

*Remarks for the
Disabled American Veterans Mid-Winter Conference
February 8, 2003*

Thank you Mr. Gatlin. It is an honor to be here with you tonight. I would like to welcome Billie Schultz *(National Executive Committee Women in the Ladies Auxiliary)* to Mississippi and Mr. Burgess back to Mississippi *(DAV National Rep.)*.

Will Rogers once commented, “we can’t all be heroes because somebody has to sit on the curb and clap as they go by.”

We can’t all be heroes. That’s part of what makes them special people, special in their deeds and in their words.

We need heroes in our lives. Those heroes might be professional athletes. They might be writers or musicians or artists. They might be policemen or firefighters.

Whoever they are, we need heroes. We need someone to look up to, to admire.

Tonight, we're honoring heroes who risked everything to protect the principles of our nation – principles of freedom, of honor, of liberty.

You are among the thousands of Mississippi's sons and daughters who have worn the uniforms of our armed services. Your dedication is reflected in our appreciation of you.

It is because of your decision to serve that we are here tonight, free people in a free land.

That service carries us now, as we still walk in the shadow of September 11. The pain of that day has eased some with time, but our focus on those responsible for the attacks has not lessened – and neither has our common love of country.

We are still flying flags in our yards, taping smaller flags to car antennas and putting flag magnets on our car trunks. We're wearing flag pins in our lapels.

“God Bless America” is the most commonly used phrase in the country, and we are saying it not just because we know how God has blessed us in our history, but because we trust in God to help us in the tests before us now. With this phrase, we know our future is secure because our faith is strong.

This faith has carried us through wars before.
This faith is carrying us now.

Add to this faith the courage of the men and women of the American military, and we know we cannot be defeated.

The veterans of America are our friends and family. They answered a call that demanded the ultimate test of will, strength and endurance.

In 1900, the British explorer Sir Ernest Shackelton placed an ad in London newspapers for an expedition to the South Pole.

The ad read, “Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.”

The conditions described in Shackelton’s ad are not unlike what those in our military have faced over the years. “Constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.”

What kind of courage must it take to sign up for a mission like this? I know this much – it takes a courage that generations of Americans have displayed, it takes a courage that you have all displayed and a courage that we honor here tonight.

It is the courage of heroes.

May God bless our veterans, and may God bless America.