

**DRAFT****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**DOT Honors Mrs. Lyndon Johnson's  
Highway Beautification Efforts**

Stonewall, Texas -- U.S. Secretary of Transportation Rodney E. Slater today dedicated a roadside native wildflower garden to honor Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson's promotion of highway beautification.

"As First Lady, Mrs. Johnson championed the faith that America is beautiful, and that we must leave the country looking as good, if not better, than we found it," said Secretary Slater in dedicating the garden. The garden is located at the Church Park rest area on U.S. 290, near the LBJ Ranch, Mrs. Johnson's home since 1952.

President Clinton said that "Mrs. Johnson was among the first to recognize that how we build and maintain America's roads demonstrates our respect and appreciation for the beautiful and spacious land we have inherited. The effort she launched a generation ago to beautify our highways has reaped benefits in all 50 states, and helped to inspire our nation's commitment to environmental protection."

As First Lady from 1963 to 1969, Mrs. Johnson promoted efforts to protect the environment, including the Highway Beautification Act of 1965, which enabled improved landscaping, the removal of billboards, and screening of roadside junkyards.

After President Johnson left office in 1969, Mrs. Johnson continued her sponsorship of environmental initiatives, especially those to enhance the nation's highways. In 1982 she founded the National Wildflower Research Center, and in 1987 she sponsored a summit on wildflower programs. Her efforts that year helped to create a requirement that ¼ of one percent of the landscape budget of federally-funded highway construction projects be devoted to planting native wildflowers.



The wildflower program is administered at the federal level by the U.S. Department of Transportation, which President Johnson created in 1967. As part of the Department's 30th anniversary celebration, the Federal Highway Administration and the Texas Department of Transportation joined to dedicate the Church Park wildflower garden in Mrs. Johnson's honor today, the 89th anniversary of President Johnson's birthday.

Accompanying Secretary Slater and Mrs. Johnson at the garden's dedication were Senator Charles Robb of Virginia, Mrs. Johnson's son-in-law; Bill Burnett, Executive Director of the Texas Department of Transportation; and Deputy U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mortimer Downey.

The garden consists of flowers and plants native to central Texas, including Desert Willows, Texas Redbuds, Mountain Laurels, Texas Sages, and Black-Eyed Susans, and is open to the public.

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(Draft 2)



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535 words

## The Beautiful Legacy of Lady Bird Johnson

By Rodney E. Slater  
U.S. Secretary of Transportation

Today, America will celebrate President Lyndon Johnson's birthday by giving Lady Bird Johnson the same present she has given the nation for three decades: wildflowers.

At a rest area on US 290 near the LBJ Ranch, the Texas Department of Transportation has planted a bed of 25 species of native Texas perennial wildflowers in honor of the former First Lady.

In dedicating the garden to her this morning, I will remind all gathered what President Johnson said three decades ago, when he signed the Highway Beautification Law, that passed Congress as much because of Mrs. Johnson's efforts as his own: "Beauty belongs to all the people."

That law provided controls for billboards and junkyards along major highways and money to landscape them. President Johnson would be proud to know that since that law came to be, the nation that builds the most roads, also has the most aesthetic roads.

Every day 5,000 cars will pass the newest wildflower plot we dedicate. Every year, 60,000 pounds of wildflower seeds are added to Texas roads, so millions can enjoy their beauty.

From coast-to-coast, every state in the union now plants wildflowers, as Mrs. Johnson's love has become America's love for flowers.



It was not always the case. President Johnson knew his bill passed because Congress was reluctant to say no to a President's wife.

What would he think today? He would be happy to know that members of Congress now fight to have scenic byways and All-American roads designated in their districts and states.

One reason they do so, and President Johnson knew this would happen, is that the kaleidoscope of colors that defines the countryside brings tourists, who spend money and create jobs, especially in rural America.

But what would surprise even him is that Congress is now considering a proposal by President Clinton to increase spending by 35 percent over six years for programs to beautify and enhance our roads and recreational enjoyment. That is all the more remarkable, considering they are doing so at a time when the President and Congress are balancing a budget, the first time since Mr. Johnson was president that has happened.

It is all because three decades ago Mrs. Johnson did the most important thing a first lady could do: she gave America the faith that America is beautiful.

She taught America to dream again and to understand the obligation that we must leave the country looking as good, if not better, than we found it. She understood that all journeys should be as pleasing or desirable as the destination.

All first ladies who have or will follow her occupy a position that Mrs. Johnson changed forever, a position where one person can make a difference on the heart and soul and face of America.

She helped America by reminding us of the simplest of lessons -- "where there are flowers, there is hope."

We have engraved those words on the plaque in the middle of Texas' newest bed of wildflowers. For the greatest gift we can give her would be for that lesson to be



learned by all generations to come.

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