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Secretary Slater's
Remarks

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RS -- Wildflower Dedication -- August 27, 1997

draft 1 -- 10 minutes -- by Ilene

Mrs. Johnson ... Senator Robb, whose inspiration brought us here ... to all the Johnson family members -- I have been Transportation Secretary for six months, and have done many pleasurable activities. But none -- none -- are more pleasurable than to be here, giving honor to whom honor is due.

To the great founding father of our Department ... and to the gracious mother of highway beautification.

I stand before the Johnson family, representing 100,000 members of the Department of Transportation family, to say, from our family to your family: thank you.

For many years, presidents and senators tried creating a Department of Transportation. Transportation was a major force, a source of jobs, the biggest industry, the lifeline of travel and commerce.

But it was only President Johnson's pleas that created the Department. Pleas that the system was not adequate, that it was not safe enough, that government policies needed better coordination.

As we celebrate 30 years, let me say, we have had a good beginning. We invested about half a trillion dollars in building infrastructure. Now every state has a transportation department,

President Johnson would be pleased that 600 million people fly a year, that 10,000 fewer people die a year on our highways, that we have a vibrant national freight railroad system, and that public transit is helping build communities.

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Mrs. Johnson, most of all, he would be proud to know that, because of you, we understand the beauty of transportation.

In the past, transportation was viewed as having an adverse effect on the environment, of bulldozing communities, of being more concerned about destination than the journey.

Today, we know transportation is about more than concrete, asphalt, and steel. It is about rebuilding communities, connecting Americans, rekindling the American spirit.

Because of you, Mrs. Johnson, the country that builds the most roads, also builds the most aesthetic roads.

From coast-to-coast, every state in the union now plants wildflowers. Your love has become America's love of flowers. Every day 5,000 cars will pass the newest wildflower bed we dedicate today.

But I know, in 1965, it wasn't easy. You had to call members of Congress yourself to get money to beautify highways.

Let me say, today, members call me, asking that scenic byways be designated in their states. For they have learned, as you and President Johnson knew the kaleidoscope of colors that defines the countryside brings tourists, who spend money and create jobs, especially in rural America.

In fact, President Clinton has sent to Congress a proposal that increases spending by 35 percent over six years for programs to enhance our roads and recreational enjoyment.

On that day in 1965, when President Johnson signed the Highway Beautification Law, and the Marine Band played America

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the Beautiful, the President said: "Beauty belongs to all the people."

But there is another way to define beauty. It is because of the special role played by President Johnson, that very same year, as he pushed through legislation ensuring all Americans the right to vote. He helped America live out the true meaning of her creed -- to become a more perfect union.

On a personal note, that right has transformed Rodney Slater, a child of civil rights, a fellow southerner, who has been given the chance as the Secretary of the Department your husband created, to remove the roadblocks on America's road to opportunity.

Last year, I designated the road from Montgomery to Selma, where Americans marched for the right to vote an All-American Road. Not because it is beautiful, for many would say it is not. But because it symbolizes the most beautiful idea of all: a highway where despair and determination turned into hope.

For that re-definition of beauty, I know President Johnson is smiling down on this nation now.

So, Mrs. Johnson, in choosing the words on the plaque, in the middle of the wildflowers we dedicate to you, we have selected your simple but most beautiful phrase: "where flowers bloom, so does hope."

Thank you, God Bless you and your family, and God Bless America.