

Remarks suggested for  
Congressman Norman Mineta  
11th Annual DOT Awards Ceremony  
September 20, 1978

Thank you, Brock.

It's a rare pleasure for a legislator to cross the street, so to speak, from the Legislative to the Executive branch, to participate in one of your internal programs.

But when Secretary Adams asked me to come here to share a few remarks, I was glad to do so -- first, because as a member of the House Public Works and Transportation Committee I do not really feel I am an outsider; and, second, because I think this is an occasion that warrants a few observations from someone who is not directly connected with the Department of Transportation.

My first observation is that what you have achieved -- the particular act or the calibre of your performance or the quality of your work -- has a far greater significance than the award which acknowledges it.

The medal or the plaque or the certificate you receive is not the award, only the symbol of the award. That piece of metal or parchment proclaims to the world that you have made a unique contribution to society. It signifies that you have made an indelible impression on the minds of those who by virtue of rank or position are entitled to evaluate your performance.

As the winner of an award today, you have been found to excel in some capacity. In today's highly competitive world that is no small achievement. So do not minimize the award or its significance. I would quickly caution

you not to over-emphasize it either. None of us, I trust, is ready to walk on water yet. But the award is yours. You've earned it. You have the right to be proud because others who know you well are on the record as being proud of what you have achieved.

My second observation is that because you work in transportation your particular contribution touches more lives and affects the quality of life in the United States to a greater degree than you may imagine or -- in modesty -- may be willing to concede.

We all tend to see our jobs in microcosm -- in terms of our specific task, the area in which we specialize or the boundaries of our position description. John Donne, of course, was right -- "no man is an island" -- and virtually everything we do affects others. That is especially true for public servants, because we propose the laws, make the laws and carry out the laws that affect our economy, our society and our lives.

All of us use or depend on transportation. When you do something that in some noteworthy way changes transportation for the better, you are rendering a public service of considerable value. The award you receive today is conferred by a grateful Department of Transportation, not only by and of itself, but in behalf of all the people of this country.

Then, third and finally, it is my observation that the opportunity to excell -- to perform in some exceptional fashion -- is virtually unlimited. For all of the talk we hear about the "common man," it is the uncommon person we need in government and throughout society. We need people willing to make the extra effort -- to give a little more of themselves, as Secretary Adams suggested -- not in the expectation of reward but out of a desire to do the best job possible.

The awards being presented today demonstrate that there are no barriers to achievement:

- none of rank, for the winners of this year's DOT awards represent a wide array of grades and military rank;
- none of education, for whatever the extent of our acquired knowledge we can put our own intellectual and physical skills to work in some innovative way;
- none of physical capacity, because as today's award to the Department's Outstanding Handicapped Employee indicates, the handicapped do not rule themselves out of the competition.

Certainly there are no limits to the problems to be solved or the difficulties to be overcome. Anyone looking for a real challenge can find it in transportation, and in the government organization and programs dedicated to transportation progress.

In just a few minutes Brock will present the awards. I regret I cannot stay for the full program. I have to get back to the floor. But I want to add my congratulations to the many you will receive today -- from the Secretary and from your families and friends. I know these awards are not given lightly. I just wish that those who at times are quick to criticize civil servants could attend ceremonies like this -- or, better still, help screen the nominations for the awards which you, as the finest of the fine, have earned.

Again, thank you for allowing me to share in your celebration. Congratulations, good luck, and keep up your good work. Your country needs you.

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