



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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REMARKS BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE TO THE SERRA CLUB, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 1972.

Not quite four years ago, when I accepted President Nixon's invitation to be his Secretary of Transportation, I must confess I felt a little like Christopher Columbus must have felt. I knew there was a new world...a better world...of transportation to be found. I knew the general direction we had to go. But no one could be sure of what we would encounter along the way, or whether we would ever reach our goal.

Certainly four years is not time enough to completely reform, revamp, revitalize, and regroup the components of America's transportation network. But under President Nixon's vigorous leadership, strong bipartisan support in the Congress, and with the inspiration of progressive communities like San Francisco -- not afraid to swim against the tide and do something that hadn't been done for 50 years: build a new rapid rail system -- we have traveled a long way toward our objectives of better mobility and an improved quality of life for everyone affected by, or served by transportation.

President Nixon believes we must do for public transportation -- bus, subway, surface rail, "people movers" -- what we did for America's highways over the past two decades. That's why he came out here two weeks ago to announce 38 million more Federal dollars for

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BART cars, and that's why he will continue to advocate more funding and more flexibility for our states and cities in planning, choosing, and meeting their urban transportation needs.

But President Nixon's programs to unclog our urban arteries and modernize America's mobility extend beyond the streets and reach beyond our suburban expressways. The first four years of Richard Nixon's Presidency contain more transportation initiatives and legislation than the preceding two administrations -- since the beginning of the interstate highway system under President Eisenhower.

The Airport-Airway Development Act of 1970 has quadrupled the resources available for airports, and tripled the funds for master and regional airport planning.

Airline flight delays have been cut in half over the past two years, and are less than a third of what they were in 1969.

Rail passenger service in the United States has been rescued from oblivion and is being restored to respectability. AMTRAK ridership and revenues are up, significantly.

Incidentally, the figures for August of this year show ridership on the Seattle to Los Angeles passenger trains up 75 percent over last year, while coach fares have been reduced 20 percent. Patronage of the LA to Oakland Streamliner was up 47 percent in the same month.

Even the 1970 Highway Act can be considered landmark transportation legislation because, for the first time, it authorized the use of trust fund monies for exclusive bus ways, fringe parking facilities, and even the construction of ferry boats wherever their use would facilitate the flow of traffic. The same legislation provided that two-thirds of the costs of the Highway Safety Program could be paid from the Highway Trust Fund.

I'm sure I don't have to tell you that highway safety has a high priority in this administration. Fifty-five thousand deaths a year is a national disgrace -- a tragedy of unacceptable proportions. These highway murders -- this "crime in the streets" -- must be stopped, and President Nixon is dedicated to taking every possible step to make our highways, our cars, and our drivers safer and more protective of human life.

We are also committed to the alleviation of transportation-related noise and pollution. New aircraft noise rules are on the books and in force. The new jetliners coming into use are successfully quieter. And just last week we awarded a half-million dollar contract to a California firm to analyze the costs and benefits of reducing commercial aircraft noise.

So while in some respects I felt like Columbus when I began this journey as Secretary of Transportation, I fully expect that before we celebrate our 200th anniversary as a nation, in 1976, we will sense something of how that great traveler felt when his destination came into view.

In his journal of that first voyage, under the date of October 12, 1492, Columbus wrote, and I quote: "Never have I beheld so fair a thing: trees all along the river, beautiful and green... little birds which sing so sweetly...the air is soft and it is a pleasure to be in it. Thanks be to God."

Columbus did, indeed, discover a fair and lovely, abundant land. But he did more. He established, by his examples of courage and great faith, those principles of bold vision and daring leadership which led to the permanent settlement of the Americas and characterized the frontier spirit of our western pioneers.

As President Nixon said in his Columbus Day proclamation this year, "Columbus was among the first in a long series of courageous trailblazers who have moved us forward across perilous areas of sea, land and space in pursuit of greater knowledge of the globe and its surroundings. We count the memory of his courage in confronting unknown dangers and his indomitable faith in overcoming the setbacks which preceded his voyage as among the ideals which helped to shape the American character."

So I join with you gladly today in commemorating the life and the memory of Christopher Columbus. Your tribute to his achievements is especially appropriate in this port city -- the "first city of the west".

Those of us who have heard the roar of the surf, or tasted the tang of salt in the air, or felt the mantle of the fog at night know the call of the sea...and something of its power.

Yet Columbus could have satisfied his passion for the sea by sailing the shorelines of the Mediterranean...plying the safe harbors of his homeland. To appreciate the magnitude of the man's courage, to savor the true depths of his convictions, we must remember that in his day Ireland was the western-most part of the known world, the seas beyond were uncharted, and the chances of reaching land dependent entirely on the unproven theory that the world might possibly be round.

Columbus was courageous, indeed. But he was more.

He was a visionary, who looked beyond his time.

He was a skilled navigator, with an uncanny sense of direction.

He was a scientist, who put experience and reason together and concluded that the East could be found by sailing west.

He was a leader of men, unafraid of the unknown and confident of his ability to reach his objective. He never wavered.

And, finally, he was a man of God. In his journal, he wrote this: "The eternal God has given me strength and courage against all, and other things of much wonder which God has shown forth. What I have found, I found with the help of the Lord."

It was 300 years later, in 1792, that Columbus Day was first celebrated as an American holiday. American patriots recognized then, as now, the debt that we as a people owe to the Genovese seafarer who, on an August morning 480 years ago, left the comfort of the Old World for the uncertain prospects of discovery.

The whole history of the land we call America stems from the four voyages of Columbus, from the faith that launched him and sustained him, and from the devotion of countless millions of Old World residents who chose to cast their lot with the new world to the west.

It is fitting, therefore, that on this anniversary of the discovery of America, we rededicate ourselves to the perpetuation of the faith demonstrated 480 years ago by the Admiral of the Ocean Seas.

Surely there are still new worlds to be found -- worlds of peace and security, worlds of greater justice and larger equality, worlds free of sickness and disease, new worlds of opportunity for anyone willing to explore, to work, and to taste adventure. If we are to attain these worlds we, too, must have courage and vision. We must search out new directions, new techniques, and new ways to old objectives. We must be willing to strive, and have the endurance to persevere. We must have the strength to lead where leadership is required, and the faith to follow when the way is difficult.

We must cherish our traditions, taking pride in our ancestry but standing strong for America.

And we must remain ever faithful to our Christian code, revering and glorifying God...serving and respecting our fellow men.

That is the legacy of one Cristoforo Colombo to the New World. That is the heritage that is ours to honor and preserve.

Thank you for inviting me to be with you. I have enjoyed it.

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