

*Remarks for the
“Proud to Be an American” Troop Rally
May 3, 2003*

I’m proud of a lot of things in my life – my family, my state, and the progress we’ve been able to make together.

I’m also proud to be an American.

America has been at war. Our sons and our daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, answered the call of their country to defend the principles of freedom and justice that we hold dear.

In recent weeks, we have watched as soldiers deployed to the battlefield. Here at home, our citizen soldiers – the men and women of the Mississippi National Guard and Reserves – have boarded buses and airplanes en route to service in places we know, and some we don't.

They are deployed to locations in the Middle East, in Asia, and to locations that we can't reveal. But, know this – wherever they are, they are well-trained and they'll get the job done.

As commander-in-chief of the Mississippi National Guard, I can't express enough the pride I feel knowing that our soldiers are serving their nation.

This much I do know for sure – when America needs their very best, they make the call to Mississippi.

Since the beginning of the war, we watched with a mix of pride and worry as our soldiers carried the fight toward Baghdad, fighting fierce battles under difficult conditions.

Now, the reign of terror of Saddam Hussein is at an end because our soldiers have made it happen. As of this past week, we've been told that major combat is over – I hope this holds true, and our soldiers can begin making the trip home.

In times of war, there are those who see a hopeless end; I see an endless hope. America is the greatest nation in the history of mankind, and nothing will change that. America is not just a country. It is an ideal, a principle.

That principle remains strong today and forever – and it remains strong because our sons and our daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, are fighting to protect it.

And that is part of what makes me proud to be an American.

I pray, as you do, for the safe return of our soldiers from this conflict. I pray for the wisdom and leadership of our president and those who serve with him. And, I pray for peace.

May God bless our state, our nation and our people.