

*Remarks for the
National Guard Press Conference
November 29, 2001*

Good afternoon.

I'm proud of the men and women of the Mississippi National Guard. I'm proud of the sacrifices and commitments you make to the people of Mississippi and the United States. I'm proud of the record you have established for excellence.

And today, I'm proud to be here to recognize the tremendous efforts that have helped to build and maintain the strength of the Guard.

The Mississippi Army National Guard met their end strength goals for Fiscal Year 2001, with the most enlistments they've had in the past five years. A total of 1,740 men and women joined this past fiscal year.

And, the Army National Guard also had their first net increase in nine years, with an increase of 215 soldiers.

The Mississippi Air National Guard was equally successful.

For the first time in five years, the Air Guard ended their fiscal year above 100 percent of their authorized strength, with an end strength of 102.7 percent.

What does this mean to our state? It means that a 100-person unit will generate approximately \$300,000 in federal and state dollars for that community.

Right now, we are in 80 of the 82 counties in Mississippi – a total of 94 communities. The impact of the Guard units in these communities is tremendous.

At a time when the focus of national security has increasingly involved the Guard, it is good to know our forces were fully manned and trained prior to September 11. The men and women of the National Guard – all of you here today – represent the best of what the Guard is about: civilians in peacetime, soldiers in war.

And Mississippi has always answered our nation's call, and we're answering the call today.

Since September 11, Mississippi Guard units have risen to every occasion presented to them, and done so proudly.

The fact we have accepted this responsibility doesn't come without a price. Meeting recruitment and retention goals is challenging.

We are called on by our nation in higher numbers and for greater missions, and with good reason. We have proven to America and the world that, when needed, we will respond.

Today, I am proud to recognize three individuals who are helping keep the Mississippi National Guard strong.

Technical Sergeant Kendall Sanders is the Air National Guard Rookie Recruiter of the Year. As a member of the 172nd Air Wing in Jackson, Sergeant Sanders had an enlistment goal for the year of 48. He enlisted 74 individuals.

Staff Sergeant Trudy Letort was awarded the National Guard Bureau Chief's 50 for Fiscal Year 2001, an award for the NCO who effects the greatest number of enlistments for the fiscal year. Sergeant Letort enlisted 59 individuals in the Army National Guard.

To be awarded the National Guard Bureau Master 7 Award, you have to meet certain criteria in the state and beyond. Only seven of these awards are given each year, and this year one of them is going to Master Sergeant Robert Styron.

With the exceptional work of individuals such as Sergeants Sanders, Letort and Styron, and the outstanding leadership of General Lipscomb and his staff, the Mississippi National Guard is setting the standard for excellence.

I'm proud of the Mississippi National Guard. America is proud, too – that's why she keeps calling on you.