

Op-Ed Exclusive for the Austin American-Statesman

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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# Memorandum

U.S. Department of  
Transportation

Office of the Secretary  
of Transportation

Subject: Joint DOT-LBJ School Forum for the Future in honor of President Johnson Date: August 25, 1997

From: Suzanne Sullivan  
Kate Hallahan

Reply to  
Attn. of:

To: The Secretary

**DATE:** Wednesday, August 27 (President Johnson's birthday)

**TIME:** 2:30 pm to 5:00 pm

**PLACE:** Lyndon Baines Johnson Library Auditorium  
2313 Red River St.  
Austin, TX

**MEDIA:** C-Span will carry the Forum live, Open Press

The Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library are co-hosting a policy forum with Department as one of our thirtieth anniversary activities. The afternoon symposium is entitled *A Forum on the Future: Opportunities and Challenges for Transportation in the 21st Century*.

*The program for the forum is as follows:*

**Welcome --** UT President Peter Flawn

**Brief Remarks --** Senator Charles S. Robb

**Civil Rights: A Legacy of President Johnson--** Former Governor  
Ann Richards



**Brief Video Tribute to President & Mrs. Johnson** -- The Department has put together a video, using footage from both you and President Johnson, about the creation of the Transportation Department.

**Remarks** -- Secretary Rodney Slater

**Transportation Forum** -- One panel of transportation visionaries

Ms. Anne D. Aylward  
Former Executive Director of the National Commission on  
Intermodal Transportation

Dr. Robert D. Bullard  
Ware Professor of Sociology and Director the Environmental  
Justice Center, Clark Atlanta University

Mr. Robert L. Crandall  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, American Airlines

Mr. J.B. Hunt  
Senior Chairman, J.B. Hunt Transport Inc.

Dr. Naomi W. Ledé  
Executive Director of the Center for Transportation Training and  
Research, Texas Southern University

Mr. Frederick W. Smith  
Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer, Federal Express  
Corporation

Dr. Leigh B. Boske, Associate Dean and Professor of Economics, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, will be the moderator.

**THE PANEL DISCUSSION:** The forum will focus on one of your major themes: the opportunities and challenges in transportation for the next century. Specifically, we have asked the panelists to discuss what the future holds for transportation and how best to address the industry's workforce, infrastructure and technology needs. The audience at the policy forum will range from University of Texas students to representatives of USDOT, transportation labor, management and government. We have invited officials from all levels of government including the entire Texas State Legislature.

The panelists are each slated to speak from 3-5 minutes. Our expectation is that once the panelists are finished that we will have an interactive discussion with the audience. We have included in your trip book your remarks (by Ilene), biographies of the panelists, potential "starter" questions to get the discussion underway, relevant news clips, some



background papers from which you can pull facts during the panel discussion, and other information.

**THE CLOSING:** As we discussed earlier, we would request that you make a few informal closing remarks to conclude the forum. At 4:35 p.m., Professor Boske will take the last question. We will show a 2 minute video we produced of children talking about transportation in the future. Afterwards, you should proceed to the podium to close the conference. We should be finished at 4:50 p.m. sharp to give you a few minutes to shake hands before you need to head to the airport.