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Governor Lawton Chiles of Florida speaks to the veterans of the Alaska Highway construction reunion

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Recording opens up with background talking. Sound of marching gradually getting closer. Jane Johns from the governor's office greets the reunion participants. She asked all of the veterans to please stand. She asked the Governor Lawton Chiles to come forward and introduces him. Governor Chiles asked everyone give a hand to all of the veterans. He said this is a wonderful opportunity for them to greet the veterans of the 93rd, 94th, 95th, 97th and 388th Regiments of the Army Corps of Engineers. Many military contributions have been documented and taught. He said the men who constructed the Alaskan Highway have not to date received the kind of recognition they justly deserve for that work. He is proud to be part of this historical occasion. He said he understands that many of them who were part of the construction came from Florida and he is proud of them and their contribution they made to our country. Many Americans were unaware of this highway and the necessity that it served during the war and the feat that it was for land transport. He said history tells us that this vital transportation link provided a short route for equipment and supplies for our Russian allies while at the same time establishing a northwest logistical base. The men who participated in the construction of the highway faced overwhelming odds, bad weather, wilderness, and sickness, but they accomplished the task at hand. The construction provided over 1520 miles of highway, chartered through rugged unmapped wilderness from Dawson Creek, British Columbia to Fairbanks, Alaska. It was called a nearly impossible engineering feat likened to the building of the Panama Canal. Despite the fact that Black troops seldom mentioned were the products of history during this time fifty years later historians are beginning to correct the record book. The contribution of some 3695 Black soldiers as verified by their commanders that they did an exceptional job under the strenuous conditions. He said they were ill housed often living in tents, using insufficient clothing, having monotonous food, and worked over twenty hours a day in temperatures at forty below for weeks at a time. Many of the participants in this project were decorated for their contribution and subsequently assigned to European and South Pacific theaters of operations. Due to the outstanding performance of members of the 93rd, 94th, 95th, 97th, and 388th and other units the United States military integrated all the units during the Korean conflict becoming the first agency in the United States to do so. He said here we are today celebrating the 50th anniversary of some of the finest American veterans and their contributions. He said it is a great honor to be part of this reunion.

Professor James Eekon talked about Governor Lawton Chiles. He recognized Bettye Davis from Alaska and Dr. Marvin. Rolland Joseph is introduced. Bishop Carroll is introduced. He asked all the veterans stand for a round of applause. He recognized Mr. Brown and Dr. Rivers. Another person recognized additional people from the state of Alaska.

