

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SEPTEMBER 13, 1975

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY  
(Midland, Texas)

---

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE DEDICATION OF  
THE PERMIAN BASIN PETROLEUM MUSEUM

5:50 P.M. CDT

Senator John Tower, my former colleagues in the House, Harold Runnels and Dick White, my former colleague in the House of Representatives, and now Mr. Ambassador, George Bush, our two mayors, Mayor Angelo and Mayor Hemphill, Mr. Ramsland, and others:

It is a great privilege and a very high honor for me to have the opportunity of being here and participating in this wonderful ceremony today.

This is a great, great crowd, and I appreciate your warmth and your cordiality, but I could not have been more thrilled and more grateful for the tremendous turnout of wonderful West Texans than were at the airport in untypical Texas weather. (Laughter)

It was a thrill, and I tried to express to them my gratitude. It was a great opportunity to come to a wonderful part of this country.

George, you mentioned in passing that under certain very limited and prescribed circumstances, you might have voted for me for Speaker. Well, I appreciate that willingness and under those circumstances -- but you even went further than that -- you voted for me for Vice President. (Laughter)

I am delighted to be here in West Texas, an area that is so obviously rich in natural resources-- oil, natural gas, cattle, good land--but more importantly than anything else, good people.

I am particularly pleased to take part in the dedication of this very fascinating petroleum museum. I just wish that the ceremony could have been held outdoors because I was honestly looking for that shower of rose petals from the top of the rig. (Laughter)

MORE

Believe me, in the last year, when it comes to oil from the Congress, I have had very little roses coming up. (Laughter)

But I think it is very significant that that drilling rig outside is named, Santa Rita, the patron saint of the impossible. When it comes to the good of the country, Americans have always joined together and worked together to achieve the seemingly impossible.

I am certain that in the weeks ahead, the Congress and I will be able to do so, to give our Nation an energy program that will cut us from the dependence on interruptible foreign sources of oil.

America's energy independence must be decided by us. It cannot be entrusted to the policies or to the passions of others in far-off lands. I want to thank very deeply the man who invited me, not once, but many times to come out here, my long-time and very close personal friend, George Mahon.

George indicated during the 12 years that I was privileged to serve on the House Committee on Appropriations I worked up from the real bottom and finally I got to the top, but in the process of that 12 years' experience, we spent literally four to five hours a day, five days a week, six or seven or eight or nine months a year trying to help develop a strong national defense program, trying to help implement a strong foreign policy, and in the process of those many hours, we became close, intimate friends, despite the fact that there was a partisan dividing line theoretically, at least, between us.

I honestly count George Mahon one of my closest friends in my period of time in the Congress of the United States, and I appreciate that friendship, George, and believe me, if I lived in this district, it would be awfully easy for me to be out in the spotlight, in the headlines for George Mahon.

First, the principal reason I would be doing that is because of Helen, not George, (Laughter) but it is nice to be here also with John Tower, who I know comes from a great part of Texas and who has been such a wonderful Senator on behalf of all of you.

John, of course, has been a close friend of mine in working together on energy matters and other important defense and foreign policy problems. John, I thank you for your help and assistance, both in the Congress, as well as since I have been President of the United States.

MORE

I might say something about George, but since he is now a striped pants diplomat (Laughter) I don't dare say anything political or non-political about him, but it is good to see him as well as Harold Runnels and Dick White.

You know his story in saying we closed the American frontier back in 1890, but Midland in 1975 still has the adventurous frontier and is obviously still thriving. The enterprise and the spirit of hard-working people in West Texas shows to me the great productivity of this region, the land, the people, the mind, the physical effort this area furnishes the Nation -- cattle and cotton, oil, natural gas, but also the genius of people, both in effort and in mind.

You have also demonstrated how much Americans can accomplish with the right incentives -- incentives are the fuel of the free market system and the energy West Texas helps to supply is the fuel of our Nation's economy. The Permian Basin produces 25 percent of the Nation's domestic oil and 20 percent of the United States' natural gas production. How fortunate the rest of us are that this great region is a part of our country.

To keep this oil and to keep this natural gas flowing from this region, the Nation must make it economically feasible to search for new production and to develop new methods. This is one of the major reasons that I believe decontrol of domestic oil prices is so essential to our national security.

The vote in the United States Senate this week sustaining my veto of an extension of the oil price controls has paved the way for decontrol. I hope -- I must concede I have been disappointed in the last eight or nine months on several occasions -- but I hope we are finally on the road to energy independence in America.

We have got a long way to go but between January of this year, and even this past week, we had made virtually no progress whatsoever, but we got 39 staunch and strong people in the United States Senate to stand up and say something had to be done. If we had lost that vote I doubt if we could have gotten off dead center for the next year and a half.

So the 39 who stood up and were strong and wise probably did a great, great service to this country and our energy independence. I think we have maybe turned the corner but we have got a long way to go.

MORE

Since 1971 America's bill for imported oil has been -- well, it has climbed from just over \$3 billion annually to \$25 billion in the last calendar year -- a 700 percent increase in American money going overseas to buy a product that we should be producing in greater and greater quantities right here in the United States.

But the ill-advised policies go back some time and have kept us from freeing our energy, our natural resources, our ingenuity, and the net result is we have imported a lot more oil than we should and it is getting worse and worse every day and we are paying more and more overseas and we are sending that money over for overseas jobs instead of having that money for jobs right here in the United States.

For example, that \$25 billion could provide more than one million jobs right in America. That would cut our unemployment, for example, from roughly eight million down to seven million. That would be a good investment if we had the right oil and natural gas policies.

Although the 4.5 percent unemployment rate in the Midland area in August is below the national average, I understand it is higher than usual. Unemployment is a problem that is worrying many, many Americans, and I travel and I hear. It is a problem that must be solved by a healthy, thriving economy.

With foreign producers supplying 40 percent of our oil needs today and growing every day and American jobs and dollars are being held hostage by other countries because we are vulnerable to this foreign oil influence, we are unable to control the price or the supply of imported oil and that makes us, of course, extremely vulnerable to economic disruptions here at home -- disruptions which we can ill-afford if we are to continue to expand our great economic potential in America.

If we don't give America's oil industry the incentives to search for new sources and new production techniques through decontrol, and if we present the wrong policies, we will, within 10 years, import more than half of the oil that we need for our economy.

Energy keeps this country going. Energy is the heartbeat of our economic system. Unless we make some tough decisions about energy now, the Nation is in danger of suffering a serious energy emergency which could come at any time because they have the capability overseas of turning that spigot off and in a relatively short period of time.

Many of you know far better than I our capability of keeping our economic machine moving would be slowed down and ended.

MORE

It just seems to me that decontrolling oil prices at home will move us toward the absolute essential policy of energy independence. Energy independence will require that we find new energy sources and develop new methods, but those solutions will not come overnight, and you are far more knowledgeable in those areas than myself.

Action must be taken now to spur the search for new sources. Research and development are critical elements in any proposed national energy program. We are spending, as George Mahon knows, in a variety of ways in so-called exotic fuel areas, better than \$2 billion a year -- solar, geothermal, et cetera.

But in the next few years, we will have to rely on our most readily obtainable domestic energy sources -- and what are they? Oil, natural gas and coal -- if we are going to meet our energy needs.

Natural gas is one of the most environmentally acceptable forms of energy, but despite the many pluses of natural gas -- and they are wonderful by any standard -- the history of the Federal Government's policy toward this valuable asset has been a very sorry one.

Over the past 20 years, the Federal Power Commission, as required by Congressional legislation, has kept interstate prices at an artificially low level, and that has seriously hampered exploration and development.

I think -- and I say this quietly, but with firmness and determination -- we must stop Federal regulation of prices on new gas for interstate use.

There are approximately 16 States in the Union that are potentially going to have a serious economic disruption this winter. You can take New Jersey, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, et cetera.

Because of the shortsighted policies of the Congress over the last 20 years, we could have not only a shortage in natural gas in those areas, but the economic consequences in jobs will be extremely serious, and the negligence of the Congress over the last few years in not recognizing that problem is inexcusable.

I hope we can move on some emergency legislation, but we cannot ignore the need and necessity for a permanent solution. Natural gas deregulation, it is obvious, is a high priority goal with myself, and the Administration.

MORE

I think solving the energy problem goes back to some of our basic American principles. We must put back into our economic system some of our old-fashioned incentives that took us from 13 poor struggling colonies to a Nation of 50 States with unbelievable economic power and progress.

The profit incentive -- the search for a better life -- populated this Continent. It brought thousands of pioneers to West Texas, men and women willing to risk all to find a livelihood on the land or in the land.

We should ask ourselves, what has made America unique? The explanations are as varied as the Nation itself, but I am convinced that one key to America's uniqueness is that we wrote into our first great document the inalienable right of the pursuit of happiness.

In that pursuit, Americans have dreamed big dreams, taken great risks -- sometimes failed miserably and sometimes succeeded magnificently. But always, whether successful or otherwise, they took it with courage and determination.

The men and women to whom this museum is dedicated lived and enjoyed that freedom to the fullest. The spirit of enterprise and daring this museum records in the petroleum industry must be kept alive all across the United States.

So, in memory of those who dared to follow their dreams, I respectfully dedicate this great museum.

Thank you.

END (AT 6:10 P.M. CDT)