

Visionaries of the Interstate Honored at Gala Celebration

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(The following material is from *Celebrating America's Highways: A Commemorative Scrapbook* published by the American Highway Users Alliance and is used with permission.)

On a perfect June evening, in a large tent at a lovely setting on the Ellipse, 450 people joined Vice President Al Gore in honoring "The Visionaries" of the Interstate--President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Senator Albert Gore Sr., Congressman T. Hale Boggs and Administrator Frank Turner.

Senator Gore and Mr. Turner attended the gala. Susan Eisenhower stood in for her grandfather Ike and former Representative Lindy Boggs substituted for her late husband.

Rounding out the list of dignitaries were 10 members of Congress, three former secretaries of Transportation, the current deputy secretary, the current Federal Highway Administrator (and three of his predecessors) plus 14 current and former state DOT secretaries, who collectively represented seven former chairmen and one current officer of AASHTO.

Others included top corporate officials of companies including Texaco, 3M, Exxon, Ingersoll-Rand and Koch Materials, as well as other representatives from the nation's most effective associations--American Automobile Manufacturers, American Petroleum Institute, National Association of Independent Insurers, American Trucking Associations, Association General Contractors and many more.

3M Group Vice President Donn Osmon, chairman of the Interstate Highway Commemorative Fund, and William D. Fay, president of the American Highway Users Alliance, were speakers. Paul Duke was master of ceremonies and the U.S. Army Band played patriotic songs, including a number specially orchestrated for the occasion. The icon of the commemorative program, the Zero Milestone, marked the location for the tent and became the backdrop for hundreds of photographs.

The evening was without partisanship--a fact noted by both the Vice President and by Bill Fay. The audience was festive and obviously delighted to be part of a history-making commemoration--a celebration of the grandest public works project of all times.

June 26, 1996 remarks of Vice President Al Gore at the Washington, D.C. dinner commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Interstate Highway System

Tonight we meet to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Interstate highway System and the four great Americans who made it possible: President Dwight Eisenhower; Congressman Hale Boggs; former Federal Highway Administrator Frank Turner; and my father, Senator Albert Gore Sr. And as we celebrate this anniversary, I really can't think of a better place to gather than on the Ellipse, at the Zero Milestone Marker. The Zero Milestone, of course, is the marker from which all distances from the nation's capital are supposed to be measured. In many ways the Interstate Highway System is a marker itself from which all legislation should be measured.

Our nation's greatest accomplishments, whether the Interstate Highway System or the Marshall Plan or many others, are often those that receive bipartisan support. The Interstate Highway System has meant so much to America. It is virtually impossible to overstate the importance of this investment. Its creation led to an unprecedented period of national growth and prosperity. Simply because we cannot ever adequately measure all of the benefits which have

come from this system, they will never all be fully recognized. But it dramatically improved transportation safety; it dramatically stimulated commerce; it enhanced our national defense and security. The Interstate Highway System has literally changed the way we work and the way we live.

It has done something else, too, something that cannot be measured by dollar signs or statistics. The Interstate Highway System unified our great and diverse nation in an era when social and cultural changes were speeding up so rapidly. The differences between different parts of America might well have been enhanced in ways that could have led to new divisions in our land except for this great, new unifying force. As President Clinton has said, "It did more to bring Americans together than any other law in this century." And by so doing, it gave our citizens and still gives our citizens 40 years and no telling how many miles--44,000 in the system--miles later, the very freedom that defines America.

Freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and all the other freedoms in our Bill of Rights and in our Constitution imply the freedom of mobility--to go where we please when we please. Families driving to our national parks on vacations, mothers coming home from work, fathers taking their children to baseball games, all of these and so much else now depend on the Interstate Highway System. This system leads not only to the next destination, but to opportunity itself. A highway to opportunity. That is America, and it was made possible by four visionaries with whom many hundreds and thousands of others worked closely. And we honor them this evening as well.

DWIGHT DAVID EISENHOWER In 1955, our 34th president, Dwight Eisenhower, sent an important message to Congress. "Our unity as a nation," he said, "is sustained by free communication of thought and by easy transportation of people and goods. The ceaseless flow of information throughout the Republic is matched by individual and commercial movement over a vast system of interconnected highways crisscrossing the country." A year later he would sign the unprecedented legislation whose anniversary we honor tonight. President Eisenhower, of course, holds a special place in all of our hearts because of his leadership in preserving our freedom in World War II and then his leadership during unusually challenging years when he served as President. He came home and then helped pave the way so Americans could be freer still, enjoying among other freedoms the freedom to travel America on modern highways that are safe and that are now the marvel of the world. It is my honor to recognize his leadership and to present to his granddaughter, Susan Eisenhower, the crystal replica of the zero milestone marker.

T. HALE BOGGS Thomas Hale Boggs entered Congress in 1941 at the young age of 26. He left to serve in the Navy during World War II, but would return to the House in 1946. He served another quarter century, rising to become House Majority Leader before his life was tragically taken in a plane crash in Alaska. Hale Boggs led the way in the House of Representatives by taking on the gigantic task of creating a funding mechanism for the Interstate Highway System. I've heard on so many occasions about what happened when Hale Boggs took on this task or any task for that matter. Once he did, there was no question that he would get the job done. And he did, by crafting the Highway Trust Fund, the master financing plan for this historic project.

The person who filled his seat later shared his commitment to map a course to a new frontier. It is my great pleasure to present this honor, recognizing Hale Boggs, to a very dear friend, Congresswoman Lindy Boggs

FRANK TURNER After years of servicing roads and highways from Alaska to the Philippines, our former Federal Highway Administrator, Frank Turner, was called upon by President Eisenhower to help develop the interstate highway system. In 1994, *American Heritage* magazine named 10 individuals who changed life for all in America but whose names might not be widely known to their fellow citizens. One of those 10 Americans was Frank Turner. Well, those who worked on the Interstate Highway System certainly knew his name; and historians of the great project know and honor his name; and each and every one of us has benefited from his work. It is my pleasure and honor to present this memento to Frank Turner.

ALBERT GORE SR. I was always amazed at how the voice that reminded me to do my homework could be the same voice that argued so eloquently in the Senate for the Interstate Highway System. I'm grateful that he did both. I remember vividly as a 10 year old, well even younger than that, going to the committee that he chaired and listening to the debates and discussions. I remember vividly one morning when the debate was about what color the signs should

be on the Interstate Highway System and I remember a debate about how wide the lanes should be. I remember when we took the trip back and forth from Carthage, Tennessee, to Washington, D.C. I remember, after this project began, each year--and we made several trips each year. I always believed that one of my father's principal motivations for playing the role he did was to shorten that trip--not a particularly profound observation. But I remember, as it was under construction, the feeling of excitement when, each year, the easy part of the journey on the interstates stretched a little bit farther. And what a shock it became to run up upon the barriers where the construction was still under way, have to find the old road that all of a sudden seemed entirely and completely inadequate. But that 18 hour journey became an 11 hour journey. That's at 55 miles per hour. Sometimes, magically, it seemed even shorter than that. In any event, as a young boy, I was so proud of what my father accomplished. And as Vice President of this country, being able to participate in this 40th anniversary and being able to honor all four of these visionaries, you can imagine it gives me special pride to present him with this memento.

Earlier, the Information Superhighway was mentioned. I want to say that 20 years ago, when I used that phrase in the Congress, it was because of the inspiration that I received from watching my father work so hard to make his vision in the Senate a reality, and to work so closely to make President Eisenhower's vision leading the nation a reality, and to work so closely with his dear friend and colleague Hale Boggs crafting the financing mechanism, and with Frank Turner, who so dedicated in the Federal Highway Administration. So on behalf of all Americans, I want to thank all of them, and want to thank my father for creating what was, in his words, an "object of national pride." It still is. And in presenting him with this memento, I want to thank him also for teaching me what it means to be a dedicated servant of the American people.
