

FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

Presentation by Neil Goldschmidt, Secretary of Transportation
to the Department of Transportation Employees
at Hispanic Heritage Week Observance

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P R O C E E D I N G S

SECRETARY GOLDSCHMIDT: There is a story which -- one of my favorite political stories -- I'm sure has made the rounds here. It's not really a political story. It's a story politicians tell, which turns it into a political story, about a third baseman for a mediocre team who about this time of year was not going to be in the playoffs, fairly obviously, and the number of spectators attending the regular major league baseball game in his home town had diminished.

And the third baseman had had a bad year, and he was having a bad night, and the stands were almost empty except for the season ticket holders who knew no other way -- just didn't know any other way to get their money out of it except just come and endure the pain.

There was one particular season ticket holder who had been riding him all year long and it had been a very, very bad night and bottled a lot of balls and had not gotten a hit. And the guy was in the third base -- along the third base line, yelling, throw the bum out; trade him; we can't wait for the season to be over; get a new third baseman; anybody would be better; and on and on.

Finally at the end of the seventh inning the professional third baseman had just had it. He'd made enough mistakes, and his temper was short, and there were going to be no bonuses, and this guy was riding him unmercifully, and you

could hear him all over the stadium because the place was almost empty. And he walked over at the end of the inning to the third base line and put his hat and his glove on the third base railing, and he pointed up into the stands, and he said, come on down here. And the fellow looked around. There wasn't really anybody else around. And he said, you mean me? And he said, yeah, come on down here.

And the fellow came within about, oh, about five feet of him, and he said, listen, big mouth. If you think that it is so easy to be -- play third base, you go out and play it. He says, you've got to be kidding. He says, no you go out and play it, big mouth, and he started taking off his shoes. He put his shoes on the railing with his glove and his hat, and the guy said, all right. I'll do it.

So come the eighth inning, the season ticket holder had on the fellow's shoes and had his hat and his glove and otherwise his spectator's clothes. And he went out, took third base. And, of course, the other team immediately, for those of you who know sports and follow it, it's a little bit like putting in a rookie safety or something. They all started bunting on the third baseline to get this guy working right away.

And he had a very, very long inning. And the coach for the team finally shifted over, and they covered him enough. They got out of the inning after giving up seven or eight runs.

And the next inning was even worse, and the fellow just had a nightmarish time. But, of course, all this time the professional third baseman is now in the dugout saying, trade the bum.

(Laughter.)

You know, get rid of him and get us a new third baseman, just loving every minute of it. Two innings of absolute hell for the spectator who's out on third base and absolute enjoyment for the professional third baseman who's in the dugout.

And just phenomenal amounts of people circling the bases and crossing, and they finally get the side out in the ninth inning, and the game is over, and everybody is thrilled to be leaving. And the amateur third baseman, who's just soaked from perspiration and rather tired because he really wasn't in training to play third base under any circumstances, started trudging off the field, and out of the third base dugout comes the professional third baseman, who's just absolutely loved it, and charges right up to him, pokes him in the chest and says, see? See? It isn't so easy, is it, big mouth? You sit up there in the stands all season long and yack, yack, yack, yack, yack, but when you get out there, it isn't so easy, is it?

And with a very slight but imperceptible pause, the season ticket holder says, you've got this position so screwed up, nobody can play it.

(Laughter and applause.)

I think all of you can see why politicians tell that story. Brock Adams told me I could tell it, could blame him for everything that went on and tell everybody the position was so screwed up, that nobody could run it anymore.

I want to bring Ellen, the personal banks, for Charlie Royer from Seattle, will be eternally grateful. Mayor Royer sent me a telegram when I --

(Laughter.)

-- when I was asked by the President to serve on this job, and he said, some people will pull any cheap stunt to get their train.

(Laughter.)

And I sent him back a telegram saying, you're damn right. It's true.

I would choose few places to spend more time socially and politically than at meetings like this, and I want you to understand that it is no comment on your importance that I'm going to leave this meeting on time and see the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Speaker O'Neill may not look like he could fill up this room, but as far as I'm concerned, whatever he says he is, he is. He's in charge.

I had two sets of prepared remarks for this occasion, a speech that was prepared by the staff, which I found

interesting because it identified some places that I probably need to be worried about and need to work on and a shorter set of remarks and it is basically an extraction of the first, and I'm sure it will surprise nobody from Portland that I won't use either one of them. I'm not big on giving written speeches.

This is my first appearance in the Department, and I'm happy that it has turned out that way. It happens to be National Hispanic Heritage Week, and it's a special time for people who understand what that heritage represents, and it's an important time for the rest of us to begin to understand what it should mean to us as well.

But for those who are Black and for those who are in other minority groups, women, whatever, we need very much to recognize that occasions like this are really a time when we have to join arms together once again. There has been, as you probably know from reading the papers, a great deal of press recently about the NAACP, Southern Christian Leadership Conference and others, speaking out on the question of foreign policy, specifically with regard to the PLO and Israel.

It's neither an appropriate time nor an appropriate secretary duty to be speaking on foreign policy, but the more important part of that, it is, once again reveals for us how delicate the links are between the people in this country who have to worry consistently about whether they will get a full

share not only of the country's heritage but a full share of its opportunities and its future, and it's an important time for all of us, I think, to rededicate ourselves to those issues.

The transportation system in the United States was created essentially because our people wanted to be free to make choices. They wanted to be able to move, and we are one of the few countries in the world that has a people that moves as regularly, feels comfortable doing it, and this department is in great part responsible for creating a framework and keeping it healthy to allow that to happen.

It's important to our resources. It's important to our products. It's important to the fact that we are as a department linked in the lives of every citizen in this country directly or indirectly with their hope for work, for a job. We are in the business of trying to have an economy in which everybody can work, and that's what this department does.

It's fine to remember ourselves when we're driving on Sunday and we see a beautifully landscaped and very attractive highway system, but that highway system Monday through Friday has been supporting goods and services and cargo movement and people moving back and forth to their jobs. It's find to talk about how fun it was to see Grandma going from Portland to LeGrand in Oregon on Amtrak, or going down to

New Orleans or Florida or wherever it may be, but the rest of the week what we're worried about is the fact that the rail system in the United States needs to support the economy.

But there is more to it than that, and this is really the reason why I come here today. It is not enough for us to say that, if we do our job, work will result. We must also be committed to the proposition that the work that is created will be shared in equally by everybody in this country. It is not possible for me to believe that this secretary, my predecessors or the many who will follow can feel comfortable giving advice to the rest of the country about how to get that done if everybody who has the job is white and male in this department.

It cannot work. It will not work. It hasn't worked. You won't fool the people who understand. I won't fool them. And we're not going to try. I am very impressed and always have been, so it is not a speech tailored for the audience or the occasion, that this department has served its country well.

I was the beneficiary of your services, and I said that to the Senate committee when I appeared in front of the Commerce Committee for confirmation. My community has received full measure pay for what it is that you are doing, and I'm very pleased that I'm in association with a group of people with whom we have so much experience and for whom I have so much respect and in whom I reside a great deal of confidence.

But on the matter of affirmative action in this department there are other governments in this country who have done better and are doing better, and we have just got to catch up.

(Applause.)

So this -- I will do what is within my capabilities, both time and energy and personal commitment to insure that we step up our efforts to attract and employ minorities and women, and I mean at all levels and at all capacities.

And I think just as importantly to those of you who are here and already busting every seam to try to get the job done, that career growth efforts must be made as well. It is important that people that are producing here be given an opportunity to progress.

Now, today is Hispanic Heritage Day in this room, and I don't want to pass over that in the name of talking about broader goals. I was introduced with a discussion about my activities in Mississippi, and I want to just relate to you what it is that I learned when I was in Mississippi. I learned a lot, but this was one particular lesson that I want to close on today.

I went to Mississippi in 1963-64, recruited to get ready for Freedom Summer, and I went, and as many of you know, three of the people who came, one of whom was there when I was there and two who came later, Cheney, Swerner and Goodman, were

killed and left in a swamp. But before them came Emmett Till, who was killed on the highways. Before them came Medgar Evers. And what happened, of course, was a lot of white folks like myself went to Mississippi, and as long as we were there, the press would cover it, and when we were gone, the Blacks still had to take the pain.

And I lived in the home of a man who is now a chairman of the Democratic Party in Mississippi named Aaron Henry, who then had just finished being a candidate in the Freedom Democratic Party for Governor of the state of Mississippi and was subsequently involved in the challenge to the Mississippi delegation at Atlantic City.

And when we finished that period of time, and I was not there during the summer, my brother had been there, and my brother ended up going out of Mississippi in the trunk of a car because he was not safe. It was a very rough summer. I was to learn the lesson very painfully that Aaron Henry gave me while I was there, because after we had left and we had stayed in Hattiesburg at the home of a Black family, a man named Vernon Dommer, who was active -- he had a lumber mill and a cotton farm and had two boys, maybe three sons in the service of the United States, in the military. After we left Vernon's home was firebombed, and he was killed.

And Aaron told me before I left. He said, Neil, go home. If you don't know it, you've got the same problems back

in Oregon. Well, Aaron was right and Aaron is still right, and I still have the problems in Oregon, but interestingly enough, my return to Oregon after I went to law school in Berkeley, to go to work for the Legal Aid Service program, my first service in fact turned out not to be to the Black community but to the migrant farm workers, who worked outside of the city of Portland on farms. They're not as famous as other migrant farms you may have heard about in the country, but we ended up litigating a case on the right of VISTA workers of the federal government to get access to provide health services on a migrant farm.

The owner of the farm said, if you come on, we'll fire a shotgun at you. Our VISTA workers went on the farm. They were arrested for trespassing. We removed the case to federal -- the United States Federal District Court, and the judge told them, if they ever fussed around with those people again, he would put them all in jail.

But what I learned from that experience and the debt of gratitude that traces back to Aaron Henry and now to Sonny Montez and some other people who live in my community in Portland is that Aaron was right. We have all of those problems in Portland. The largest minority population in my state is in fact Hispanic. It is not Black. And the Indians probably would be a second -- close second and third, depending on whether or not they're on or off the reservation

and how we count.

The problems of the folks that we have, the Spanish speaking people in my community, are serious and unrelenting, and the pressures that many of you are aware of now with the migration that I think in good conscience we must accept, and we must be prepared to handle, of people from Southeast Asia, makes the pressure even worse.

We have violence now in some communities where Hispanics and Blacks who have inadequate housing, inadequate job opportunities, inadequate health care, inadequate educational opportunities, are being told that they've just been granted the opportunity to share all of those inadequacies with a new group.

(Laughter.)

And it's tough. But it is not a time to prove what we're committed to by telling somebody else who has nothing that they're entitled to have exactly what they've already got. It is a time to commit ourselves to do better for those who are without, and it is on the occasion of this week that that commitment needs to be made and in particular to Hispanics in this country, because we cannot fulfill our objective -- and let me be clear to you, it is an objective that the President raised in the first meeting I had with him about this job. It is not acceptable to him in this department that we be all white, period.

And he said it and he means it, and I intend to carry it out, and I want your help to do it. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

(End of proceedings as recorded.)