

Lincoln Day Celebration - Opening Remarks 3-5-07  
By Commissioner Pat Geissman

Tonight we are celebrating the life of our first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln. He was born 198 years ago. Our 16<sup>th</sup> president was a very odd looking man, long limbed and raw boned. He had a very distinct look about him. He was easily recognized during his life and his image is easily recognized today.

In my office I have a picture of myself and a friend, John Lund, dressed in the character of Abraham Lincoln. John, portraying Abraham Lincoln, was a guest speaker a few years ago here at the Lincoln Day Dinner. A photo was taken of us and I placed it on my desk. Shortly afterwards, I took Carrie, my 6 year old granddaughter to work with me. She was sitting at my desk coloring, when suddenly she said "Grandma, I thought Abraham Lincoln was dead!" She had seen the photo, I wish I could have captured the look of shock (big eyes and all) on her face.....  
.....Even a 6 year old recognizes the image of Abraham Lincoln!

Paintings of Lincoln are found in public building all across America.

We have pennies in our pocket with that famous Lincoln profile. And \$5 bills with Lincoln gazing back at us.

Cities and schools and monuments and even cars bear the Lincoln name.

Lincoln is everywhere.

Like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson or perhaps Benjamin

Franklin, Mr. Lincoln's life's work has made a mortal man into an eternal presence. A symbol of leadership, tenacity, vision, and strength..in short, a symbol of America as we know it today.

He's the greatest reason why 50 stars are stitched on the blue field of every American flag.

And he's the reason why the birthright to be free can be claimed by every American.

Many of the images of public servants we hoist to the top of granite pedestals are destined to be toppled.

And in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America, when we find many of our leaders with clay feet, moral imperfections and occasional bad judgment, the focus groups and the pollsters turn quickly to find the next short-term hero, who says and does politically correct things until, at least, the next election cycle.

Abraham Lincoln's legacy and reputation stand the test of time because what I found when I searched to uncover the "real" Lincoln, were over three million results on a quick Google of Lincoln's name. - what I found from his private and public record - is a life filled with heartache, disappointment, and many, defeats....

But a life of uncompromising character and unshakable integrity.

This frontier president grew up without a lot of the niceties we take for granted today. He grew up surrounded by wilderness and not having much schooling. As he remembered it, "...I could read, write, and cipher (simple math)..but that was all."

But the backwoods boy had ambition to be more than a rifle-toting farmer. He got himself educated, which was not easy, and never lost sight of his ambitions.

I think it's worth speculating -- if Abraham Lincoln were alive today in 2007, would there be any doubt of his interest in pleading in the hallways and caucus rooms of the capitol to mend the broken trust between our legislature and a disillusioned citizenry.

To shed light and make transparent our legislative process.

To end a culture of privilege so disconnected from the lives of the people being served.

To treat public service as a temporary trust, not a way of life.

There is little doubt in my mind he would.

Lincoln knew that power corrupts. That without checks and balances on a flawed and fallen human nature, the mistakes of the past would inevitably repeat, again and again, and again. Lincoln's value to our lives today isn't just for 8th Grade Gettysburg battlefield school trips or annual celebrations or tributes like this.

Abraham Lincoln's importance to the work of our legislative body and our role as citizens is a hallmark against which we measure our commitment to what we believe.

Slavery has been removed from our law books.

50 independent states form a united country.

These remarkable truths are a portion of his public record, his legacy for Americans.

Does his spirit of uncompromised truth live today or will the people of this great nation be ashamed of the actions of our leaders. We must remember Lincoln often and pray for the wisdom and character of this great leader.