

*Remarks for the
13th Annual Cookout Honoring American Veterans
April 26, 2003*

Today, the war in Iraq is, for all intents and purposes, over – and our troops have liberated a nation from the iron rule of a dictator. Our sons and our daughters, our brothers and sisters, have 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 thousands of soldiers of the Mississippi National Guard 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 remain classified. They are in the danger zone, but they are ready. And *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 state and their nation.

This much I do know for sure – when America needs the *very best*, the call is made to *Mississippi.*

That's been the case for some time now. Our Mississippi soldiers are the ones called on by their country because they have proven themselves time and time again, and they have set a high standard for others to follow.

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.

They've made it to Baghdad – and the reign of terror of Saddam Hussein has come to an end because our soldiers have made it happen. Our soldiers are winning the war against terrorism and those who would use terror to inflict harm on us and other innocent people.

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 Mississippi's soldiers – America's soldiers – stand ready to protect it.*

And it remains strong because of soldiers like Larry Brown, Henry Brown and Shane Childers – brave Mississippians who made the ultimate sacrifice in this cause.

Today, we honor all those who have served – and those who serve today – for their bravery, their dedication, and their commitment to the principles that make America great.

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.