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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
NEIL GOLDSCHMIDT, DOT ANNUAL AWARDS CEREMONY, WASHINGTON, D.C.
SEPTEMBER 3, 1980

On this occasion last year I had been here but a short time.

A difficult agenda was before us.

Now, after a year, I have a greater appreciation for what we can do as a team. And, with a year of achievements behind us, I have great confidence in our collective ability to take on any transportation problem and either solve it or shrink it.

I am not surprised by the large number of awards this year. I would be disappointed if it were otherwise. Our successes as a department are simply the sum total of the dedicated efforts of all our people, and while I cannot speak personally to everyone in the department I am pleased to have this opportunity to commend those of you who have excelled in the performance of your jobs.

I would like to make three observations. First, what you have achieved--through a particular act of heroism, through the quality of your work or through exceptional merit--has a far greater significance than the award which acknowledges it.

The medal or the plaque or the certificate you receive today is not the award; it is 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 and your actions have made an indelible impression on the minds of those who by virtue of rank or position are entitled to evaluate your performance. You have been singled out for recognition and reward.

In today's highly competitive work environment, being judged outstanding is in itself no small achievement. So do not minimize the significance of this occasion. The award is yours. You have earned it. You have the right to be proud because those of us who know you well are on record as being proud of what you have achieved.

My second observation is that because we work in transportation our contributions touch more lives and affect the quality of life in the United States to a greater degree than we may realize.

We all tend to see our jobs in microcosm--in terms only of our specific task, the area in which we specialize or within the boundaries of our position description. Yet virtually everything we do as public servants affects others in our land, because we propose the laws and make the rules and carry out the programs that affect our economy, our society and the way we live.

This is especially true in transportation, and it is especially important today--because the energy shock and international competition are changing transportation traditions in our country. We hold, in this department, much of the responsibility for making and shaping the policies that will enable us to control those changes rather than be controlled by them.

My third observation is that an awards ceremony such as this really looks forward, not backward. We are here to honor achievement, and that is behind us; but our commitment is to the future, and to the challenge before us.

The achievements of the past year should give us confidence, just as these awards attest to the competence within this department. Over the last 12 months we have made trucking deregulation come to pass. We have brought highway issues to decision, and turned the key on urban initiatives. We have formed a new, more productive alliance between government and the auto industry. Our proposals for higher transit funding and a better distribution of those funds have survived budget-trimming and congressional reviews.

We have extended more help to more people through the transportation process. Our new minority business enterprise regulations have given minority firms greater access to federal contracts, and our employment and promotion policies have expanded the opportunities open to minorities and to women within the department. Through their superb management of the Cuban refugee flotilla, the Coast Guard saved many lives and prevented great suffering.

These and the other achievements of the past year provide the foundation for our assault on the problems still at hand--completion of the rail bill, new airport legislation, a new formula for highway programs and a better blending of transportation policy with the President's economic and industrial policies.

The agenda for the 80's, which we recently published and which commands--and will command--so much of our efforts and our energies, requires that we continue to make exceptional performance a Department of Transportation tradition.

There are no barriers to the kinds of high professional achievement we honor here today--no barriers of age or physical condition, of race or rank, of education or position--as the range and variety of these awards demonstrate.

There are no barriers to the rewards of personal satisfaction and peer recognition--none except those that the individual sets for himself or herself. Anyone looking for a real challenge today can find it in transportation, along with the opportunity to take that challenge and run with it. Our job, I believe, is to go after the problems that are obvious, address the needs that are basic, and fight for the things that make life better for people.

My main purpose today, of course, is to thank you for your day-to-day efforts and for the work you do that makes my job easier--that enables me to go to the President and say "Here's what we've done. Here's what we're going to do" with the assurance of pride in the first and confidence in the second.

I also want to congratulate each of the winners, as I shall do personally in just a moment, and express publicly my appreciation for the time, the efforts and--in some cases--the risks involved in earning the commendation these awards denote.

I also want to thank the many people throughout the department who have not been singled out for an award by name, but without whose loyal and steadfast support we could not function.

I think what Johnny Miller said recently about Jack Nicklaus when Jack had won another U.S. Open is appropos here today: "When Jack Nicklaus plays well, he wins, when he plays badly, he finishes second, when he plays terrible, he finishes third."

That's the kind of "players" I believe we have here at DOT--the good, the better and the best. I'm proud, now, to present awards to this year's "finest of the fine."

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