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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXTS OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT AT THE AMERICAN FREEDOM TRAIN CERTIFICATION, ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA, DECEMBER 19, 1974

I am very pleased to participate in this ceremony officially recognizing the American Freedom Train as a major national Bicentennial project.

When it begins its 17,000 mile journey through 48 of our states this spring, the Freedom Train will serve as one of the focal points for our Bicentennial commemoration.

It will visit 76 cities and give Americans a once-in-a-lifetime chance to view some of our most important national documents and artifacts.

I especially urge parents and teachers to make sure that your children and students take advantage of this opportunity. The cargo on this train represents much of our Nation's past history and our hopes for the future.

The exhibits touch virtually every phase of the American experience. The train will carry George Washington's personal copy of the Constitution. It will contain the handwritten draft of President Kennedy's first inaugural speech. There will be moon rock samples, the first Bible printed in America, Paul Revere's saddlebags as well as exhibits representing the Nation's culture, technological progress, professions and trades, sports and the arts.

During the next year and a half, 40 to 50 million Americans are expected to view these exhibits as we near our 200th birthday as a Nation.

I hope every American, as he or she contemplates these historical reminders, will reflect on how far we have come in these 200 short years. And as we take a long look back, let us also take a long look forward. I think that if we do, we will be able to see the problems facing us today in much clearer perspective.

Our problems are serious ones -- especially our energy problems and those of our economy.

But think of the problems our forefathers faced. Think of those 13 tiny colonies taking on the mightiest empire in the world. And think of them winning their liberty.

Very few people back in 1776 would have thought that in just 200 years those 13 colonies would provide the jumping off spot from which, eventually, 50 United States would span a vast continent and beyond -- tame a mighty wilderness -- construct a technological society of enormous scientific complexity -- and then set out to explore space itself. But that is exactly what happened.

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As we reflect on these historic accomplishments, let us also look ahead to the future that we are building. Let us reaffirm our faith in the American spirit.

As one of the great nations of the world, -- spiritually, militarily, diplomatically and economically -- we in America have the best of many worlds. We have nearly all the natural resources we need. We have the technological resources. We have the human resources. Now we need the will to solve our problems, the will to win. And win we will.

By the year 2000, I see a people living in a community of peace with other nations, with a standard of living still the highest in the world, with disease greatly conquered, with individual liberties secure for everyone, with wide opportunities for good education and good housing and with our national will and spirit still climbing as we move toward celebration of our tricentennial.

I see the Bicentennial of 1976 as a rebirth as well as a birthday -- a rediscovery of our strength and our potential. It will strengthen our resolve to fulfill the promises of our forefathers. It will fortify our determination to continue to build a freer, more just, more humane society.

This American Freedom Train will be a fitting symbol for what the Bicentennial represents. Since the day the golden spike was driven, the railroad has symbolized our unity as a Nation.

On behalf of all Americans, I thank the American Freedom Train Foundation, and the corporations that provided grants for this Freedom Train. I know that your contributions will inspire others to participate in the Bicentennial. I would like to say a special thank-you to the people of Portland, Oregon, who provided the iron horse that will pull the train.

I look for the Freedom Train to provide a unifying symbol of the heritage that made America's past great and will make its future even greater.

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