

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan on the Signing of ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Act of 1991)

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Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan on the Signing of ISTEA

From remarks by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan in the Senate on January 30, 1992, regarding the Secret Service:

In the State of the Union Address, the president referred to the Surface Transportation Act, which he signed on Dec. 18 in a gulch outside Fort Worth, where a highway is being constructed.

Good photo op. Fine. Home state. Fine. Hard hats in the front row on the small platform. Fine again.

But what about the members of "Codel Roe" who had traveled to Texas to witness the signing of the bill, which, after all, we had written? The Air Force term "codel" refers to a congressional delegation, "Roe" to the distinguished chairman of the Committee on Public Works and Transportation of the House of Representatives, the Honorable Robert A. Roe of New Jersey.

We did just as we were told. Left Andrews Air Force Base at the crack of dawn. Got into buses at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport. Not, however, before one of our members was refused entry into a large empty hangar where the president's party, or whatever, was to have coffee. Stopped at a holding point. Were shifted to new buses. Stopped again. Finally, let out at the site.

In due course, the presidential party arrived. Serried limos with Cabinet members rank-by-rank. Hush falls. Finally, the president himself, who, personally, could not have been more gracious to us, individually and collectively. He, after all, was once a member of Congress, too. The brief ceremony concluded, the president was off to lunch with the hard hats. Again, fine. It was, after all, lunchtime.

But not for "Codel Roe." The Secret Service, as they put it, "froze the site." They almost froze "Codel Roe" in the process, left as we were, standing in the drizzle and the mud After a half hour or so, the men with rifles up behind the abutments began to peel off. In time, buses came for us, and we were in that sense spared. At the price, however, of a certain measure of comity which ought to attend relations between the executive and legislative branches.

On the way back to Washington, more than one member of our group commented on these arrangements. Were all those agents really necessary? All those guns? All those walkie-talkies? All that ordering around? . . . No care can be too great to protect the president and the vice president. But there is such a thing as excess, and it ought to be avoided in a republic.