

*Remarks for the
MDOC Memorial Service
May 6, 2002*

Commissioner Johnson, thank you. To the families of the fallen, you have our sympathy, and you have our deepest gratitude. Your loved ones, those we honor here today, made the ultimate sacrifice to protect you and me. They did it to protect the innocent across this great state of ours.

I didn't know the officers we remember today. I wish I did. I know they were good and decent people who were just doing their job.

The work done by employees of Mississippi's correctional institutions is not easy. They are charged with the care and control of more than 30,000 people. It is a charge they take seriously.

Correctional officers are on the front lines of law enforcement. They may not make the arrest, but they are the ones who spend the most time with an offender. They are the ones who, on a daily basis, work to separate those who would commit crime from those who could be victims of crime.

It is a difficult job, and today we are here to honor the memory of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the completion of that job.

In preparing for today's service, I came across "The Correction Officer's Prayer." It reads, "Lord, I ask for the courage to face and conquer my own fears; courage to take me where others will not go. I ask for strength of body to protect others and strength of spirit to lead others.

“I ask for the dedication to my job, to do it well; for dedication to my community, to keep it safe.

“Give me, Lord, concern for others who trust me and compassion for those who need me.

“And please, Lord, through it all, be at my side.”

The officers we honor and remember today had courage; they had strength, and dedication, and concern and compassion.

And I believe – we all believe – the Lord was at their side through it all.

To those of you who knew and loved those we remember today, they will never be so far away that you can't feel their love. Our faith reminds us that we will be together again with our loved ones. Until that time, the best we can do is take care of each other.

I am honored by this day, and I want to honor the memory of the officers who gave their lives in the line of duty – Sergeant Chester Tullos of Hattiesburg; Assistant Sergeant Amy Kendall of Bolivar County; Sergeant James Meeks of Parchman; Correctional Officer Argentra Cotton of Parchman; and Correctional Officer Sidney Harrison of Tutwiler.

In their memory, I am proclaiming this week, May 5-11, as “Correctional Employee Week” in the state of Mississippi. I encourage all Mississippians to remember those who have perished to protect, and those who follow in their footsteps.

Mississippi is blessed by their work. Thank you.