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Remarks to Treasury Department Employees

March 18, 1993

Thank you very much. Secretary Bentsen and ladies and gentlemen, thank you for that wonderful reception.

I have looked forward to this day when I might come to the Treasury for some time, and with somewhat mixed feelings. I read about this building since I was a boy. I remember, in the periods of my life when I was absolutely absorbed in the Civil War, reading about the trips that President Lincoln used to make across the street to come to the Treasury Department. I learned today from the Secretary that in 1830 the employees burned this building down. You know, I've done a lot to increase people's sense of empowerment, but I hope I didn't overdo it. *[Laughter]* I've also, quite frankly, heard that I would be humbled to the point of embarrassment if I walked into the offices of either the Secretary or the Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, that they would make the White House look like public housing. *[Laughter]* So I thought I'd show up and see.

Years ago, the whole Government used to be within walking distance of the White House, and I'm glad the Treasury still is. I'm glad that so many of you have worked so hard to help to put together the economic program that is now making its way through the Congress. And I want to thank you for that, and to echo what Secretary Bentsen said: that most Americans literally would have no idea, they would be staggered to know the hours that were put in by public servants in the preparation of this program and in the historic speed with which it was put together. I hope that you did it not only because you were here and it was your job but because you know what Americans feel, and that is that our national security today is tied as never before to our economic security, and

that if we do not regain control of our economic destiny, we will soon lose the ability not only to provide for a future for our children but to lead the world that has come to look to us. That's why I asked the Secretary of the Treasury to serve on the National Security Council as well as on the National Economic Council; and why, when he met to meet with the leaders of the other G-7 nations and found himself treated with such respect, he helped us in the conduct of American foreign policy as much as in the conduct of American domestic economic policy.

Our policy is a team effort. I tried to convince the White House staff and all of my Cabinet of that, and I say that to you. In Lloyd Bentsen, I think we have a Secretary of the Treasury with the unique capacity to command respect, not only in the halls of this building and among the financial leaders of the country but also in the Congress and in the world's financial and political capitals. And that is an invaluable asset. He's been my neighbor for a long time. I've known him for nearly 20 years and admired him for a long time. And when we were riding the bus on one of my numerous bus trips, this one across Texas, I made up my mind then that if the people elected me President of the United States that I would ask him to become Secretary of the Treasury. I think it's been a pretty good decision.

He has sought here in Deputy Secretary Altman, an old and trusted friend of mine of many, many years. We went to college together. He made money; I went into politics. *[Laughter]* Until I was elected President, my mother was absolutely convinced he had made the right decision. *[Laughter]* In Under Secretary-Designate Newman and Under Secretary-Designate Summers, and so many others, I think we have a rare combination of intellect and experience, of people who are committed to making this country into the high-wage, high-growth nation that it ought to be.

In all the employees of the Treasury Department I have seen, I've noticed a rare commitment to serve this Nation conscientiously. And I must say, with the recent tragedies freshly in our minds, I think that we

should all once again honor the plaque on the 4th floor of this building that notes more than 160 Treasury agents who have been killed in the line of duty in our Nation's history. From the Secret Service agents who protect our Presidents and who have a particular chore in me because I like to get out and see the people who put me in this job, to Customs agents who wage war on drugs, to the agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, many of the employees of this Department risk their lives to protect the lives of the rest of us. My prayers and I'm sure yours are still with the families of all four of the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms agents who were killed in Waco: Todd McKeehan and Conway Le Bleu of New Orleans, Steve Willis of Houston, and Robert Williams from my hometown of Little Rock. Three of those four were assigned to my security during the course of the primary or the general election. My gratitude is also with the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms agents who helped to evacuate the World Trade Center in New York in the aftermath of the explosion and later, who helped to find the identification number of the van that led to the arrest of the first suspect in the bombing. I know that all of you join with me in praying for a peaceful and sure and quick conclusion to the events in Waco.

Here in this building, Treasury employees made extraordinary efforts—this has already been noted—in the preparation of the economic plan. And you are continuing to tackle some of the most important issues facing our country. I want to reemphasize what Secretary Bentsen said: The agenda that I have laid before the American people cannot be effective without the confident, committed, intense, consistent, and long-lasting efforts of the employees of the Department of the Treasury. From our efforts to find ways to control health care costs and provide coverage for every family, to our plan to ease the credit crunch on small businesses, to the plan to extend the earned income tax credit to lift every working family out of poverty, to the proposal to create community development banks in the communities of this country where the poor are willing to work if they can access the free enterprise system, to our efforts to negotiate Russian debt relief and

promote free institutions and free markets there and around the world, and to our effort to create a comprehensive strategy for global economic growth; all these things depend upon you and the employees of the Department of the Treasury. And every one of you, whether you consider your job large or small, is making an inestimable contribution to our efforts to adjust to the changes in the world that have dealt so much grief to the American people over the last several years that can bring so much hope and prosperity to the American people in the years ahead, if we can find a way to make these changes our friends and not our enemies. Indeed, I think you could make a very compelling case that the central challenge of this time is the challenge of making the changes that we cannot control, that are inevitably going to come anyway, the friends of the average American people instead of their enemy.

Even as we speak, the Congress is debating and deciding on the economic program, especially on the immediate jobs package. This economic stimulus will create a half a million jobs. It will create some jobs immediately that will build a foundation for more prosperity in the future. We have to start immediately investing in our children's schools, our workers' skills, our families' health, the transportation and communications networks that will make our communities more productive, our companies more profitable, and our people more secure over the long run. If we make these investments, we will create more jobs today and have a stronger economy tomorrow. Every element of this plan is designed to help Americans do better, to get the economy moving whether by generating jobs or increasing income, investing in the future or reducing the deficit that has so paralyzed our ability to control our own destiny. If we give the plan's elements a chance to work all together, we can make the changes we need. We can create a half a million new jobs in the short run, eight million during the term of this economic program, and make our next 20 years, most important of all, the best in our history.

There are those who still resist these changes, who prefer the status quo. They say we don't have to change anything. I say, just look around the world. Look at what hap-

pened in Europe for the last decade when they had two major economic recoveries that generated no new jobs. Look at what happened just last month, where our trade deficit went up, even though the American dollar went down because our trading partners, gripped in recession and without any new jobs and any incomes, couldn't buy any more of our products. Look at what has happened in this country, where the unemployment rate is higher today than it was at the depths of the recession, even though we just reported the biggest increase in productivity in 20 years in this country. It is clear that there needs to be a partnership between the private sector and the Government to get the economy going again in ways that generate incomes and jobs as well as show good economic statistics at the end of every month.

There are some who say, well, this program's all right, but we ought to do a little less of it. They are known affectionately as the "status quo lite" crowd over at the White House. [Laughter] Frankly, I think that if we do a little less of everything, we have a little less deficit reduction, a little less spending cuts, a little less tax increase, a little less investment, we'll get a lot less in results.

It is clear that the time has come to make a fundamental change in policy and direction in this country. We know that the things that we're doing will work. This plan contains an enormous incentive to increase private investment in the near-term in ways that will generate jobs. We know it contains a permanent investment incentive for small business, which until just a couple of years ago, had been the main generator of new jobs in this economy.

Indeed, you can make a compelling case that the recession we have endured in jobs is almost totally tied to the fact that the small business engine, that created more jobs than big business lost in the 1980's, came to a screeching halt in the last 2 years in the face of a recession, a credit crunch, the incredible burden of health care costs, and other costs on small business in adding new employees to their enterprises. We also have proposed some special incentives for new companies in high technology areas that will create the high-wage jobs of the future. All of these things should not be compromised. If you

just take the last issue alone, the economist Lester Thurow has written a book called, "Head to Head," which estimates that most of the new high-wage jobs in the future will be created in seven areas of high technology, and that there is a limit to the total number of jobs the world can absorb in those areas, and that many of our competitors have planned for what will happen 10 years from now much better than we have.

We are playing catch-up in some areas where we appear to enjoy the lead. This program is designed to insure that we can keep that lead for 10 or 20 years, and that our economy and your future as public employees will be supported by that kind of technologically based job growth in the future. I believe that these things are critically important to our future. And I hope that the United States House of Representatives will vote today for new jobs and deficit reduction.

Let me also say that there are a lot of people programs that some question the value here of. But look at the plan for immunization. We know that if we immunize all children against the preventable childhood diseases, we would save over the course of their lives \$10 in health care and lost economic benefits for every \$1 we spend on immunization today. It works. We know that if we expand college opportunities to families of middle class people and low income people who otherwise couldn't afford to go to college or stay in college, we'll get more money back because of the earning power of college graduates and how much greater it is than the earning power of college dropouts or high school dropouts. We know that. And so when we invest in people in a world where what you earn depends so much on what you can learn, we know there will be a direct return to the taxpayers and to the rest of the people in this country.

These things are unobjectionable, but we've always found excuses not to make a full commitment. The toughest thing about this economic program is it requires so many difficult decisions, if you want to increase investment and reduce the deficit at the same time. That's never been done. We've reduced the deficit in times past, we've increased in-

vestment in times past, and we've had years where all we did was just let the present spending patterns spiral out of control, but we have never had a disciplined plan to reduce the debt and increase investment at the same time.

Look what this plan has produced in the markets. Look how much lower interest rates are just since the last election. I bet there are people in this room today who have refinanced a house or gotten the benefit of a variable interest rate on a credit card or gone out and bought a car at a lower interest rate because of the interest rates going down. There are Americans who have literally already gotten as much back in lower home mortgage payments, already, than they're going to pay in the energy tax for the next year or two. Because if you make real changes that are tangible, that people can see, they have real results.

So many times our Government has been burdened by blurring everything around the edges. I hope that today the House will make a clear statement to the American people that we're not going to blur this around the edges. We're going to have 150 and now, more cuts in specific spending programs. We're going to raise some taxes, even though they're tough, and make over half of the money come from people who benefited most in the 1980's, those with incomes above \$200,000. We're going to have a balanced program that also increases investment. And we're going to say there really is a difference in Government spending, that immunizing a child or sending somebody to college is not the same thing as spending more money every year on the same health care. There is a real difference. There is a difference, and it matters.

Let me say, finally, that I appreciate, more than I can say, the work that you have done and the sacrifices that you will have to make to make this economic program work. The Vice President has been asked by me to head a program on reviewing the entire performance of the Federal Government, trying to find ways to, in effect, reinvent the way Government operates. And he told me right before I came over here that he was well aware

that Treasury had been among the leading Departments in installing quality management techniques and doing other things that would modernize the operations of Government. We have some money in the stimulus package that will help you to modernize the operations of Government further. And when he comes back I hope you will be willing to meet with him and work with him and, in the meanwhile, remember we have 6 months to try to get the best ideas we can from all the Federal employees in the country about how to save more money and increase our ability to serve our customers, the American people. So if you have those ideas I ask you to give them to the Vice President.

Finally, let me say that the end result of all of this has to be to help our country work better, has to be to improve the lives of the American people. I hope that by my coming here today millions of Americans who never thought about the Treasury Department will know that you're here working for them. And I hope you will know how very grateful I am for all you have done and all you must do if this program to turn America around is to succeed.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:48 a.m. in the Cash Room at the Treasury Department.

Nomination of Mortimer L. Downey To Be Deputy Secretary of Transportation

March 18, 1993

President Clinton today announced his intention to nominate Mortimer L. Downey, the Executive Director and Chief Financial Officer of the Metropolitan Transit Authority of New York City, to be the Deputy Secretary of Transportation.

"There are few people in this country who can match the experience or the expertise