

*Remarks to the
11th Annual Southern Industrial Contractors Cookout
June 16, 2001*

Thank you for the invitation to join you again this year.

I am always proud to join in the celebration of those who have given so much – some of them the ultimate sacrifice – to protect our way of life.

Tonight we are honoring our American veterans. We honor not only the service they have given to their country, but the contributions they have made in the years since.

We honor their courage, their commitment, and their dedication to a way of life kept vibrant through the unselfish actions of those who came before them, as well as those who will follow.

We honor men like Van Barfoot from Carthage, Mississippi. Near Carano, Italy, in May 1944, Sergeant Barfoot singlehandedly captured 17 German soldiers while his platoon attacked heavily entrenched lines.

We honor men like Roy Wheat from Moselle. On an August day in 1967, Lieutenant Corporal Wheat and two other marines were setting up in a tree line in the Quang Nam province, when Wheat triggered a mine. Wheat saved the lives of his fellow marines when he threw himself on the mine.

These men are two of the 17 Congressional Medal of Honor winners from Mississippi.

They are but two of the hundreds of thousands of men and women who have served our country so valiantly. Others have served and died, and are known only to their family and friends.

One of these was a marine named J. O. Warren. On December 14, 1944, Japanese soldiers began the systematic execution of American P.O.W.'s at a prison camp in the Philippines.

Some of the soldiers were able to escape the gunfire and hide in the rugged cliffs below the camp. J. O. Warren was one of a group of seven hiding together.

A barge carrying Japanese soldiers motored through the bay next to the cliffs. J. O.

Warren's foot was spotted by the Japanese and quickly shot. To avoid exposing his six other fellow soldiers, Warren stepped out into the open.

He was immediately shot and killed. But, the barge moved on and the other soldiers were spared.

J. O. Warren gave his life for his country and his fellow countrymen.

America's veterans are truly a national treasure.

Will Rogers said it perfectly when he stated, "we can't all be heroes because somebody has to sit on the curb and clap as they go by."

Tonight, we're sitting on the curb and clapping.

God bless you, and God bless America's veterans.