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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND
WILLIAM T. COLEMAN
AT THE SWEARING-IN CEREMONY OF
WILLIAM T. COLEMAN
AS
SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

THE EAST ROOM

12:10 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Before making an observation or a comment, as we walked in, I couldn't help but note that back in 1963 I had the first opportunity of meeting the Secretary. Following the tragedy of the assassination of President Kennedy, I was appointed by President Johnson as a member of the Warren Commission, and the Commission, under the leadership of the then Chief Justice, sought out the finest lawyers we could find. One who was recruited to be on the staff of the Warren Commission was our new, about-to-be, Secretary of Commerce, I mean Transportation.

I am not switching jobs on you. I am thinking of one we have to fill. (Laughter)

It was a pleasure to work with him, and I am very proud of the contribution that he made on that very important assignment.

When we were looking for a Secretary of Transportation, Bill Coleman's name was right at the top of the list. But Mr. Secretary, you have your work cut out for you. The policies and the programs of your department will play a very critical role as this Nation proceeds toward energy independence.

Transportation accounts for over 50 percent of our total petroleum use. To attain the goal of energy independence, we need strong assistance from the Transportation Secretary.

In January, I signed a bill making the 55-mile-per-hour speed limit mandatory. It contains tough provisions so the Secretary of Transportation can ensure strict enforcement by the respective states. The state governments will soon be certifying to you that they are enforcing the speed limit prior to the future release of Federal highway funds. Strict enforcement of the 55-mile-per-hour limit is absolutely essential. It will save lives, as well as energy. I will look to you for stern, but equitable, enforcement.

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You will also be working closely with my energy and environmental advisers to improve the fuel efficiency of automobiles produced in this country. I am determined to reach the goal of a 40 percent improvement by 1979 in the energy efficiency of new cars sold in this country.

Another important part of our transportation program affects energy. It is the National Mass Transportation Assistance Act of 1974 which I signed in November of last year. I worked for the passage of this bill in the last days of the Ninety-Third Congress and I am looking to you for vigorous implementation.

It provides \$11.5 billion over the next six years for mass transit. This means that we will be spending in the next fiscal year almost 70 percent more Federal funds for mass transit than we spent in the last fiscal year.

We must take steps, of course, to save the Nation's railroads. The United States desperately needs its railroads to transport the vast quantity of goods in a fuel-efficient manner necessary for our economy to survive and to prosper. Railroads are an important mover of energy, especially coal, and we will need to double our coal production by 1985. Railroads obviously will play a major role in helping us to obtain our energy objectives.

Working with you, Mr. Secretary, I plan to submit to the Congress over the next several weeks very important legislation in the transportation area. I will propose a new highway bill which will set forth a revised highway program through the year 1980.

Also, the Federal airport program expires on June 30. I will propose major revisions in the airport and aviation programs.

Another important legislative initiative which the Administration will be submitting to the Congress concerns reforms of the economic regulation of transportation by the independent Federal agencies. Regulatory reform is critical if we are to reduce the rate of inflation which inflicts the Nation. Nothing is worse than inflation caused by government requirements.

Mr. Secretary, I am very pleased to welcome you into one of the toughest Cabinet posts in our government -- and to wish you success as we work together.

Now, Mr. Secretary, if you still want the job -- (Laughter) -- I will ask Mr. Justice Marshall to please administer the oath.

(Mr. Justice Marshall administered the oath of office.)

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SECRETARY COLEMAN: Mr. President and friends:

When you indicated that perhaps I was going to take the job of Secretary of Commerce, I said you always realize the great friendly competition that I had with your Ambassador to Great Britain, and I was going to beat his record in switching jobs. (Laughter)

Mr. President, and also Mrs. Ford -- and I understand why she can't be here right now -- I really want to thank you for the opportunity to let my friends come into this beautiful house and share this moment with me.

If you could just look out and see the cross-section of friends from every walk of life, you will know that if I succeed in this job, it will be because my friends have been able to give me that ability that I need, whether it be my law school teachers, my good friend, the Justice, some of my good Quaker friends -- and he is an Episcopalian friend -- and my labor leader friends. You name them; they are all here.

In closing, the only thing I would like to say, Mr. President, is that thank God you intended to take a political career rather than practice law because it is the first time I ever went into the Oval room and felt that I had to say no, but in 20 minutes you were able to give me a commitment as to what you felt about the field of transportation and why it was so important.

I really want to serve under you and with you as my leader.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Mr. President, before we go, here are the great Senators from Pennsylvania. Senator Scott is here, and I do have a telegram from Dick Schweiker, where he deeply regrets an out-of-town engagement which prevents him from being here.

I want that know, and I see a lot of my other friends and I think that you perhaps want to ask my friends to go to another room now.

THE PRESIDENT: We will leave here now, but in the State Dining Room there will be some refreshments. I do invite all of you to join Bill and Mrs. Coleman and the other guests in the State Dining Room.

END (AT 12:20 P.M. EDT)