served Mississippi well for many years, and I know he will represent us equally well in this role. Dr. Conerly?