

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
ST. EDWARD MERCY MEDICAL CENTER

2:54 P.M. CDT

Congressman John Paul Hammerschmidt, Governor Dave Pryor, Senator McClellan, Ray Thornton, Congressman Ted Risenhoover, Sister Judith Marie, Mayor Freeze, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

At the very outset, let me say without any hesitation or equivocation that Betty and I are delighted to be in Fort Smith, Arkansas and, of course, we are more than pleased to have had a quick look at this wonderful facility, which is a development started some 70 years ago.

You have lots of wonderful brick and mortar, but it is the soul of the Sisters of Mercy that make it what it is.

I am especially grateful that John Paul came back from the Middle East to participate in this wonderful ceremony. I think all of us know that that is one of the most volatile areas of the world.

The more attention that Members of the Congress can give in understanding the intricacies and the complexities of that area of the world can and will be helpful in the step-by-step progress we are seeking to make to prevent war again in that area of the world.

I might say to my dear friend, John McClellan-- Senator McClellan--if I was ever to be a Member of the United States Senate, Democrat or Republican, I would want the reputation you have for ability, integrity.

There is none matched -- in my time -- in Washington.

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It is really inspirational to have an opportunity to congratulate all of the people who have participated in the planning and construction of this very, very special hospital of tomorrow that will serve a half million people in Western Arkansas and Eastern Oklahoma.

This new facility, having grown from what it was, beginning in 1905, is an outstanding addition to the thriving medical community in Fort Smith.

It is hard to believe that from what it was in 1905, seven decades ago, that we now have in St. Edward a facility that will provide vital health services to this great community and the surrounding area.

A \$2 million local fund drive, combined with a \$14 million-plus Federal Housing Administration guaranteed loan, gave the money that was necessary to provide the brick and mortar.

And if I can add a little postscript, about eight years ago I joined with many others in the House as well as in the Senate to provide the legislation that made it possible for loan guarantees rather than outright Federal grants for this facility.

People doubted that we could do it with loan guarantees, but here is the evidence right here.

Obviously, all of you deserve to be commended about the health needs of some 65,000 people who live in this area, not only in the city but in the rural residence as well, and how much better all of you will be treated with this new and modern facility.

I understand that it was examined at the time that the project was initiated how you could maintain the highest class medical service without a tremendous increase in the cost. You wanted top quality medical care at reduced cost, and it is my understanding that with what has been incorporated, you will hold the line and hopefully do even better.

The innovative design of St. Edward with automation and centralization and privacy will help keep the cost down and the quality of patient care higher and higher. And I think it is unique also that you plan to combine the Fort Smith Center with the smaller rural hospitals, and this is a giant step forward.

And I understand you are already working with these smaller hospitals in the surrounding areas in the purchasing program so you can achieve better service at a lesser cost.

St. Edward, I am told, showed its willingness to break new ground in medical care with the Emergency Medical Service Programs.

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Right in St. Edward you initiated at the outset an emergency medical service and as a consequence literally hundreds of thousands have been served on a 24-hour-a-day basis.

And again, if I can just put a little personal postscript in, Betty and I have four children, and they had in Alexandria, Virginia one of the first emergency medical care facilities, I tried to count on the fingers of both hands how many times either Betty or I have taken Mike, Jack, Steve or Susan down to that Emergency Medical Care Facility.

And you and Fort Smith are fortunate, for the Sisters of Mercy at St. Edward were among the originators of this first-class program.

And I think also through this service St. Edward has given some 30,000 guardsmen -- who were injured at Fort Chaffee when the high winds struck -- the kind of immediate medical care that was essential.

We all know that medical progress is achieved when the newest techniques, the newest scientific knowledge are available to all our citizens, and your use of improved patient care will serve as an example to other medical facilities. Your success will inspire others to search for more creative and more efficient methods of providing this care.

The best equipment, the latest technology, the finest medical skills must be combined with compassion and care if a hospital is to serve all of our individual needs, all of our fellow citizens.

The motto of St. Edward is "Through our love of God and compassion for our fellow men we serve." This hospital's beginning in 1905 to today has translated these words into community outreach. For instance, the sponsorship by the hospital of a Vietnamese family of seven and the employment of two refugees points up very dramatically that this facility is more than just a fine place to practice medicine. It is a center which cares.

I am, therefore, Sister Marie, deeply honored and very proud to have an opportunity to participate in this dedication because of St. Edward's proud past and bright future.

Thank you very, very much.

END

(AT 3:05 P.M. CDT)