What a great day…

Today we celebrate the Fourth of July, our nation's birthday. It is a time for celebrations just like this, where we gather to share food, fun and fireworks.

But it is also a celebration of much more.

Today, let's talk about the great things of America.

Let's talk about how, as Americans, we enjoy freedoms never before experienced in history.

Let's remember all the men and women who have given the ultimate sacrifice to secure those freedoms.

And, let's support them as the talks begin again about base closings. We need to do all we can to protect these soldiers and the work they do for our state and our country.

That's why I signed an executive order last week establishing the Mississippi Military Communities Council, which will advise state officials on the proposed base closings we expect to see in 2003.

There are over 31,000 military men and women in Mississippi today. Their payroll exceeds $1 billion per year. The work they do each day helps protect the wonderful freedoms we celebrate today.

We can't afford to lose them – not after all they've done for us.

Think about what makes us proud to be a citizen of the United States – our freedom, our opportunity, the fact that each one of us has a voice with which to protest or praise.

Those are some of the reasons America is great. And, those are also some of the reasons Mississippi is great.

Each of us, as a citizen of this great state, can be proud of who we are, where we live, and where we are going – together.

We are moving ahead in education, in economic development, in health care. We are doing more, together, to make life better for every Mississippian.

Today, we celebrate. Tomorrow, we go back to our jobs, doing the work that makes this state the best place in the country to live.

Next year, we'll get together to celebrate again – and I know we'll have even more to be proud of, in Mississippi and in America.

Thank you, and happy Fourth of July!