

*Remarks for the
Buckle for Life Officer Appreciation Awards Ceremony
February 11, 2002*

Thank you, Commissioner Huggins. It is an honor and a privilege for me to be here with you today, and have the opportunity to say “thank you” to those who give, and have given, so much to our state.

This is something we should do more often, and it doesn't have to be in a setting like this. We should take every opportunity to express our appreciation.

Today, we're doing just that as we honor law enforcement officers who work hard every day to protect the people of Mississippi – our children, our parents, our friends.

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. Security increased everywhere, and nobody has complained.

We all want to feel safe.

But in finding that safety we cannot forget the work that you do 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 your job – and you do it well.

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, the average citizens are showing their appreciation for the work you do.

The numbers prove the results of your 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, you are making a difference in our communities, in our homes, and in our lives.

The work you 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.

In fact, your work was well-defined by a British nobleman, Sir Richard Mayne. In 1829, he wrote the following: “The primary object of an efficient police is the prevention of crime; the next that of detection and punishment of offenders if crime is committed. To these ends, all the efforts of police must be directed.

“The protection of life and property, the preservation of public tranquility, and the absence of crime, will alone prove whether those efforts have been successful and whether the objects for which the police were appointed have been attained.”

Judging by the statistics I mentioned earlier and the improvements we've seen here at home, your efforts are successful.

In particular, your commitment to our children is so special. Teaching them respect for safety, for our system of laws and for the people who work to enforce those laws is a building block for our society.

It's been said that our children are the message we'll send to a future we won't see. With your help, the message will be positive – and it will be passed on for generations.

One interesting thing about your 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 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.

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.