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DECEMBER 10, 1974

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
UPON THE UNVEILING OF THE PORTRAIT  
OF CONGRESSMAN GEORGE H. MAHON

THE CAPITOL

11:29 A.M. EST.

Jamie, Helen and George, Mr. Speaker, the distinguished Leadership of the House, my former colleagues and friends:

You don't know how honored and wonderful I feel about coming up here to say the things that come from the heart concerning George Mahon.

I am proud to say to George and his lovely wife, Helen, that I consider them among the very best friends that I have ever had in the Government of the United States.

In the House, according to the titles, George sat on the other side of the aisle, but that is one of the things that I think are great about this Government; that it doesn't really make much difference where Republicans or Democrats sit on so many issues, and of course, the friendships that you develop over the years do transcend the aisle. The relationship, we all know who have served in the House, goes well beyond the handshake. The relationship, really, as I found it, was an abiding trust, a total understanding, a person-to-person relationship that bridged the gap of partisanship or any of the other things that we hear or read about so often.

You know, it is an interesting fact that the second week after I became President -- I should say the second weekend -- George Mahon, Les Arends, Mel Laird and I played golf together out at Burning Tree. I won't say how I did on that day, but I think it was a veto-proof foursome. (Laughter)

A lot of people subscribe to the theory that when you play golf with the President you don't try too hard to win. I have some news for you. I don't think George Mahon ever heard of that theory. But come to think of it, I haven't found anyone I have ever played with that did either. (Laughter)

But my respect and my admiration for George Mahon goes far, far beyond the golf course. George may have an interlocking grip on his putter, but he has a hammerlock grip on unnecessary Federal spending.

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(OVER)

I was blessed in the House to have the opportunity of serving 14 years on the House Committee on Appropriations with George Mahon. We all know that George Mahon has served ten years as Chairman of that great committee. And from my perspective as a Member of the House, as a Republican Leader, as Vice President and President, I know that George Mahon has done a super job.

Now I have to concede he is not quite like Clarence Cannon or John Tabor. Many of you didn't have the privilege of knowing those stalwart characters, but let me assure you that although his style is different, he learned a great deal from both of those historic characters.

I think, as we know from the record, that George has devoted his total energies, his boundless resources, to keep America morally, militarily and fiscally strong. He is one man who I have found in my years in the Congress and elsewhere who, in all sincerity and with deep conviction, did put his country above his party.

If I were to describe somebody who I served with who would deserve the accolade of a statesman, I certainly would pin that label on George Mahon.

I can't tell you how many countless hours I spent with George, not only in the full Committee on Appropriations but on the Defense Subcommittee on Appropriations, and various other subcommittees of the Committee on Appropriations. But I don't think I can think of a single person who I served with who was more decent, more honorable, more dedicated, more loyal, more careful, and when the issues were down and the going was tough, could be more forthright. To me those are the kind of characteristics that in my judgment determine a great Member of the Congress more than any of the others.

So George's service, his leadership, and all of the other things he has done for his district, his State and his Nation, I think will go down in history and will always be on the record books for all other Members of Congress to try and emulate and to follow.

Texas, we all know, has been known for its bigness. In George Mahon it has lived up to its reputation.

Thank you very much.

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(AT 11:35 A.M. EST.)