

Remarks on Signing the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century June 9, 1998

Thank you, Robin. You're a pretty hard act to follow. *[Laughter]* And thank you, Secretary Slater, for doing such a good job and for giving such a good sermon today. I thought he was going to pass the plate. *[Laughter]* Then I realized that you had already given him all the money; he didn't need to pass the plate. *[Laughter]*

I, too, want to thank the Members of Congress who are here. There are 40 or 41 here. But I would like to specifically acknowledge and thank Senator Lott, Senator Chafee, and Senator Baucus, Congressman Shuster and Congressman Oberstar, Senators Byrd, D'Amato, and Sarbanes, all the others who are here who have worked for this. I thank you so much.

Thank you, Governor Schafer, for coming, and all the mayors who are here from all over our great country. Governor Voinovich wanted to come and be with us today, but he's back in Ohio with his mother who is ill. And our thoughts and prayers are with them.

Forty-two years ago this month, President Eisenhower signed the Federal Aid Highway Act into law. The bill was sponsored in the Senate by Albert Gore, Sr. It gave rise to the most efficient network of roads in the history of this country, connecting millions of Americans to the economic mainstream, ushering in two decades of unparalleled growth.

In 1992, when I got on that bus and rode across America, I was still the beneficiary of that farsighted action over 40 years ago. But I also saw that the concrete foundations built in the Eisenhower era were crumbling in some places, that more needed to be done in our cities, in our rural areas, and in all places in between.

It was clear to me then that if America were to roll into the 21st century at full speed, we had to be willing once again to make historic and long-term investments in our roads, our bridges, our transportation systems. We've worked hard to do that for 5 years with enormous bipartisan support in the Congress, even as we were cutting the deficit and reducing the size of the Federal Government to its smallest in 35 years.

Today I am proud to sign this bill, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century. It meets the challenge of building the pathways of the future, while maintaining the fiscal discipline that allowed us to achieve the first balanced budget in 29 years and an accompanying very high rate of economic growth. The act will strengthen America by modernizing and building roads, bridges, transit systems, and railways to link our people and our country together and to permit a freer flow of goods. It supports, as you just saw, hundreds of thousands of jobs and a lot of good training.

The act will save lives by allowing us to develop advanced airbag technologies, to offer incentives for increased seatbelt use, to make our roads safer, to get bad drivers and vehicles off the road. The act will protect the environment. It expands recreational trails and bike paths, promotes mass transit, and helps communities to meet national standards for healthy air. The act will expand opportunity. It offers transportation assistance to enable more Americans to move from welfare to work. If you can't get to work, you can't go to work. It protects the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise program so that minority and women owned businesses have an opportunity to compete for transportation projects.

That act will allow us to reserve our budget surpluses until we have saved Social Security for the 21st century. The bill is paid for, line by line and dime by dime, without squeezing other critical investments in education, health care, research and development, and the environment.

I have to say that I am disappointed that the bill does not go far enough to ensure a national standard of .08 blood alcohol standard in every State. I'll continue to fight for it and I hope we can pass it, because I believe it will save hundreds of lives.

I also would note for the record that, working with these Members of Congress, we were successful in removing several extraneous environmental riders from the legislation. But I hope that that process can be abandoned so that all environmental issues can be voted on in the clear light of day, up or down.

Let me finally say that now that we are honoring our commitment to build a 21st century transportation infrastructure, I hope that the bipartisan support I have already seen for a 21st century education infrastructure will result in a broad bipartisan bill there as well. For less than one-tenth of the cost of this bill and without spending a cent of the surplus, we can help to ensure that our children will be able to learn in safe, modern, well-equipped schools.

Now again, for all of you, just look at this array of Members of Congress who are here from both parties and both Houses. This shows what we can do when we bring honorable differences and an honest determination to solve a problem together in open and respectful dialog with an absolute commitment to getting to the end of the road. This kind of constructive bipartisan approach can do anything it sets its mind to do.

I talked to Senator Lott today, and I want to thank him and, in his absence, Senator Daschle, for the agreements which have been made today to allow votes to proceed on the tobacco legislation. I thank you, sir. We have another chance to save a million lives, reduce youth smoking, and make a massive contribution

to the public health of America. The public expects us to work out our differences on this legislation and on other important bills. The public expects us to act as parents, not politicians. The public really expects us to bring the kind of bipartisan spirit that was brought to bear on this transportation bill to all our important work here.

And I must say again, the country owes a deep debt of gratitude to the United States Congress for the way they have done this work. Thank you. And I would like to ask all the Members of Congress to come up here and gather around, and I'll sign the bill.

[At this point, the President signed the bill.]

Thank you all very much. We're adjourned.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:45 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Robin McNab, member, Operating Engineers Local 77, Suitland, MD, who introduced the President; Gov. Edward T. Schafer of North Dakota; and Gov. George V. Voinovich of Ohio. H.R. 2400, approved June 9, was assigned Public Law No. 105-178.

Statement on Signing the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century June 9, 1998

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 2400, the "Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century." This comprehensive infrastructure measure for our surface transportation programs—highway, highway safety, and transit—retains the core programs and builds on the initiatives established in the landmark Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991.

This Act achieves our transportation goals while maintaining fiscal discipline. My Administration worked with the conferees to eliminate excessive funding that would have undermined key Administration priorities for the environment, child care, and education. The resulting compromise, which is paid for with real offsets, funds a record level of guaranteed transportation investment while preserving the budget surplus for Social Security first. The Act also includes

a new budget method for surface transportation programs, ensuring that certain transportation authorizations may not be reduced in order to increase spending for nontransportation purposes. I support this change.

I am deeply disappointed, however, that H.R. 2400 fails to include language that would help to establish 0.08 percent blood alcohol concentration (BAC) as the standard for drunk driving in each of the 50 States. The experience of States that have adopted the 0.08 blood alcohol level shows that this stringent measure against drunk driving has the potential, when applied nationwide, to save hundreds of lives each year. Applying 0.08 nationwide is an important cornerstone of our safety efforts. My Administration will continue to fight for it. In the meantime, H.R. 2400 does establish a new \$500